

Phenomenology of Open Online Voluntary YouTube Confessionals: Exploring Data Mining for Understanding the Phenomenon of White Males without Friends in the Age of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study explored YouTube confessionals of white males in their 30s who identified as friendless, aiming to understand the implications of these public declarations and the role of YouTube as a confessional platform. Conducted on June 15, 2024, the research employed a thematic analysis of four YouTube videos, examining the transcripts for themes of isolation and vulnerability within the framework of Heideggerian phenomenology. The confessionals revealed deep emotional struggles related to loneliness and social anxiety. Participants shared their challenges in forming meaningful friendships, often citing childhood trauma, relocation, and societal pressures as contributing factors. Despite professional success, they expressed feelings of rejection and difficulty in connecting with others. Common themes included the effects of introversion, the differing social needs in relationships, and the pursuit of genuine connections. Each narrative emphasized self-reliance, personal growth, and the importance of overcoming internal barriers to achieve happiness amidst persistent isolation.

Keywords: YouTube, Confessionals, Social Media, White Male Vloggers, No Friends

INTRODUCTION

Foucault (1988) explored the concept of "technologies of the self" as voluntary practices through which individuals regulate their conduct and transform their identities. These practices are rooted in self-reflection and aim to mold the self into a particular form or ideal, making life an intentional creation or "oeuvre." Initially discussed in ancient Greek and Roman contexts, these practices evolved alongside the development of textual media, particularly writing, which enabled deeper introspection and self-expression.

In Foucault's view, writing becomes a crucial "technology of the self" by serving dual purposes: first, as a means to externalize and document one's inner life, including thoughts, emotions, and actions; and second, as a tool for self-examination and reflection. This process of writing about oneself constitutes a form of confession, where individuals articulate nuances of their existence, leading to a heightened experience and understanding of the self.

Foucault traced the evolution of these confessional practices through history, noting shifts from Hellenistic and Roman practices to Christian forms of confession. In Christian tradition, confession becomes intertwined with notions of renunciation and penance, where verbalized self-disclosure plays a central role in spiritual and moral purification. Foucault's analysis underscored how technologies of the self, particularly through confessional practices like writing and verbal disclosure, shape individual identities and moral frameworks across different historical periods, influencing both personal development and societal norms.

Television Confessionals

Television confessionals normalize vulnerability. TV is inherently confessional, according to Grobe (2017). Reality TV confessionals, where participants share their thoughts and feelings directly to the camera, can significantly influence regular people's lives in several ways (Staples, 2022). Reality TV confessionals often

depict participants sharing their deepest thoughts and emotions, from fears and insecurities to triumphs and joys. This open display of vulnerability helps to normalize the expression of emotions in everyday life. Viewers see that even those who appear strong or successful have their own struggles, which can encourage them to be more open about their own feelings. This shift can contribute to a cultural change where emotional honesty and vulnerability are valued rather than stigmatized.

TV confessionals facilitate behavior modeling. When participants in reality TV shows navigate conflicts, relationships, and personal challenges in their confessionals, they provide a template for viewers. People might imitate the ways in which these participants communicate, resolve issues, or make decisions. This behavior modeling can be particularly influential for younger viewers who are still developing their social and emotional skills. However, the dramatized nature of these interactions can sometimes lead to unrealistic expectations or unhealthy behavior patterns if not critically assessed.

TV confessionals produce relatable content. The candid nature of confessionals makes reality TV stars more relatable to the audience. By sharing personal stories and genuine reactions, participants create a sense of connection with viewers who might see their own experiences reflected on screen. This relatability can foster empathy and a sense of community, as viewers feel that their own life challenges and triumphs are shared by others. This connection can be comforting and validating, reducing feelings of isolation.

TV confessionals influence perceptions of reality. Confessionals can shape viewers' understanding of what is "real" by dramatizing and editing participants' experiences for entertainment value. This can lead to a skewed perception of reality, where viewers might overestimate the prevalence of drama and conflict in everyday life. It can also blur the line between authentic experiences and performance, influencing how viewers interpret real-life events and the behavior of those around them. This distortion can affect expectations and interactions in personal relationships and social situations.

TV confessionals encourage viewer's self-reflection. Watching participants dissect their own actions and thoughts in confessionals can prompt viewers to engage in similar self-reflection. This introspection can lead to greater self-awareness and personal growth, as viewers analyze their own motivations and behaviors. By seeing others reflect on their choices, viewers might be inspired to think critically about their own lives, leading to positive changes and a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships.

