Article

Intergenerational Friendship as a Conduit for Social Inclusion? Insights from the "Book-Ends"

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Abstract
Friendship is said to promote psychological and physical well-being and increase social inclusion. Yet, intergenerational friendship has garnered little research attention due to the assumed dominance of age homophily in friendship. In this article we explore intergenerational friendship from the perspective of "younger" and "older" friends at the "generational book-ends" of the life course. We focus on the role that intergenerational friendship plays in processes of social inclusion in the everyday lives of the participants, bringing together a study conducted in Finland and one in Ireland. Both studies employ qualitative methodology, drawing from interviews with 31 young people who were refugees (aged 13–18) in Finland and 23 older people (aged 65+) in Ireland. Our findings reveal that the younger and the older participants concur on the qualities and benefits of intergenerational friendship. Additionally, while age is not a uniform definer of friendships, differences in chronological age are not meaningless but support caring, enjoyment, and inclusion in alternative ways compared to peer-aged friendships. Access to diverse company, distinct support, broader networks, and alternative identities lead to increased experiences of social inclusion at a personal and societal level. We conclude by calling on policy makers and communities to create spaces and opportunities for inclusion through friendship for all generations.

1. Introduction

Friendship as a precursor and predictor of individual happiness and wellbeing is well documented by social scientists (e.g., Nehamas, 2016). Connection with friends is referred to as a "social glue" (Pahl, 2000) fostering inclusion and belonging (e.g., Blieszner, 2014). Adams and Taylor (2015) on conclusion of an extensive literature review on the topic of friendship purported that "the literature clearly demonstrates that friendship and happiness are positively related" (p. 160). Happiness and life satisfaction are reported to be highest among those individuals who have friends (Demir, 2015). Chopik (2017) further argued that friendships in later life promoted

increased happiness and health for the older individuals, beyond even family relationships. For young people, friendships are said to provide an important environment for informal learning, healthy identities and developing solidarity (e.g., Bartos, 2013; McLeod, 2002). As sources of social support, it is suggested that young people often find their friends to be more important than their parents (Cotterell, 2007). Accordingly, Muraco (2012, p. 15) stated that friendship is one of the most significant, yet socially ignored, relationships.

In addition to exploring the benefits and outcomes of friendship, understanding and conceptualising friendship and its characteristics has occupied social scientists throughout history. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle

distinguished between the character of friendships of the young and the friendships of the old, with the young forming fleeting friendships "in pursuit of pleasure" and the old more inclined to form enduring friendship based on virtue. Aristotle argued that people form friendships with those who are similar to themselves, including similarity in age (Crisp, 2014, p. 144). Seeking friends who are similar to oneself is conceptualised in contemporary research as homophily, i.e., "birds of a feather flock together." The "feathers" that bind people in friendship have most commonly been identified as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or education (Block & Grund, 2014; McPherson et al., 2001). Elliott O'Dare et al. (2019a, 2019b) argue that the assumed prevalence of homophily in friendship has resulted in a particular valuable and interesting type of friendship, namely intergenerational friendship, to be ignored by social scientists and others to the detriment of individuals, societies, and policymakers.

This article seeks to add to the sparse yet growing body of literature on intergenerational friendship in focusing on the role that intergenerational friendship plays in the processes of social inclusion in the everyday lives of the "old" and "young" at either end of the generational life course, conceptualised by Hagestad (2008b) as "generational book-ends." We ask how older and younger people experience friendships with people from a different generation and if intergenerational friendship promotes social inclusion. In this article, we bring together the views of the two book-ends, the old and young, which were initially part of separate studies, one in Finland and the other in Ireland.

2. Intergenerational Friendship

The term intergenerational in this article refers to friendships between people who belong to different social generations. The term generation, as conceptualised by Mannheim (1928/1952, p. 290), refers to "a common location in the historical dimension of the social process." Pilcher (1994, p. 481) clarifies the "notion of generation as widespread in everyday language as a way of understanding differences between age groups and as a means of locating individuals and groups within historical time." Hence, intergenerational friendship is defined here as a friendship between people of different social generations who are not related.

