

How does the nature of children's friendship change with age

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



How does the nature of children's friendship change with age? Within this essay I will be looking at how children's friendships change in nature as they age. I will begin first by defining what is meant by the term friendship. I will then examine theories on stage and age development in relation to the development of friendships, exploring research which suggests that the nature of a child's friendship is based on their age.

I will look at conflicting research which suggests that although stage's of friendship may be categorized, that there is conflicting research to suggest the ages at which this behaviour manifests itself may not be the same for each child. Finally I will summarize by concluding how the nature of children's friendship changes with age. The very definition of what the term friendship actually means in itself is difficult to clarify and categorize. A dictionary definition defines friendship as an attachment from mutual esteem, and a friend as someone who is loving or attached to another.

As an adult it can seem easy to define who are friends are, they are like minded individuals whom we share common interests with, people we trust and socialize with. Other people within our adult life are associates, work colleagues or general acquaintances. The category of friend is reserved for those whom we have developed a bond with and in most cases an emotional attachment to. However, when we consider this in relation to the nature of children's friendship this dictionary definition and an adults view of friendship may not hold true for all children.

It also over simplifies the nature and dynamics involved in friendship. Barnes (2003, pg 49) highlights this when he discusses the many experiences

children have of friendship, and the emotions and experiences these friendships expose children to, for example it affords them the opportunity to share experiences, develop communication and develop a sense of closeness to another person, however in contrast to this Barnes tells us that friendships in childhood introduces children to a to conflict situations and emotions such as jealousy, anger and loneliness.

Best to leave a line space between paragraphs. The significance of childhood friendships can be a difficult area to gauge. The importance of these relationships and the subsequent impact on a child is not something which can be measured with any certainty. Allison James, an anthropologist, states the difficulty of gauging impact but also acknowledges the significance of childhood relationships and the importance of these 'friendships' in preparing children for later life and adult roles. participation in this tangled web of social relationships helps to shape identity and sense of self which is assumed as s/he moves towards adulthood to become a person in society..... the actual process of socialisation can only ever be haltingly documented" (James, 1993 cited in Kehily and Swann, 2003. pg 51). James admission that research in this area can be difficult to record and analyse is supported by Barnes when he discusses the reminiscing of childhood by adults in later life " none of this is to deny the the value of personal reminiscence..... ut it serves as a reminder not just to accept it in an unquestioning way" (Barnes, 2003, pg. 51) American psychologist Robert Selman supports the theory that the nature of children's friendships is influenced by their social understanding which develops as they age. Selman carried out research whereby he posed 'dilemma's' through scenarios to

children aged between three and fifteen, he then questioned the children on their solutions to these dilemma's and recorded these interviews.

In doing this Selman came to the conclusion that the nature of friendship could be categorized into four distinct stages, related to four distinct ages. Barnes (2003, pg 56) outlines Selman's four stages, 'Momentary physical playmate' this is the stage whereby children, usually around the age of three to five will categorize their friends as those who live in their locality, go to the same school and who partake in similar activities.

The second stage is 'One-way assistance' this is the stage whereby children do things to please another, within this stage Selman acknowledges that although at this stage children may try to adapt to others the friendship is still one sided and there is little evidence of the reciprocal nature of friendship, the age at which this occurs in most children is between the age of six to eight years old. The third stage of Selman's theory is the "fairweather co-operation" stage usually evident in children aged between nine and twelve years.

Within this stage children begin to see the consequence of their actions and begin to act accordingly, that is to say they appreciate that their actions and the actions of their friends are now evaluated and hence they begin to become adaptable taking into account the thoughts, needs and preferences of their 'friends'. Within this stage Selman argues that children may encounter conflict and disagreements which in turn may cause these friendships to peter out as opposed to enduring. Selman's final stage is called "mutual concern" this is usually seen around the ages of eleven to fifteen.

Within this stage Selman's research suggested that children have developed the skills required to develop stronger friendships based on a mutual understanding. Within this stage friendships can survive minor conflicts, Selman acknowledges the fact that, through his research, he found the way in which children describe their friendship has now changed, he found that descriptions were not based on physical descriptions, which had been the case with younger children but were now based on psychological attributes.