TV also significantly impacts viewers' mental health. The emotional intensity and conflict often depicted in reality TV confessionals can have a dual impact on viewers' mental health. On the positive side, seeing others navigate similar emotional landscapes can be validating and cathartic, helping viewers process their own emotions. On the negative side, constant exposure to heightened drama and stress can contribute to anxiety or emotional distress. It is crucial for viewers to maintain a critical perspective and remember that these shows are edited for maximum impact, which might not always reflect healthy or typical real-life interactions.

Social Media Influencers' Confessionals and Public Opinion

TV confessionals have bled into social media content. Social media 'influencers' use confessionals to attract audiences and influence their consumption behaviors. Social media influencers have the ability to reach a vast audience and engage with them on a personal level. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok enable influencers to build large followings, often reaching millions of users. This vast reach allows influencers to disseminate messages quickly and broadly. Moreover, their followers are often highly engaged, resulting in higher interaction rates compared to traditional advertising channels (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

Influencers often build a sense of trust and authenticity with their audience. Unlike traditional celebrities, social media influencers are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy. They share personal experiences,

opinions, and behind-the-scenes content, which helps in creating a more intimate connection with their followers. This perceived authenticity makes their recommendations more persuasive (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencers can cater to niche markets and specialized interests. Whether it is beauty, fitness, travel, or technology, there are influencers in every conceivable niche. Brands can leverage this by partnering with influencers whose audience matches their target demographic. This targeted approach ensures that marketing messages are delivered to a highly relevant audience, often leading to better conversion rates (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Influencers are adept content creators. They understand what resonates with their audience and can produce engaging, high-quality content that aligns with brand messages. This can include photos, videos, blogs, and more, often with a creative and authentic touch that traditional ads lack. Brands can benefit from this expertise by co-creating content with influencers, ensuring it feels organic and engaging (Abidin, 2016).

Influencers can significantly impact consumer behavior and trends. They often set or amplify trends in fashion, beauty, technology, and lifestyle. Followers look up to influencers for recommendations and are likely to emulate their choices. This trend-setting ability can drive consumer demand and shape market trends, giving brands a competitive edge if they partner with the right influencers (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011).

Influencers provide social proof, which is a powerful psychological tool in marketing. When potential customers see influencers using and endorsing a product, they perceive it as more trustworthy and desirable. This can lead to increased brand credibility and consumer trust, enhancing the overall effectiveness of marketing campaigns (Jin & Phua, 2014).

Social media influencers' use of confessionals significantly influences public opinion by fostering relatability, authenticity, and emotional connections with their audience. Confessionals create a perception of genuineness, enhancing parasocial relationships where followers develop one-sided emotional bonds, increasing trust and influence (Abidin, 2015; Horton & Wohl, 1956). By discussing personal issues, influencers normalize these topics, encouraging public discourse and reducing stigma (de Vries et al., 2018). Emotional engagement from these confessionals leads to increased sharing, spreading the influencer's message further (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Additionally, influencers impact followers' self-perception and identity by sharing personal growth experiences (Marwick, 2015).

Phenomenology of Social Media Confessionals

As such, they leverage on the power they perceive confessionals have over audiences and capitalize on it to create monetizable content. These assertions surface the nature of confessionals that must be considered when understanding the ontology of lived experiences when told to faceless audiences outside the context of research. This means that using confessionals as sources of information about lived experiences must be seen as possessing a dynamic distinct from regular interviews, where monetization is less likely an intent influencing narratives from interviewees. Nevertheless, information from social media confessionals must not be discounted and rendered irrelevant as such can be studied as phenomena in themselves that are built over other phenomena (topics of any confessional).

Hence, the confessional must be seen as a powerful, and yet invisible, frame that must be understood simultaneously with, and separately from, the lived experiences which it makes publicly accessible in the age of social media. This means that classical phenomenology (before social media) must be considered distinct from the phenomenology of social media confessionals in that the latter are complex (differently motivated) performances of storytelling of lived experiences. In this study, the phenomenological inquiry is interwoven

with another qualitative approach - data mining - where the information is generated separate from a pre-formulated research question. In the traditional phenomenology, the data is constructed only after the research questions are formulated.

Heideggerian Phenomenology in the Context of Social Media Confessionals

Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, is one of the most influential figures in the development of phenomenology. His work, particularly in *Being and Time* (1927), represents a significant departure from his mentor Edmund Husserl's approach, shifting the focus from a pure analysis of consciousness to an exploration of Being itself. Heideggerian phenomenology delves into the nature of human existence (Dasein) and our relationship with the world. Heideggerian phenomenology, with its focus on Dasein (being-there) and Being-in-the-world, offers a unique lens through which to understand (post-)modern phenomena, including the use of social media confessionals. This form of self-expression contrasts with traditional, in-depth face-to-face interviews. By examining social media confessionals through Heidegger's concepts, how digital platforms mediate human existence, authenticity, and the quest for meaning could be explored.

