

Title

Some would have you believe the importance of friendship in modern society has withered, and the values on which it is to be founded are lost. There is a belief that modern technology has somehow alienated us from one another, creating impersonal and feeble connections, mistaken for friendships, with emotions reduced to cartoon emoticons and conversations reduced to short bursts of rapid-fire interactions with our electronic devices, rather than people. While individual friendships may not have the same structure as those a thousand or even a hundred years ago, it is only because our society does not have the same structure either. Our friendships are a reflection of ourselves, an extension of our own personalities. We are influenced by our society, and society is strongly influenced by technology. It is only reasonable to draw the conclusion then, that as technology and society evolve, then so to would our friendships. But to say that the importance or value of friendship is lost is to underestimate the adaptive mind of the human being. Friendship today is as important as ever before, it just happens to exist in a vastly different form than it has been classically depicted.

In an essay written during the French Renaissance of the mid-1500s, by Michel de Montaigne, he describes the "perfect friendship." Of this he says, "...the multitude of friends for the perfect friendship I speak of is indivisible; each one gives himself so entirely to his friend, that he has nothing left to distribute to others... For the rest, what we commonly call friends and friendships, are nothing but acquaintance and familiarities." This idea of a singular perfect friendship is a reflection of the era in which he lived. Imagine, in his lifetime, he may have encountered a few thousand people if he was an

adventurous man, less if he wasn't. Of those thousand, he likely only interacted with a few hundred, and frequently interacted with only a handful. Of that handful, what are the chances that a few would share qualities that he would be so enamored with to devote all of his spare energy and love?

Given these circumstances, it is not difficult to grasp the idea of having a single "perfect" friend. This intimacy was a result of the limitation of technology. There were no buses, planes, or trains. No radio or television. No means of communication outside of face-to-face contact. This wasn't a conscious choice people were making to remain disconnected from the world outside of their community, this was the effect the limitation of technology had on their ability to develop a greater number of friendships. Community and communication play a vital role in the development of friendships. It is no coincidence they share the same root word – commune. Community is founded on communication between people who share some commonality. The classic idea of community is a group of people sharing a location in common; but as our society has developed, so too should our concept of community.

In a recent essay, "Faux Friendship" by William Deresiewicz, in which he critiques the state of friendships given the rise of social media, he compares the decline of friendship to that of community:

"As the traditional face-to-face community disappeared, we held on to what we had lost-the closeness, the rootedness-by clinging to the word, no matter how much we had to water down its meaning. Now we speak of the Jewish "community" and the medical "community" and the "community" of readers, even though none of them actually is one. What we have, instead of community, is, if we're lucky, a "sense" of community-the feeling without the structure; a private emotion, not a collective experience." (Deresiewicz p. 477)

I don't believe Deresiewicz could have been further from the truth. The idea that community has been watered down by social media and modern advances in technology, or that it must conform to some pre-defined structure decided hundreds or even thousands of years ago, is an insult to human intellect. (2)

Society has evolved; and so to must our definition of these concepts. No longer are we bound by simple city limits. Our reach spans across the globe with the advent of the internet. A community no longer be bound by an imposed boundary, forced into relationships they have little control over. Freedom of choice is a concept this country was founded on, so why would we not want to exercise our right to choose our communities?

Four years ago I found myself captivated by a videogame, LittleBigPlanet. This game allowed you to create your own levels and share them with anyone else who had a copy of the game and an internet connection. I was amazed by the idea of being able to share something I had created with a large group of people. Initially, the task of creating the levels seemed almost overwhelming. I first turned to my best friend, an industrial designer, to help me with the artistic aspects, but by ourselves we were still unable to overcome many issues. So we turned to the internet. A few Google searches later, we had discovered a small but developing website with about 100 members all sharing the very same interest we did. They were eager to help. We kept in constant contact. I would spend much of my free time there, learning and sharing in their experiences as they shared in mine. After spending months communicating with this group of like-minded individuals, I realized that we weren't just a group, we were a community.

We may not have been incidentally located in the same area, but we shared a much stronger connection than I share with my next-door neighbor, or even the two families that live directly above me. Our scope of friendship is no longer limited by something as chance as location. As Deresiewicz put it, "We are nothing to one another but what we choose to become, and we can unbecome it whenever we want" (Deresiewicz p. 477). This idea of the selective nature of our friendships has not weakened the bond of friendships, but rather strengthened them. To know someone is your friend today is to know that out of a million people, they have chosen you. They have a choice; there is nothing to tie them to

you, no false sense of community. Yet given so many different options that modern technology has enabled, they have opted for you.

(...Show that technology is only a tool through which we can communicate and develop friendships, not a replacement for the friendships themselves. Use Lewis as example to show that the idea of friendship being lost existed before the internet...)

(...Conclude by explaining that friendship is as important today as ever before. Although the structure and virtues on which they are built has changed, that is only a result of advances in society and technology. Community is not lost, it has been redefined, just as friendship has....)

[Include this somewhere in essay if possible – Our concept of friendship with your partner or spouse was not even comprehensible in that society. They hadn't evolved past the inequality of women, so their friendships hadn't evolved either. In Montaigne's words, "the ordinary talent of women is not such as is sufficient to maintain the conference and communication required to the support of this sacred tie; nor do they appear to be endued with constancy of mind, to sustain the pinch of so hard and durable a knot."]