Likely influenced by the principle of homophily, intergenerational friendship as a topic had attracted little research attention (see, e.g., Bettini & Norton, 1991; Holladay & Kerns, 1999; Matthews, 1986; Roos, 2004). However, more recently, Dykstra and Fleischmann (2016) provided quantitative empirical evidence as to the existence and prevalence of intergenerational friendships across 25 European countries. In all countries, the proportion of people reporting cross-age friendships was higher among the older (30.6%) than among the younger people (18.1%). This was highest in Finland at 50%, followed by Sweden (46.2%), then Ireland

(43.5%), Germany (39.8%), the UK (38.5%), and lowest in Lithuania at 4%. Younger people in Ireland reported the highest proportion of cross-age friendships at 36% (Dykstra & Fleischmann, 2016).

Elliott O'Dare et al. (2019b, 2021) purported that the dearth of interest in exploring and understanding intergenerational friendship may lie in the sociocultural creation of intergenerational "schisms" grounded in the social construction and expectations of age-norms, underpinning the principle of age homophily. Identifying sociocultural expectations in regard to how individuals of all ages "should" conduct their behaviour, Neugarten et al. (1965, p. 711) defined age norms as "expectations regarding age-appropriate behaviour and interaction, a network of expectations that is embedded throughout the cultural fabric of life." Cuddy et al. (2005) point to the pervasiveness and consistency of age stereotyping and argue that the outcome is the social exclusion of older people. The same goes for the young, as the categorical age norms lay development-psychological expectations for them to primarily interact with same-age friends (Cotterell, 2007). Stereotypical understanding of the nature of peer friendship in youth also places young people under constant surveillance by grown-ups which determines who, when and how they should meet and, for instance, restricts their access to public spaces (Kallio, 2016; Korkiamäki, 2013, 2016). Intergenerational friendships defy this dichotomy between the "young" and "old," as friends are of different generations yet choose to engage in a close relationship with each other. Intergenerational friendship, hence, challenges the notion of age-norms and age homophily as a deterrent to meaningful intergenerational interaction (Elliott O'Dare et al., 2019b, 2021; Korkiamäki & Kallio, 2017).

2.1. Generational Book-Ends as a Concept for Intergenerational Friendship Exploration

Ironically, the sparse discussion on intergenerational friendship centers on the views and needs of one generational end: older people. Children and young people are recognized as actors in familial (parent/grandparent–child) and formal (teacher–student,) intergenerational relationships, but their informal ties to non-kin adults are often overlooked (Korkiamäki & Kallio, 2017). Hagestad (2008b) criticizes the separation of what she calls "generational book-ends" for neglecting the interdependence and interconnectedness across age and generation. This "generational myopia" has consequences at both institutional and personal level and should thus be societally acknowledged and deliberately addressed in policy making as well as in research (Hagestad, 2008b, p. 21; see also Hagestad, 2008a).

As one of the reasons behind the generational distinction, Hagestad recognizes the assumption that the two marginal ends of the lifespan, the old and the young, are in competition for similar resources such as government funded social and health care services. The institutional

segregation and relational asymmetry caused by this could be, in Hagestad's view, avoided by seeing the two as the "*book-end generations*, who may have more in common than is commonly recognized" (Hagestad, 2008a, p. 114). The modern institutionalization throughout the life course affects social networks and socialization experiences, particularly for the young and the old, and the everyday spatial segregation of age groups feeds cultural segregation suffered at the book-ends, as the young may lose their connection to history and the old to the contemporary (Hagestad, 2008a). Contemporary society, where age groups are segregated into detached "islands," inhibits intergenerational networks between the young and old, limiting opportunities for them to discover what they have in common (Conti & Sgritta, 2006). As a result, old and young are isolated and "vertically deprived," that is, missing out on the support of and experiential connection with people outside their own age-group (Hagestad, 2008a, p. 129). This holds true especially for "generational solos": for older people not embedded in familial intergenerational chains, such as the childless/grandchildless older people, and young people inhabiting out-of-home environments (Herlofson & Hagestad, 2011). Therefore, the discussion on interdependence across generations should not be limited to familial ties but seek to study the potential common ground between youth and old age in their sociability beyond families. In this article, we search for this common ground by looking at the characteristics and benefits of friendship with both book-ends: the "young" and the "old."