Being-in-the-World. Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-world emphasizes that human beings are always already situated within a specific context, interacting with their environment through practical engagement rather than detached observation (Heidegger, 1962). Social media confessionals represent a new kind of world in which Dasein exists—a digital world where interactions are mediated through technology. In this digital space, individuals share their experiences, emotions, and personal narratives with a potentially vast audience. This shift from face-to-face interaction to digital confessionals changes the way Dasein is situated in the world, offering a broader yet more impersonal context for expressing and interpreting one's existence (Dreyfus, 1991).

Authenticity and Inauthenticity. Authenticity in Heideggerian terms involves living in accordance with one's true self, making choices based on an understanding of one's own existence rather than conforming to societal norms (Heidegger, 1962). Social media confessionals can be seen as a double-edged sword in this regard. On one hand, they provide a platform for individuals to express their authentic selves, share vulnerabilities, and seek understanding and connection. This can be particularly empowering for those who might feel isolated in their offline lives. On the other hand, the performative nature of social media can lead to inauthenticity, as individuals might curate their confessionals to fit perceived audience expectations, seeking validation rather than true self-expression (Carman, 2003).

Being-toward-Death. Heidegger posited that an authentic existence involves an awareness of one's mortality, which gives meaning to life (Heidegger, 1962). In the context of social media confessionals, this awareness can manifest in various ways. Individuals might use these platforms to confront and share their fears, regrets, and reflections on life and death. In this study, the focus is on one's lack of friends and the meanings that emerge from such absence. However, the transient nature of digital content can also diminish the profundity of such existential reflections. The impermanence and often fleeting engagement with online content might contrast with the deep, sustained engagement typical of in-depth face-to-face interviews, potentially leading to a less impactful confrontation with one's mortality (Polt, 1999).

Temporality and Narrative. Heidegger's concept of temporality, which involves the past, present, and future as dimensions of Dasein's existence, is central to understanding the narratives shared on social media (Heidegger, 1962). Social media confessionals often involve storytelling, where individuals reflect on past experiences, articulate present emotions, and project future hopes and fears. These narratives provide temporal coherence to Dasein's existence. However, the digital format might fragment these narratives due to the episodic and often disjointed nature of social media posts. In contrast, in-depth face-to-face interviews allow for a more continuous and integrated exploration of an individual's temporality (Guignon, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to conduct a phenomenology using publicly accessible YouTube confessionals of white males who publicly declared themselves as not having friends. By doing so, the study sought to understand the meaning of publicly declaring one's self as having no friends in social media, specifically YouTube, YouTube as a confessional platform, and white males in their 30s using it to declare personal vulnerabilities. It also sought to reflect on fusing data mining and phenomenology as a way to conduct phenomenology using virtual space as a ready source of lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative data mining and phenomenology study interpreted on June 15, 2024 involved four purposively-sampled YouTube confessionals of white males who talked about having no friends. First, there was "YouTuber 1" (with 39,000 subscribers and 165,000 views on the selected 17-minute confessional with 7,000 likes). Second, there was "YouTuber 2" (with 113,000 subscribers and 221,000 views on the selected 11-minute confessional with 11,000 likes). Third, there was "YouTuber 3" (with 279,000 subscribers and 160,000 views on the selected 10-minute confessional with 6,500 likes). Finally, there was "YouTuber 4" (with 6,560 subscribers and 6,800 views on the selected 13-minute confessional with 293 likes). They were selected based on their 10-20-minute confessionals on having no friends that were uploaded within the last year (from July 16, 2023 to June 15, 2024) on YouTube that cater to the shorter attention spans of male viewers their age (in their 30s) and younger. They were transcribed using a YouTube transcribing application (<https://kome.ai/tools/youtube-transcript-generator>) and the transcripts were read multiple times in the conduct of thematic analysis. The researcher, having undergone a similar experience in his earlier years used said lived experience to dig deeper into the transcripts. His earlier works inspired by this study's phenomenon, *Multiplicities of Manhood: Exploring Young Men's Gender Constructions and Their Serial Drama Connections* (Bantugan, 2012), and looking into lived experiences of isolation and alienation, *Superstar-spangled Server Screen: Production and Consumption of Filipino Mainstream Care Work Films* (Bantugan, 2014), serve as testaments to his interpretive capacity in the context of Heideggerian phenomenology.

