

Perception of
friendship among
young adults: a
qualitative study
essay sample



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Same-sex friendship in childhood and adolescence has been well investigated. However, normative individual differences in the perception of friendship among heterosexual young adults has had little research attention. The aim of this study is to explore individual differences in the perception of friendship including needs attached to close relationship.

Three young adults were interviewed using a semi-structured schedule focusing on the description and qualities of real friendship; the difference in friendship between males and females; the role of time; the importance of friends and how does someone prove to be a real friend. Research was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Qualitative analysis revealed five main themes – intimacy, empathy, similarity, fun and effect of the time on friendship. Five common features of close friendship emerged: trustworthiness, shared interest, close friendship developed between people with the same gender, time tested the friendship and friendship was important in a person's life.

Friendship is a word that has a different meaning for each of us. Smith, Cowie and Blades (2003) defined friendship as a close relationship between two particular individuals, as indicated by their association together or their psychological attachment and trust. This description refers to a reciprocal friendship, whereas Rawlins (1992) describes the characteristics of a close friend in a rather unilateral way as somebody to talk to, to depend upon, rely on for help, support and caring, have fun and enjoy doing things together.

There have been numerous endeavours to identify common characteristics that would comprehend the variation in the perception on friendship.

Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) identified five particular features of friendship by comparing children's and adolescents' relations to their friends and to non-friends. It was found that their relations to friends were based more on reciprocity and intimacy; they had been having more intense social activity and more frequent conflict resolution; also more effective task performance was found among friend peers. Sharabany (1994) structured the concept of 'close friendship' into the following eight dimensions: Frankness and Spontaneity; Sensitivity and Knowing; Attachment; Exclusiveness; Giving and Sharing; Imposition; Common Activities; Trust and Loyalty.

Selman and Jaquette (1977, cited in Strayer & Roberts, 2004) suggested a five stage model of adolescents' and adults' understanding of friendship that linked to stages of perspective-taking abilities. In late adolescence and early adulthood an autonomous interdependency characterized the friendship in which friendships were regarded, still important but the need for other relationships was accepted. Evidence of awareness that relationships develop and change over time was found. Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) found that factors such as initial attraction and preference based on perceived similarity to their friends significantly influenced the formation of adolescents' friendship. Other factors, such as age, sex, ethnicity, mutual liking, and activity preferences also influenced friendship formation, whereas attitude and similarity values were weaker factors. They also suggested that the degree of friendship closeness should affect the strength of the friendship and that reciprocal friendships are stronger than unilateral friendships.

The same-sex friendship in childhood and adolescence has been well investigated (Hartup, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Rawlins, 1992; Sharabany, 1994; Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2003) and its significance across the lifespan has been acknowledged (Selman & Jaquette, 1977, cited in Strayer & Roberts, 2004). However, normative individual differences in the perception of friendship among heterosexual young adults has had little research attention. In this study my intention was to contribute to filling this gap by exploring individual differences in the perception of friendship including needs attached to close relationship.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a type of quantitative method was chosen so that a deeper understanding of the complexity of friendship could be gained. Peoples' perceptions could be wide-ranging and very different. This study aims to explore the characteristics of close friendships in early adulthood by analysing the uniqueness of three young adults' understanding and perceptions on friendship. The research question was: What are young adults' perceptions of friendship?

Method

Overview

Three female interviewer conducted semi-structured interviews with three young adults (two female and one male) with whom they were acquainted. The interviews were conducted in a quiet room at the University of Surrey. During the session participants were asked about what came immediately to their mind when they heard the word " friendship", what qualities a person needs to have to be considered as a real friend; the characteristics of one of <https://assignbuster.com/perception-of-friendship-among-young-adults-a-qualitative-study-essay-sample/>

their friends; the difference between friendship with a same-sex person to an opposite-sex person; the difference in topics discussed with their same-sex and opposite-sex friends, a particular event or situation where someone proved to be a real friend; the importance and role of time in becoming friends with someone; the importance of the participant having friends; and finally, if there were any other suggestions or thoughts they would have liked to mention.

Ethical issues

Because the nature of the study necessitated participants discussing personal issues, it was necessary to audio-tape the interview to ensure transcript accuracy so their consent in participating were sought. All three participants gave their approval. Participants were also told about their anonymity and freedom to stop the interview if they wanted.

Participants

The participants were recruited by asking an acquaintance of each of the three interviewers to voluntarily participate. The participants, all students of the University of Surrey, had a mean age of 21 years (range 20-22 years, $SD= 1$). The two female participants identified themselves as White British and one male identified himself as White European.

This study represents an idiographic approach to investigation into individual psychological functioning (Gazzaniga & Heatherton, 2005) and into examples of personal perceptions and understanding about friendship in sufficient

detail. This is particularly the case when the topic under investigation is novel or poorly investigated and complex as is the case in this research.

There were three interviewers, including the author; all were from the second year University of Surrey Psychology course. Each conducted one interview, which is an unusual procedure but was the only practical solution because of the time constraint. Prior to the interviews the interviewers worked as a team and discussed and agreed all aspects of the study and interview techniques to make sure that they all carried out the same study.

The interview

The aim of the interviews was to explore individual differences in the perception of friendship including needs attached to close relationship. The interview was semi-structured to allow the participants to discuss their experiences and views from their own perspectives. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they wanted to add or discuss anything else in connection with the interview subject or questions. During the design of the interview schedule, the questions were discussed among the members of the research group and changes were made to the content of the interview schedule (Table 1).