3. Methods and Materials

Herlofson and Hagestad (2011) suggest that to overcome the challenging issues of age segregation, policy makers, social scientists, and other interested parties must forge "cross-alliances" within academia. This article combines two research projects of which the first is a social work study concerned about vulnerable young people's peer and intergenerational friendships in Finland and the second is a gerontological study exploring the meaning and significance of intergenerational friendships of older adults (aged 65 and over) in Ireland. The Finnish study was funded by the Academy of Finland and granted ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region in August 2016. The Irish study was funded by the Irish Research Council and granted ethical approval from the Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin in September 2015. Pseudonyms are used in this article to protect the privacy of the participants.

Author Korkiamäki's research investigated friendship of vulnerable young people, namely newly arrived asylum-seekers and refugees in Finland. Twenty-three boys and eight girls, 13 to 18 years of age and originally from Asia, the Middle East, and Northern Africa, participated in the research. The data was gathered at the school where the young people attended preparatory courses (before being gradually integrated

into the Finnish basic education classes). The research applied an ethnographic methodology, and Korkiamäki spent several weeks at the school becoming familiar with the young people, observing activities and negotiations around friendship, and performing various research tasks with the participants. The information on their friendships used in this article was gathered through three types of activities. Firstly, the participants drew person-centered friendship network diagrams (e.g., Bravington & King, 2018) where they indicated people who they would define as their friends under different categories: friends in their current (group) home, in their home country, at school, in town/street/public places, online, through hobbies, and "other." In the diagrams participants also indicated how close they felt to these people and if the people in their diagram knew each other. Secondly, the participants were asked to choose photographs to share with the researcher about their friends or about friendship. Thirdly, social support network diagrams were drawn to point out who the young people felt would be there for them with support or advice under the categories of family, *friends*, authorities, other. The diagrams and photographs were then discussed in open-ended and participant-centered individual interviews where the participants explained why they had chosen these people on their diagrams and photos. In addition, the origin, quality, characteristics, and the shared activities of the friendships were discussed, while other issues were also highlighted by the young people during flow of the conversation. Because of the vulnerable nature of the research group and the possibly sensitive topic, the interviews followed the ideology of only asking questions and follow-up questions about people and issues that the participants chose to talk about (Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020).

Initially, Korkiamäki's study concerned not only intergenerational friendships but friendships in general. However, participants chose to discuss not only same-age friends, with 16 of the 31 participants (four girls and 12 boys) naming people clearly older than themselves as "a friend." To investigate intergenerational friendships in this study, "intergenerational friend" was defined as a person from a different age group and a presumed generational difference. Hence, the 13- to 18-year-old participants had intergenerational friends ranging from 30 years of age to people in their 70s.

The accounts of the 16 participants talking about older friends were analyzed to identify the characteristics, meanings, practices and significance of intergenerational friendship. An abductive analysis, alternating induction and deduction, was employed to allow the data to "surprise" and create new theoretical insight while being in a dialogue with the existing theories of friendship (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Hence, the analysis first proceeded from data-based coding to case-specific qualitative content analysis. The inductively identified analysis-units were then thematically categorized utilizing the theoretical pre-knowledge on friendship,

social support, and social inclusion (see Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

In Ireland, to understand the meaning and experiences of non-kin intergenerational friendships in later life, Elliott O'Dare conducted in-depth interviews with 16 women and seven men aged 65 and over living in Ireland, from diverse educational, occupational, and socio-economic backgrounds. Participants ranged in chronological age from 66 to 95 years of age, were community dwelling, and they had an intergenerational friend(s) for more than three years duration. An intergenerational friendship for the purposes of this study was understood as a friendship between an older (aged 65 years plus) individual and a younger (by 15 years or more) non-kin individual. The decision to allow for a minimum 15-year age gap reflects a pragmatic choice to opt for a presumed generational difference that would be generally understood as potentially significant. It was recognised that in using these criteria both friends may adhere to a societal definition of being older, for example, an 80-year-old with a 65-year-old friend, and this emerged to be case for many of the participants. Therefore, the 15-year age-gap also recognises that distinctions based solely on chronological age may be arbitrary, as both parties, despite having significant age differences and being part of different generations, may commonly be labelled and grouped together as "old." Additionally, this challenges an ageist approach by recognising that the intergenerational friendship is no less valuable or worthy of attention simply because both parties to the friendship may be labelled "old."