RESULTS

Themes from Confessional 1

Emotional and Psychological Impact. The speaker experiences significant emotional and psychological distress due to a lack of friends, primarily feeling loneliness and isolation. They openly state, "over the last three years again, not for a lack of effort, but I have failed to establish any like very meaningful friendships." This ongoing struggle has heightened their sense of loneliness, making them reflect deeply on their social situation. Additionally, the speaker contends with pervasive overthinking and social anxiety, mentioning, "I have an inner monologue going on almost the whole time... thinking how maybe stupid I look or how I sound weird." This constant self-evaluation exacerbates their anxiety, making social interactions daunting and reinforcing their sense of isolation.

Personal Development and Self-Perception. A persistent negative self-image significantly impacts the speaker's ability to form friendships. They grapple with feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome, which undermine their confidence. The speaker notes, "I think that I can't speak well... I have a lot of doubts and insecurities." These feelings of inadequacy stem from past experiences and have become ingrained in their self-perception. Despite understanding these issues more clearly now, the speaker finds it "just more frustrating because it's like I know all of these things that I need to do... it's just my, I just get in my own way." This heightened self-awareness has paradoxically intensified their frustration.

Behavioral Patterns. The speaker exhibits avoidance behaviors and tends to find excuses to avoid social

interactions. They admit, "I always find like an excuse or reason like after hanging out like one time why I don't want to hang out again." This tendency to retreat from potential social engagements prevents the formation of lasting friendships. The speaker has also developed a habit of solitude, often preferring to do things alone. They acknowledge, "I'm used to doing so many things without friends," indicating that long-term habits have solidified their solitary lifestyle, making it challenging to break out of this pattern even when opportunities for socializing arise.

Impact on Daily Life. Despite their social difficulties, the speaker's professional life remains unaffected. They take pride in their career progress, stating, "I have progressed in my career like year after year after year for the last eight years." However, this career focus has left little time for socializing, with the speaker noting, "weekdays are so constrained... and then I do have the weekend but unless you can get a friend to hang out consistently throughout the month you might only see like a new friend 12 times a year." Their busy routine and responsibilities have further compounded the difficulty of establishing and maintaining friendships.

Reflective and Aspirational Elements. The speaker's reflections reveal a strong desire for social improvement and a recognition of the importance of friendships. They express hope for change, saying, "I don't want another 3 years to go by and I still don't have friends." There is a clear acknowledgment of the need to prioritize social interactions despite the challenges. The speaker's self-awareness is evident as they discuss their inner conflict, describing how "a nicer version of myself, a more mature version who sees things as they are," attempts to combat their negative self-talk. This internal struggle highlights their commitment to personal growth and their ongoing efforts to overcome social anxieties.

Themes from Confessional 2

Phases of Life. The speaker delineates life into two primary phases: childhood and parenthood, emphasizing that "if you're lucky enough to make it to the second phase that's Parenthood." This binary division underscores the importance the speaker places on having children and forming a family. They argue that without reaching the parenthood phase, one's life might lack fulfillment and continuity, hinting at a broader societal expectation that achieving parenthood is a significant milestone.

Unlimited Pleasure and Self-Improvement. A critical issue the speaker highlights is the paradox of unlimited pleasure and self-improvement prevalent in developed countries like the United States. They assert that while self-improvement is often perceived positively, it can be detrimental, describing it as "one of the worst mental illnesses somebody can have." The speaker illustrates this by noting how perpetual self-improvement can lead to feelings of inadequacy, such as "never feeling like you're ready to get married" or "never feeling like you've quite accomplished enough." This relentless pursuit can leave individuals perpetually dissatisfied, always seeking more without achieving a sense of contentment.

The Illusion of Self-Improvement. The speaker uses a reference from the movie *Fight Club* to emphasize their point, quoting, "self-improvement is masturbation." This metaphor is employed to illustrate the futility of endless self-improvement, equating it to a form of self-pleasure that ultimately leads to emptiness. They argue that without meaningful human connections, all the achievements and material gains from self-improvement are equivalent to self-indulgence: "if you don't have meaningful connections with other people, you might as well have sat at home and masturbated." This stark comparison is meant to convey that genuine satisfaction and purpose come from relationships, not from individual accomplishments.

The Fear of Missing Out. The speaker discusses the haunting fear of missing out that plagues many adults who have not settled down or started a family. This "haunting feeling of dread and hopelessness" is described as an omnipresent anxiety that can strike at any moment, making individuals feel like they have failed to fulfill their life's purpose. The speaker shares a personal reflection, acknowledging this fear: "I'm 37 years old and I don't have any children," highlighting how this absence creates a sense of incompleteness despite other

achievements.