Selman's theories on stage development of friendships can be compared with other researchers who also concluded that there were specific points in a child's life whereby the nature of their friendship differed dependent on age, Barnes (2003, pg 55) comments on Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) who also categorized the nature of friendship based on particular age/stage brackets. Bigelow and La Gaipa argued that the changing nature of friendship developed alongside children's cognitive development.

That is to say as children develop their cognitive understanding and have experiences of social interaction and the nature of their friendships develop and this can be categorized in general terms into particular ages. Barnes uses Zick Rubin, an American psychologist, to illustrate this staging theory, "Rubin (1980) likens this to climbing a ladder and resting at each rung in order to consolidate the new level of interpersonal awareness that has been achieved" (Barnes, 2003, cited in Kehily and Swann).

This categorization of stage development is not a new concept in the 1950's and 1960's Jean Piaget a Swiss psychologist through years of research developed theories regarding child development and the stages which

children will act in a certain way based on their cognitive development, however “ Increasingly psychologists have adopted a 'life perspective' which recognizes that development is a process that continues from birth to death..... the end of childhood, as well as the beginning and middle, is not fixed by chronological age' (Morrow, 2003). It is therefore important not to wholly focus on the age of a child and assume that they will fit into a pre-defined category or stage, in my opinion what Morrow highlights for us is that development isn't fixed in to particular ages and stages, it suggests to me the way in which children and adults act can be determined by other factors such as their surroundings and the experiences they have.

Avoid using too many quotations in U212 essays – use them sparingly. We want to hear your answer primarily in your words. Although it can be argued that “ slotting” children's friendship development solely into age brackets isn't conclusive, it is helpful in determining the changing nature of friendship. By using stage development theories such as Selman's or Piaget's theories on the cognitive development of children we can use these 'stages' to further explore the changing nature of friendship within a wider context.

In the case of Selman, research was carried out by interviewing children of varying ages and asking them to comment on scenarios, a different approach in determining the changing nature of friendship has been explored through the observation of children in the context of play and life experiences and comparing these social interactions against the stage models.

By taking an ethnographic approach studying children, this involves the direct observation and analysis of their communications, sociologist William Corsaro (1985) explored the way in which children talked about friendship with each other. Through his studies Corsaro identified six distinct ways in which children talked in relation to friendship these included instances whereby children talked about 'friends' as a method to gain access to play or categorized 'friends' as the people they were playing with.

Corsaro's research was based around children aged between three and five year old and in his findings highlights that empathetic behaviour is displayed even in children at this young age, if we compare this to Selman's stages of friendship development this empathetic behaviour should be seen at around the age of eleven onwards according to his research. Barnes (2003, pg 61) uses Allison James' own findings from her study of four year olds to support Corsaro's findings.

James (1993) suggests "through its discrete performance that children learn about and experience friendship, which means that social contexts in which children find themselves, not simply their age, play the greater part in shaping children's understanding of the concept" James and Corsaro offer a contrasting view to that of Selman and Piaget in the way in which children develop their friendships. It is clear that age alone can not truly determine how a child will behave towards their 'friends' and that considerations relating to social experiences and environmental influences have to be taken into account.

Common held beliefs, discourses, can also influence the way in which children will behave and react in relation to friends and friendship, factors such as culture, gender and social status will also have a bearing on a child or adults behaviour and thus influence the way in which they behave and feel they should behave. What is clear is that research offers no definitive model on the changing nature of children's friendships it cannot be precise in relation to age when a child will move from one stage to another it merely confirms the fluid nature of friendships.

Previous sentence is too long and is actually three separate sentences. However what is apparent is the importance and significance of friendships need linking words or an introduction of some sort here for this quote; > “ friendships are among the central ingredients in children's lives from as early as age three..... through adolescence. Friendships occupy, both in their actual conduct and in the world of thought and fantasy, a large proportion of children's waking hours. They are often the sources of children's greatest pleasures and deepest frustrations. ” (Rubin, 1980, cited in Barnes, 2003, pg 52).