Elliott O'Dare considered grounded theory's offering of the generation of theory from data as important as the topic of intergenerational friendship is under-researched and therefore theoretical insights on the topic were imperative (Hood, 2007; Morse, 2016). The research therefore took a qualitative approach using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The participants' preference for being interviewed in their own home shaped the data gathering and analysis phases; an additional layer of observational data along with the recorded interview data was captured. Field notes, in the form of memos, were written to capture observations related to participants' homes and environments (for instance, technology and equipment used for hobbies and interests with intergenerational friends). In keeping with the grounded theory method, an initial interview guide prioritised learning about the participants' views, experiences, and actions, and contained open-ended questions, for example: "Could you describe how your friendship started and how it grew?" Coding (line-by-line and focused), analysis, and memoing (observational and analytical) progressed in tandem, as participants with particular characteristics or in particular circumstances were recruited as being suited to build and add depth to emerging concepts (theoretical sampling).

For both researchers, the "troublesome trinity" of "theoretical sampling, constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and theoretical saturation" speak to the strength of the validity of analysis (Hood, 2007, p. 164). In our shared analysis we draw together our data and findings to explore the qualities and benefits of intergenerational friendship in ways that are not confined to the views of a single generational "book-end." In this article, we focus on the role that intergenerational friendships plays in processes and promotion of social inclusion in the everyday lives of the "young" and "old'' participants.

4. Supporting Inclusion and Belonging Through Intergenerational Friendship

While the data with the older people was generated through exclusively focusing on intergenerational friendship, the research on young people focused on friendships in general. Nevertheless, when asked about their friends, the young participants referred not only to their same-age peers but also to people of other generations. The youths had formed intergenerational friendships with assistant teachers and the care-workers in their residential homes and, particularly, with volunteers who were assigned to them to ease their cultural integration and who were commonly referred to as "aunties," "uncles," and "grannies" by the young people. Some participants also spoke about their summer job co-workers, neighbours, or their girlfriends' parents as adult friends. In Elliott O'Dares's study the older participants met prospective younger friends through four main settings: leisure pursuits and interests, work and professions, meeting through peer-age friends and family members, and through social interaction in their community.

For both book-ends, the activities pursued with friends from different generations often differed from activities that were performed within same-age friendships. The older or younger friends guided their intergenerational friends to places, relationships, and activities that they did not typically engage in with their peer-aged friends. For instance, the young people visited museums, theatres, specific outdoor activities, and the workplaces of their older friends. The older people spent time together with their young friends at football clubs, camera clubs, and societies based around a shared interest in music, drama, or history. In these ways, the generational book-ends accessed the other generations' communities and mundane milieus, broadening the inclusionary space that is available for them (see also Korkiamäki & Kallio, 2017). Next, we look at how this inclusionary space was created in friendly intergenerational mingling. Finally, we return to the question of how these practices of "doing friendship" relate to the broader concepts of inclusion and belonging.

4.1. Companionship, Fun, and Enjoyment

Without exception, the older and younger emphasised the significance of having company and sharing fun and

laughter with their intergenerational friends. The light-hearted commonality was signalled to be of immense importance in the experience of intergenerational friendship. Regardless of age, the participants talked about the importance of being in company that felt easy and natural. This was often narrated through comparison to their same-age friendships, as the participants clearly felt that due to the perceived "unusual" nature, intergenerational friendships needed to be expressly justified:

> She [Liisa, intergenerational friend] is an adult, not my age, but she's still a good friend. Because with people who are my age I quite often feel that they don't understand me or, that, I don't fit in. But with Liisa it is just easy to be with, it's just that we have so much fun together. (Maria, 16)

> Age doesn't matter. The important thing is that you get along and that you can be together and it's fun, so then you are not lonely. (Mehrab, 17)

> I'm not good on my own. I love people. I don't see myself making any more close friends. They, will grow old with me. I get on with younger and older people, age doesn't matter to me at all. I love people, I love talking to them and having a bit of laugh. (Lucia, 89)

Laughing together was perceived by the participants as an essential element of the process of transitioning from a "good friend" to a "close friend." Both the young and the old stated that shared laughter, joy, and humour is a conduit for close friendship:

> We [Eileen and her younger friend] had the greatest laughs… we laugh and laugh when we go out, and, I mean, I have to put great effort into it [going out] now, because I'm killed with arthritis. We had more laughs and fun together, and that brought us even closer. (Eileen, 79)

> [We are friends] because we have the same sense of humour. So that's why, because it's so important with friends, that you can laugh to the same jokes. (Jawed, 16)