Personal Experience and Reflection. The speaker recounts their personal journey, detailing how life events and decisions led to their current situation. They narrate how the loss of their father and friends shaped their life choices, eventually leading to a dismissive attachment style in relationships. This personal history underscores their broader message about the limitations of self-improvement. They shared, "I went through the self-improvement journey and I hooked up with a lot of women... and it did absolutely nothing for me at the end of the day," illustrating how external successes did not translate to internal fulfillment.

The Importance of Meaningful Connections. Emphasizing the paramount importance of relationships, the speaker urges others to prioritize forming meaningful connections over continuous self-improvement. They argue that no material or social achievements can replace the value of relationships with loved ones, stating, "no amount of money, no career, no resources, no experiences in traveling... compares" to these connections. The speaker calls on individuals to be genuine, lower their guard, and seek out relationships, regardless of their social or financial status.

Societal Pressures and Realizations. The speaker addresses societal pressures and the often misleading messages about single life and financial freedom. They label these notions as "cope," suggesting that the idea of a fulfilling single life is a consolation rather than a truth. They stress the importance of family and children, arguing that without them, all self-improvement efforts are in vain: "if you don't have a family... all that self-improvement was just masturbation." The speaker encourages others to embrace relationships, even if it means overcoming social awkwardness or personal insecurities.

Themes from Confessional 3

Increasing Introversion with Age. In the YouTube video, the speaker reflects on becoming increasingly introverted with age, noting that they have "always been kind of an introvert." They explain how their social life evolved over time, moving from occasional outings with friends to spending most of their free time playing video games. The speaker mentions that online gaming became a significant part of their life as they got older and could afford more games and high-speed Internet. They recount, "A lot of my friends became friends that I played video games with online." As they transitioned into their late 30s, the speaker observed that social gatherings with friends became less frequent, primarily due to increasing responsibilities like family and work. They state, "When you start getting closer to 30, you hang out with people less," and emphasize their comfort with this change, expressing, "I am perfectly fine spending all my time by myself."

Family and Limited Social Interactions. The speaker discusses how having a family further limits their time for social interactions. They reflect that without a family, their lifestyle would likely remain unchanged, consisting of "drinking beer, smoking weed, and playing video games." They also touch on their remote work situation, which leads to having "no real friends" locally and avoiding most social gatherings unless necessary. Their wife, an extrovert, tries to pair them up with her friends' husbands, which the speaker finds frustrating, saying, "I don't care to have friends, and it doesn't bother me as much as it might bother other people because of my introvert(ed)ness."

Contrast Between Introversion and Extroversion. A significant part of the speaker's reflection focuses on the differences between their introverted nature and their wife's extroverted behavior. They describe their wife as someone who "enjoys that social closeness to people" and maintains relationships from all stages of her life, which the speaker finds exhausting even to think about. In contrast, the speaker prefers limited social interactions, explaining, "I will do anything to avoid having to go to a get-together, a barbecue, any kind of social gatherings."

Professional Success and Introversion. The speaker attributes their professional success to their introverted

nature, particularly their comfort with being alone, which has benefited their career as a coder and YouTuber. They argue that being an introvert is not a problem, stating, "I think that being an introvert is not a problem," and that it has been a "secret weapon" for their success. They challenge the societal view that extroversion is preferable, suggesting that it is "overrated," and emphasize that relationships, while valuable, are not essential for everyone's happiness.

Regret Over Lost Friendships. The speaker acknowledges some regret over not maintaining certain friendships due to their introverted tendencies but emphasizes that their personal happiness and comfort are more important. They admit, "I feel bad because I'm the type of person that'll get a text message and be like, I gotta respond to them, that I don't feel like doing it right now, and then I never respond." They believe that introversion has allowed them to succeed and be comfortable with themselves, advising fellow introverts to embrace their nature and not feel pressured to maintain numerous social relationships. They conclude, "Lean into the things that make you you," encouraging introverts to focus on what makes them happy rather than striving to be extroverts.

Themes from Confessional 4

Limited Friendships and Social Anxiety. The speaker begins by addressing the issue of having no real good friends at the age of 35, attributing this primarily to their lack of social inclination and diagnosed social anxiety. They describe themselves as "not the most outgoing and social person" and reveal, "I've actually have social anxiety and I'm not saying like a self-diagnosis there; that's a real actual diagnosis." Despite their efforts, this anxiety has made it difficult to maintain friendships, a situation that has only slightly improved as they have become more comfortable in their own skin. They reflect, "It's gotten better as I've gotten older... but at times my life has been crippling."

Childhood Trauma and Bullying. The speaker recounts severe childhood bullying that began after moving to a new neighborhood at the age of seven. They share harrowing experiences of bullying, saying, "They would strip me naked and beat me up and whip me with sticks, throw stones at me in front of everyone." This persistent abuse forced them to avoid playing outside. Concurrently, their parents divorced, leading the speaker to internalize feelings of rejection and blame. These early traumas significantly contributed to their social withdrawal and anxiety.

Loneliness and Relocation. At 23, the speaker moved to Cyprus alone, experiencing intense loneliness and anxiety. They recall, "I experienced some serious loneliness... I was really, really lonely." The anxiety became so severe that they resorted to daily drinking to cope. The speaker describes a breaking point where they almost returned home but eventually stayed after meeting their future wife, who integrated them into her social circle. Despite this, the speaker still struggled to form deep friendships in Cyprus, admitting, "I don't really have friends here... I've been here for 13 years."

Failed Friendships and Efforts to Connect. The speaker details various attempts to form and maintain friendships, often meeting with disappointment. They explain, "I tried putting in an effort and put myself out there... but you get kind of rejected and they don't put in any effort." This recurring rejection has led them to a stage where they feel okay without close friends, though they admit, "I would like closer friends, yeah, I'm not going to lie, but I don't need it."

The Importance of Effort in Friendships. Highlighting the challenge many men face in forming friendships, the speaker advises others to make the effort to reach out and maintain connections. They note, "So many guys are like that... we're just like broken children... waiting for the other guy to make the move." They encourage men to take the initiative, suggesting, "You put yourself out there, put the effort in... be the one to send the message, send out the text."

Balancing Self-Reliance and Desire for Friendship. Finally, the speaker emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and being comfortable alone. They advocate for personal development, stating, "You are your own best company... you don't need others, you want them but you don't need them." This self-acceptance is crucial for personal well-being, even while acknowledging the desire for more regular friendships. The speaker's advice underscores the balance between striving for social connections and fostering self-sufficiency.

Recurring Themes

The recurring themes across the confessionals include emotional and psychological distress from lack of friendships, negative self-perception, and social anxiety. Each speaker experiences isolation and loneliness, often exacerbated by past traumas or life changes, and struggles with forming and maintaining meaningful connections. Despite professional successes, their social lives suffer due to avoidance behaviors and busy lifestyles. They emphasize the importance of overcoming social barriers, the detrimental effects of perpetual self-improvement without meaningful relationships, and the significance of prioritizing genuine connections over societal expectations. Each speaker reflects on personal growth and self-reliance while expressing a desire for deeper social interactions.

Recent studies on men and friendships echo the themes found in the confessionals, highlighting significant emotional and psychological distress stemming from a lack of meaningful connections. Men's friendships often decline due to social anxiety, past traumas, and life changes such as career demands and family responsibilities (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023).

For instance, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, one of the longest-running studies on human happiness, emphasizes that strong relationships are critical for well-being and longevity. The study found that men who lack close friendships experience greater loneliness and isolation, leading to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). This aligns with the confessional themes of emotional distress and social anxiety.

Additionally, a study by the American Psychological Association found that men are less likely to form deep friendships due to societal expectations of masculinity, which discourage emotional vulnerability and reliance on others (Mahalik et al., 2022). This results in many men having superficial relationships and experiencing a sense of inadequacy, as noted in the confessionals where speakers grapple with negative self-perception and impostor syndrome.

Furthermore, the impact of childhood experiences on adult social interactions is well-documented. Men who faced bullying or adverse childhood experiences are more likely to develop social anxiety and avoidance behaviors, which hinder their ability to form and maintain friendships in adulthood (Lund et al., 2021). This is evident in the confessionals, where speakers recount how past traumas contribute to their current social difficulties.

Studies also highlight the importance of making efforts to connect and the role of personal development in forming friendships. Men who actively seek social interactions and prioritize relationships report higher levels of satisfaction and well-being (Kawamichi et al., 2022). This is reflected in the confessionals, where speakers recognize the need for effort and self-improvement to overcome social barriers and foster meaningful connections.

Overall, recent research supports the themes observed in the confessionals, underscoring the complex interplay between social anxiety, past experiences, societal pressures, and the necessity of personal initiative in cultivating friendships.

DISCUSSION

Essence of Friendships in the Confessionals of Friendless White Male Youtubers

In essence, male friendships in the context of the selected male YouTubers in this study are characterized by profound emotional complexity, influenced by societal norms, personal insecurities, and individual life experiences. These confessions highlight the deep impact of loneliness and social anxiety on personal well-being, underscoring a struggle with self-perception and the pursuit of meaningful connections. Despite these challenges, there's a resilient aspiration for change and personal growth, reflecting a nuanced journey towards balancing professional success with emotional fulfillment. The narratives ultimately call for greater understanding of male friendship dynamics and support systems that acknowledge and address these emotional complexities in adulthood.