While having fun and joking around are typically viewed as a feature of young people's friendship (Cotterell, 2007; Korkiamäki, 2013), they are rarely mentioned in extant literature focused on later life (Elliott O'Dare et al., 2019a). However, in our study, it is evident that fun and laughter are a vital part of "being friends in action" for the older intergenerational friends also. Iris, 91, and Valerie, 67, declared:

> A friendship is not always a cry for help. It's just being together, friendship, chit-chat that sort of thing. So we don't notice the age difference and that. (Iris)

> Yeah, a bit of a laugh there….If you are feeling down you could say, Denise [a younger friend] will we go for a walk. Ah yeah, a great relationship, you know we have a great laugh. She is great fun and all, I am eighteen years older than Denise, I never really think of it that way. (Valerie)

As the examples above demonstrate, companionship and having a good time are not solely "light" or superficial features of friendship (Demir, 2015). Often expressed through humour and shared laughter, spending time in a comfortable company prevents loneliness and provides effortless experiences of belonging. As suggested by May (2013), it is possible that such sense of belonging in close personal relationships translates into more generalised experiences of being included, hence promoting emotional inclusion in meaningful communities.

4.2. Trust, Emotional Support, and Reciprocity

Along with being fun and enjoyable company, the participants explained that a friend is a loyal and trusted confidante who will listen to worries and anxieties. Hence, fun and laughter was not only about joyous time but had deeper meanings, often those of emotional support. This was reflected by the older generation, an example of which was given by Valerie above, and it was also mentioned in the interviews of the young people. Benham, 17, demonstrates:

> Friend is important because, for instance, if you have a problem, if you are sad you can talk to them, if you are sick, friend comes to see you.

Talking to an intergenerational friend was referred to as "great therapy" by Lucia, 89, as she engaged in coping with widowhood, and as "therapeutical" by Fatima, 17, who struggled with the stressful situation of seeking asylum in Finland. The word "therapy" was also used by Mariam, 16, to highlight trust in friendships:

> It is like therapy, because you can talk about anything and trust, trust is there.

While trust is always a crucial characteristic of friendship (e.g., Nehamas, 2016), some of the younger participants felt that it can be more easily obtained in intergenerational than in peer relationships. Mohammad, 15, explains:

> If I tell her [intergenerational friend] my secrets, I don't worry that she'll tell them to other people. Because she doesn't know any of my friends, so then she won't tell them.

In friendship and in social life in general, the division between benefits and disadvantages is not clear-cut. Being able to confide in her older friend undeniably

provides Mohammad with an important source of emotional support, but the narrative also signals the isolation of their friendship from Mohammad's other spheres of life. For Mohammad's peer age friends, this challenges the notion of access to broader networks through intergenerational friendship which we look at in the following section.

Kathryn, 94, reflected on how fortunate she is in her intergenerational friendships as "they are all very good, good fun, and good people." This statement stresses how, along with being fun, being "good" (supportive) and "good people" (trustworthy and loyal) are characteristics that Kathryn observed and admired in her friends. Crucially, these characteristics, i.e., being confidant, trustworthy, and supportive, are required to flow both ways. While this kind of reciprocity is commonly described in accounts of peer aged friendship (e.g., Cotterell, 2007; Nehamas, 2016), in intergenerational relationships it is equally important:

I know, it's funny, and many wonder about that, why, how we can be friends, since I don't have anything to give or, something like that. Or, well, I think I do, but people just don't get it because I'm young. (Karima, 15)

Equality and reciprocity are not typical definers of intergenerational relationships, as it is more common that adults are the "givers" and children and youths the receivers. In the same way, older people are often viewed as passive recipients of the bounties of care through friendship, rather than equal contributors (Hagestad, 2008a). However, in our data, both bookends described reciprocity in their intergenerational friendships and portrayed themselves as both "giving" and "taking":

Then I can go and offload to her. I call it offloading and Jane can offload to me because we're very good friends....You're equals in their [friend's] company, you are equals when you're chatting. (Iris, 91)

Abdul… he is my friend, I always do everything with him and, I help him find work because he doesn't speak Finnish or English, only Arabic. And he helps me and I work with him and I learn....This is why he is my good friend. (Amin, 17)

I think it's like a shared experience and also that we are both getting something out of it, out of the relationship and the friendship because I would say it's very 50/50. (Janis, 78)

Being a confidant and confiding, trusting and being trustworthy, supportive and being supported were enabled within the bounds of friendship. Hence, the benefits of friendship were equally experienced when the status as good friends were shared. The bidirectional flow of

the attributes that the friends considered significant in their friendship, seemed essential according to the participants. These exchanges took varying forms, as narrated by Maria, 85, who had mobility difficulties:

But I know that if there is anything the matter they would come to my rescue, you know, that sort of thing. And there is solidarity about the friendships that they give me, its solidarity. They are with me; they are for me. That's the sort of thing you expect…and you are for that person…it has to be mutual…that's how I feel, to have a friend you have to have mutual understanding and mutual consideration.

While it would be easy to assume that Maria was the lone recipient of care in an intergenerational friendship, the shared elements—solidarity, understanding, and consideration—are signalled as necessary ingredients in Maria's friendships. Moreover, in addition to the mutual flow of emotional support, the alluded "if anything is the matter," encapsulates a broad array of support—an important aspect of friendship achieved through broadening intergenerational networks.

4.3. Belonging and Access to Broader Networks

Friendship is traditionally understood as a bonding and exclusive relationship between two people or within a small group and, thus, not necessarily beneficial for broader social inclusion (e.g., Putnam, 2000). However, when looking at intergenerational friendship it seems that with and through their friends, people access networks, spaces and opportunities that would not be available for them without their intergenerational friends. For example, Tommy, 76, gives an example of what he perceived as being expected of him as an older individual by others of his generation, but not by his intergenerational friend:

I think that anyway, some of my people my age, like, they think that you might be out of place if you are there [in the pub] at one o'clock, two o'clock [laughs].

Exceeding age-categorical expectations, Tommy was granted increased opportunities for socialisation by his younger friends. Similarly, Leyla, 17, who had made friends with her mother's supervisor, had visited "adult areas" otherwise inaccessible for her, such as cultural events, a spa, and the friend's workplace. This kind of "generational boundary crossing" was not limited to spatial environments but often signified broadening social spaces and the development of new social ties, as involvement in an intergenerational friendship often meant getting acquainted with the friend's family and friends. To our young refugee participants, these "weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973) had provided summer jobs, useful practical advice and, importantly, the sense of belonging in a group or a community of native-born Finnish people.

Often enabled by a broadening of their social network, an important feature of intergenerational friendship to the older and younger participants was that their intergenerational friends provided other kinds of support than their peer friendships. Many of the older participants spoke of the assistance their young friends gave them with technology, which facilitated the older friends' connectivity to contemporary society. Valerie, 67, states:

> If anything goes wrong with my iPad, straight up to him [intergenerational friend]—or my phone, he will fix all that for me.

For young asylum-seekers and refugees, pronouncedly seeking inclusion in Finnish society, bridges to varied support and wider networks provided by their intergenerational friends were of extreme importance. Two of the refugee boys explain:

> I don't talk to my [same-age] friends if I worry about something because they have big problems themselves. But sometimes I talk to Marketta [intergenerational friend], and her friend Pirjo, and Marketta told me that I can talk to Pirjo too, so that is good, it is good that I talk to Pirjo, and to Marketta. (Abdullah, 15)

> Well, none of my [same-age] friends know [how to be and behave in Finland], and they can't, they don't know how, so it's good that I have Marko as my friend, he can help. Because he is a little old and he is Finnish, so he knows lots of things. (Farhan, 16)

These intergenerational friendships guided the young people in making sense of society, building attachments, and reworking its conventions. With and through their adult Finnish friends, the young people were able to experience their new living environment in spatial and social spheres that were broader than their close circle of same-age and same-ethnic friends. This also promised an expected continuation of friendship, unlike peer friendships, some of which were likely to end on becoming independent of state care:

> And when I move out [of the group home], then my [older] friend can stay as my friend, you understand? It is really important that you have a good friend, a best friend, then it is all good for you, it's all better. (Behnam, 17)

To the asylum-seeking young people, friendship with their Finnish "aunties," "uncles," and "grannies" was significant also because it guided them—and their Finnish counterparts—to address ethnic and cultural ignorance and prejudice, present on both sides, and helped them to realise the differences and similarities between peoples and cultures. This sense of inclusivity may initially develop with a close friend and then generalise into a broader group, as Hamasa, 15, pronounces:

> She is my Finnish friend, she always helps me, whatever I need… and I can help her too, I can play with [her daughters] and I can tell her what I know… and I like her and she likes me, and, then, I think Finnish people are nice.