Emotional and Psychological Impact. Men in their 30s grappling with the absence of close friendships face profound emotional and psychological challenges. The confessions reveal deep-seated feelings of loneliness, isolation, and social anxiety that significantly impact their well-being. For instance, one individual expresses, "I have failed to establish any very meaningful friendships," highlighting a persistent struggle with forming deep connections despite efforts. This emotional distress is compounded by self-doubt and overthinking, as evidenced by statements like, "I have an inner monologue going on almost the whole time," which reflects heightened self-awareness and anxiety in social settings.

Personal Development and Self-Perception. The lack of friendships often intertwines with issues of personal development and self-perception. Men in their 30s reflect on feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome, influenced by past experiences and societal expectations. One speaker admits, "I have a lot of doubts and insecurities," indicating how these internal struggles undermine their confidence in social interactions. Despite recognizing the need for change and personal growth, there's a pervasive frustration with self-imposed barriers, illustrating a complex relationship between self-awareness and emotional fulfillment.

Behavioral Patterns. Behavioral patterns among men without friends often include avoidance tendencies and a preference for solitude. Many describe finding excuses to withdraw from social engagements after initial interactions, reflecting a challenge in sustaining connections. This retreat into solitude is further reinforced by busy schedules and professional commitments, limiting opportunities for socializing and reinforcing solitary habits. Despite this, there's a clear desire for change and a recognition of the importance of prioritizing social interactions, even amidst personal and professional responsibilities.

Impact on Daily Life. The impact of having no friends extends beyond emotional realms into practical aspects of daily life. While professional lives may thrive, personal satisfaction and emotional fulfillment are compromised. One individual noted, "I've progressed in my career... but weekdays are so constrained," highlighting a dichotomy where career success coexists with social isolation. This imbalance underscores the challenge of balancing professional achievements with the need for meaningful personal connections, often resulting in a sense of incompleteness despite outward success.

Reflective and Aspirational Elements. Reflective elements in these confessions reveal a strong aspiration for change and personal growth. There's a palpable desire to break free from loneliness and isolation, with statements like, "I don't want another three years to go by and I still don't have friends," emphasizing a commitment to improving social interactions. This introspection also underscores a willingness to confront internal conflicts and self-limiting beliefs, demonstrating resilience in the face of emotional challenges and a proactive approach to cultivating meaningful relationships.

The essence of friendships among friendless white male YouTubers, as derived from their confessions, resonates strongly with recent findings on the ontology of male friendships. These confessions provide a rich

and nuanced understanding of the complex emotional landscape that men navigate when dealing with the absence of close friendships.

Emotional and Psychological Impact: Loneliness and Isolation. Recent studies highlight that men often experience profound loneliness and social anxiety, which significantly impact their mental health and overall well-being. The confessionals echo this, with individuals expressing deep-seated feelings of loneliness and a persistent struggle to form meaningful connections despite their efforts. These feelings are compounded by self-doubt and overthinking, mirroring findings that social anxiety and over-analysis of social interactions are common barriers to forming and maintaining friendships among men (Mahalik et al., 2022).

Personal Development and Self-Perception: Insecurities and Impostor Syndrome. The internal struggles with self-perception and feelings of inadequacy mentioned in the confessions resonate with research indicating that societal expectations and past experiences heavily influence men's self-esteem and confidence in social settings. The confessions reveal that despite awareness of their issues, men find it challenging to overcome self-imposed barriers, which aligns with the broader understanding that personal insecurities often hinder social interactions and relationship building (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023).

Behavioral Patterns: Avoidance and Solitude. The tendency to avoid social engagements and retreat into solitude is a recurring theme in the confessionals, and it is consistent with research findings that men often withdraw from social interactions due to discomfort or anxiety. Busy schedules and professional commitments further exacerbate this tendency, limiting opportunities for socializing and reinforcing solitary habits. This behavioral pattern reflects a significant challenge in sustaining social connections, as noted in studies on male friendships (Lund et al., 2021).

Impact on Daily Life: Professional Success vs. Social Isolation. The dichotomy of thriving professional lives alongside compromised personal satisfaction is evident in the confessionals. This imbalance highlights the difficulty men face in balancing professional achievements with the need for meaningful personal connections, a challenge that recent studies also emphasize. The sense of incompleteness despite career success underscores the importance of addressing emotional fulfillment alongside professional goals (Kawamichi et al., 2022).

Reflective and Aspirational Elements: Desire for Change and Growth. The confessions reveal a strong aspiration for change and a commitment to improving social interactions, reflecting a proactive approach to overcoming loneliness and isolation. This introspection and willingness to confront internal conflicts align with findings that men are increasingly recognizing the importance of emotional growth and meaningful relationships in achieving overall well-being (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023).