4.4. Enabling Alternative Identities

Described as the "weak segments of population" by Conti and Sgritta (2006), the young and the old inherently carry the label of vulnerability. In our data, this stigma was especially evident among the asylum-seeking youths and some of the older people who, due to for instance retirement or illness, felt isolated and useless, "just sort of dropped out of society," as Brendan, 72, stated. He continued by highlighting the need to feel useful to someone:

> I suppose from a personal satisfaction point of view just feeling needed, and useful, and in demand, you know just in that friendship sort of way.

For the young asylum-seekers, who in their encounters with adults were almost exclusively labelled as "refugees" (Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020), intergenerational friendship offered a way of being recognised differently. Rashid, 17, who became friendly with an older man who shared the room when he was previously hospitalized, recounts:

> All the boys came [to visit]… and we took selfies, many selfies. And, first, the man said that we are refugees...then he just laughed and said: "You are just boys, you just play with your phones."

Amin, 17, embraces an agentic role of a "teacher" despite his position in society inflicting the role of being exclusively helped and taught by others:

> I tell him [intergenerational friend] about my home country and he is interested and he wants to learn, and I can help him and tell him everything.

The notion of being "vertically deprived" (Hagestad, 2008a), like Tommy who, without younger friends, would have missed out on important chances to socialize or stigmatised with a single identity (Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020) like Rashid and Amin, can "paralyze" and cause withdrawal from attempts to agentic positions (Warming, 2015). As the narratives above demonstrate, this can to some extent be overruled by the alternative identities introduced in intergenerational friendships. Being able to perform "ordinariness" and step out of a labelled category (for example "old" or "young") can be a meaningful way of constructing self-esteem and self-confidence

which, then, may lead to bolder societal and communal connections—and for these to be recognised by society.

5. Conclusions

Friendship is commonly understood as the most meaningful social relationship to young people and recently highlighted as a vital source for enjoyment and social connectedness in later life. In this article, we have focused on a less addressed "type" of friendship: friendship between people from different generational cohorts. The friendships explored in this article illuminate the characteristics of the intergenerational friendships of the generations at either "book-end" of the life span. In these narratives, intergenerational friendship aligns with the characteristics of friendship in general, but it also supports caring, enjoyment, belonging and inclusion in alternative ways compared to peer-aged friendships. Therefore, we argue that intergenerational friendship is an important conduit for social inclusion for, and between, younger and older generations.

The young and older participants concur on the qualities and benefits of intergenerational friendship, lauding the importance of fun and laughter, trust and confiding, and reciprocity and equality. Both book-ends agreed that intergenerational friends offer company, fun, and enjoyment in unexpected ways, providing new and varied experiences. Intergenerational friends can afford confidential emotional support where "more traditional" channels, such as peer support, are restricted or unreliable. In addition, the participants described how their older or younger friends provided access to diverse forms of support, such as practical advice or physical care, but both the young and the older stressed that this was never the sole motivation for forming an intergenerational friendship. Reciprocity and equality as crucial characteristics of friendship were not compromised because of age differences, or differences in experiences, skills, capabilities or what each friend had to offer in a relationship. Reciprocity as a component of intergenerational friendship challenges the "generational order" (Alanen, 2009) and contradicts the narrow perception in extant literature of intergenerational friendship as imbalanced, often portraying one generation as the "receiver" and the other as the "giver" of care, support, or advice. Moreover, intergenerational friendships challenge age-norms as in coming together in shared activities and pursuits and in forming friendships that are mutually meaningful and enjoyable, younger and older friends defy stereotypical understandings of what younger and older people "should" do and be.

Korkiamäki and Kallio (2017, p. 7) suggest that "whereas peer groups tend to connect people into socially and emotionally tight communities, the connections formed in intergenerational friendships are often more porous in nature, thus opening up opportunities to create alternative social relations and activities."