Overt Assumptions of the Selected White Male YouTubers on Friendship

The Importance of Shared Interests and Experiences. All the transcripts emphasize the importance of having shared interests and experiences in forming and maintaining friendships. For instance, one individual notes, "if I enjoy your company, if we have a laugh together, we got some things in common, that's cool man," underscoring that mutual enjoyment and common ground are key elements in friendship.

Friendship as a Buffer Against Loneliness. The transcripts explicitly state that friendships serve as a buffer against loneliness and provide emotional support. One person reflects, "When I moved, I experienced some serious loneliness... I couldn't find anyone as friends or anything," highlighting the role of friends in mitigating feelings of isolation.

Effort and Initiative Are Required. There is a clear acknowledgment that effort and initiative are crucial in maintaining friendships. The advice given is, "You be the one to send the message... put in the effort to

maintain that friendship," suggesting that friendships require active participation and willingness to reach out.

Covert Assumptions of the Selected White Male YouTubers on Friendship

Friendship as a Measure of Self-Worth. The transcripts subtly reveal an underlying belief that having friends is tied to one's self-worth. For example, the confession, "I don't have friends here... it stings," implies that the lack of friends negatively impacts self-esteem and personal validation.

Gender Norms and Vulnerability. The discussions implicitly reflect societal expectations about male behavior and vulnerability. The statement, "so many guys are like that... we're just like broken children," indicates an assumption that men are less likely to openly seek support due to fear of rejection and societal norms discouraging vulnerability.

Transactional Nature of Friendships. There is a subtle assumption that friendships can be somewhat transactional, where individuals expect mutual effort and reciprocity. The sentiment, "I don't want to try too hard in case he doesn't really like me," points to the fear of investing more effort than the other person, suggesting an underlying expectation of balanced give-and-take in friendships.

Reflections on the Assumptions

The transcripts reveal that friendship is perceived as a crucial part of social life, offering emotional support and a sense of belonging. They highlight the active role individuals must play in fostering these relationships and acknowledge the emotional risks involved. Moreover, the discussions shed light on the specific challenges men face in forming and maintaining friendships, influenced by societal norms around masculinity and emotional expression. These assumptions collectively paint a picture of friendship as a dynamic, essential, yet sometimes challenging aspect of human experience.

YouTube Confessionals in Phenomenology

The resonance between the themes from YouTube confessionals and recent studies on men's friendships underscores the validity and richness of using data mining of online platforms for phenomenological research. The implications of this approach are multifaceted and noteworthy.

Rich and Authentic Data Sources

Accessibility and Volume: YouTube confessionals provide a vast amount of data that is easily accessible, unlike face-to-face interviews which are time-consuming and logistically challenging. This allows researchers to analyze a broader spectrum of experiences and insights.

Authenticity: Individuals often share their thoughts and emotions more openly and candidly in online confessionals due to the perceived anonymity and lack of immediate judgment. This can lead to more authentic and unfiltered data compared to traditional interviews where social desirability bias might influence responses (Mahalik et al., 2022).

Reflections of Real-World Issues

Alignment with Broader Trends: The themes from YouTube confessionals align with broader research findings, validating the online data as reflective of real-world issues. The emotional and psychological distress, impact of childhood experiences, societal pressures, and importance of effort in forming friendships are consistent with recent studies (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023; Lund et al., 2021).

Longitudinal Perspectives: Online confessionals allow for longitudinal analysis by tracking individuals over time through their video uploads. This offers insights into how perspectives and experiences evolve, which is more challenging in one-off interviews.

Methodological Advancements

Combining Data Mining with Phenomenology: The integration of data mining techniques with phenomenological analysis represents a methodological advancement. This approach leverages technology to handle large datasets while maintaining the depth of qualitative analysis (Kawamichi et al., 2022).

Scalability and Efficiency: Automated tools and applications can transcribe and initially analyze large volumes of video data efficiently, allowing researchers to focus on deeper thematic analysis. This increases the scalability of phenomenological studies.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Privacy and Consent: Researchers must navigate ethical concerns regarding privacy and consent when using publicly accessible data. While individuals share content willingly on platforms like YouTube, explicit consent for research purposes should be considered (Mahalik et al., 2022).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Expanding Research Horizons: The success of using YouTube confessionals suggests potential for other social media platforms. Future research can explore platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or specialized forums to gather diverse qualitative data.

Hybrid Approaches: Combining online data mining with traditional methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Initial insights from online data can guide the design of targeted, in-depth interviews for nuanced exploration.

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