Hence, intergenerational friendship may "lead to different kinds of spatial attachments and inclusionary relations compared with those created solely with peers" (Korkiamäki & Kallio, 2017, p. 7). The younger bookend participants in this research had access to broader networks which granted them increased inclusionary opportunities, such as summer jobs and practical advice not available in their close communities. Moreover, in the connections formed through their intergenerational friends, they experienced a sense of communal belonging which had potential to generalise into an experience of being included in a "foreign" society. At the other bookend, older people with their younger friends got involved in groups and communities that allowed them to socialise in ways that suited them, challenging generational norms and expectations. These narratives delineate intergenerational friendship as a broadened space for the recognition of solidarities and communal belonging (Bowlby, 2011; Korkiamäki & Kallio, 2017). Furthermore, they indicate that intergenerational friendships create opportunities for both generations to adopt alternative identities, such as being useful, "normal," and agentic. Elliott O'Dare et al. (2021) similarly argue that in transitioning to older age, people value and seek intergenerational friends to maintain an inclusive "anchor" to contemporary ways of doing and being, and to maintaining an "all-age" identity. Such identities can act as bridging experiential ties to broader communities and societies and, therefore, lead to increased experiences of social inclusion at a personal and societal level.

The many benefits of intergenerational friendship were outlined by the participants; however, some drawbacks also became evident. For instance, a young asylum seeker confided that his intergenerational friend did not know any of his peer-age friends, indicating that benefits such as the broadening of networks will not automatically flow from intergenerational friendship. Occasionally, a trusting relationship with an older person may even prevent a younger person from seeking friendship with other young people, which indubitably would be beneficial in terms of inclusion and integration. This type of tight bonding is famously argued by Putnam (2000) to be a downside of close friendships, and intergenerational friendship is no exception in this regard. Further research is clearly needed to identify potential additional "downsides" to intergenerational friendship, thus expanding the understanding of the topic.

Also, investigations into exchanges of knowledge and experience between younger and older people would provide vital information on how the potential benefits flowing from intergenerational friendship could be consciously advanced and promoted through policy and practice. Biggs (2018, p. 174) proposes the concept of "intergenerational complementarity," whereby individuals, while aware of their own generational position, put themselves in the shoes of the other generation and have "the relative ability to negotiate between generational positions." This complementarity challenges

the segregation of "young" and "old," and "family" and "friends," and facilitates care, support, companionship, and learning for all generations. We argue that in intergenerational friendship, intergenerational complementarity has the potential to thrive as the book-end generations choose to come together in a personal, non-kin, chosen, enjoyable, beneficial relationship, through a homophily of "doing and being" (similarity in interests and outlook). This is important as different types and degrees of friendship are accessible to people in different (political) contexts, societies, and situations. Access to diverse support and broader networks, and spaces for establishing alternative identities and a generalised sense of belonging, are particularly important to the book-end generations as horizontal relationships based on age homophily may bind them in closed and vertically deprived communities. Hence, further research on the topic of intergenerational friendship is imperative at both book-ends to highlight and to promote the importance of intergenerational solidarity and interaction to younger and older individuals, and to the societies that they live in.

The limitations of this study are those common to qualitative research with relatively small sample sizes and drawing partly from a very particular group of participants (in this research, young asylum seekers). In addition, the research was conducted separately in two individual countries, Finland and Ireland. While the intention of this research is not to compare the countries or generalise the findings to the general population, but to provide insights into the experience and meanings of intergenerational friendships at the book-ends, we acknowledge that more wide-spread research is needed to make comprehensive conclusions on the benefits (and potential disadvantages) of intergenerational friendship of the general population in different cultures and societies. Also, bringing together two distinct studies presents differences in population samples and methodological approaches to data gathering and analysis, but the authors consider these differences are outweighed by the conceptual and experiential insights provided by both book-ends without the aim of comparing the groups. We encourage other researchers to form similar feasible "cross-alliances" to expand the understanding of intergenerational friendships at a national and international level.

In this research, we were not afforded the opportunity to explore the views of the younger friends of the older participants, or the older friends of the young participants, which we consider a limitation of this study and an important topic for prospective future research. In conclusion, we call for research, policy and practices which bring the book-ends of young and old together in practice. In contemporary societies meaningful intergenerational interactions may not happen automatically, therefore action may be required to bring older and younger people together. This article highlights that generations are not necessarily far apart in their thoughts,

views, hopes, and interests. By creating spaces and opportunities for intergenerational interaction, the formation and maintenance of intergenerational friendships can be promoted at the book-ends. Therefore, we conclude by calling on policy makers and communities to create such opportunities for inclusion through friendship for all generations.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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