

FRIENDSHIP QUALITY IN SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIP AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

A high quality friendship is good for health and longevity. Friendship is a relationship in which two people spend a great deal of time together, interact in a variety of situations, and provide emotional support to each other. A closed friend is always valued for his or her sensitivity and honesty. There is a limited literature on the role of friendship quality among adolescents. To address this gap, the present study aimed to assess the gender differences on four indices of friendship quality (closeness, help, acceptance and safety). A sample of 64 participants (32 male and 32 female) was collected for the study. Friendship Quality Scale was used as a tool to assess four dimensions of friendship. t test was used for the analysis. The mean scores indicated that females provide more safety, show more acceptance, closeness and are more helping than males. Results indicated a significant difference on closeness and help dimensions of friendship quality. No significant difference was found on safety and acceptance dimensions of friendship quality. Significant difference was also found for overall friendship quality.

Keywords: acceptance, closeness, friendship, help, safety

Introduction

An individual sees many changes from childhood to adolescence such as social situations and social norms that serve to elevate the importance of friends. Friendship is usually referred to be the voluntary experience of a mutual relationship (Margalit, 2010). Human beings are social creatures who are motivated to be affiliated with others. They have a sense of belongingness in meaningful relationships outside that of family and lack of these interpersonal relationships has a significant negative impact on physical as well as mental health of an individual (Baumeister and Leary 1995). The literature reveals that closeness, acceptance, help, and safety are found to have positive relationship with one and other (Thien & Nordin, 2013). The term Friendship feature is used to describe student characteristics demonstrated in friendship (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Berndt & Murphy, 2002). High quality friendship is always characterized by high level of positive features such as pro-social behavior, intimacy, and loyalty whereas low levels of negative features such as conflicts and rivalry (Berndt & Murphy, 2002). It is a relationship in which the persons enter into contact with somebody original, unique and

irreplaceable, somebody that is close to them and unselfishly devoted (Wright, 1969). It is essential for the social development of the adolescent. Friends raise our self-esteem, increase our sense of well-being, help in the process of socialization, support one another in coping with developmental transitions and various stress and strains of life (Jelle, Sijtsema, Hawley & Little, 2010). Friends engage in different activities with one another across the life span, but the relation of friendship is understood similarly by children and adults. The outcome of friendship depends upon whether the friends are supportive and intimate or unsupportive and unstable (Willard, Hartup & Stevens, 1999). The research on the quality of adolescent friendships has been plentiful in recent years.

Hartup (1996) found that friendship gives the opportunity to develop social, cognitive, and emotional capabilities and to experience new types of relationships. High quality friendships are related to the regulation of emotions (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee & Sippola, 1996), social competence (Buhrmester, 1990), problem solving abilities and academic success and adjustment (Berndt & Keefe, 1995).

Young people enjoy spending more time with age mates, often with reduced oversight by adults, and they put greater emphasis in the expectations and opinions of peers. Research reveals that, peers sometimes compete with adults as a significant source of influence on adolescent attitudes, activities, and emotional well-being (Berndt & Murphy, 2002; Hartup, 1999). An important characteristic of friendship is that the partners share many traits in common. Investigators discovered that this is because similar background, tastes, values, habits and interests encourage individuals to select each other as friends, and as these characteristics are acknowledged within the relationship, so the peers are likely to grow even more similar to each other (Cohen, 1977; Kandel, 1978).

Adolescents tend to make friends who can provide qualities such as giving, those who are spontaneous and supportive and avoid peers who may not be able to satisfy these needs (Reisman, 1985). Research shows that good friendship improves health. Good friends encourage their friends to lead more healthy lifestyles;

encourage their friends to seek help when needed; and help to enhance the coping skills of their friends in dealing with illness and other health problems (Jorm, 2005).

There are similarities as well differences between male-male and female-female friendships. Although the similarities tend to outweigh the differences, there are some interesting ways that men's friendships differ from women's (Vigil, 2007). In this paper, we examine this issue in a sample of college students and propose the following objective- Females will score higher on friendship quality than males.

Table-1: Conceptualization of the dimensions of Friendship

Dimension	Conceptualization	Operationalization
Safety	The level of confidence or trust relied on friend(s).	To what extent is a student's confidence and trusts relied on his or her friend(s).
Closeness	The level of attachment by friend(s).	To what extent is a student attach to his or her friend(s).
Acceptance	The level of a student's acceptance by school friends either socially or emotionally.	To what extent is a student accepted by his or her school friend(s) either socially or emotionally.
Help	The mutual help offered by the participant in	The extent to which a student will offer his or her mutual help to

sustaining a friendship.
friend(s) who are having school related problems.

Source: Thien, L. M., Razak, N. A., & Jamil, H. (2012)

METHOD

Participants

The present study comprised of 64 participants (32 male and 32 female) in the age range of 17-19 years. The sample was collected from the two government colleges of Jammu city. The data was collected over a period of 3 weeks.

Instrument used

Friendship Quality: To assess the four dimensions (closeness, help, acceptance and safety) of friendship quality, the friendship quality scale (Thien, Razak and Jamil, 2012) was administered. It is a self report measure, which contains 21 items with six response categories ranging from 1 (high strongly disagree), 2 (strongly disagree), 3 (disagree), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree) to 6 (high strongly agree). The Cronbach's Alpha for safety, closeness, acceptance, and help were .88, .83, .84, and .81 respectively. The results revealed that the reliability and validity of the scale were warranted.

Procedure

Data was collected individually using a cross-sectional design. Care was taken that doubling of data does not take place. Consent was taken from the participants before administering the test.

Statistical Method

Coding of one categorical variable i.e. gender was carried out by using SPSS version 20. Mean, standard deviation and the t-test were calculated. The variables tested were safety, closeness, acceptance, help and overall friendship.

Result

Mean, standard deviations and the value of t are presented in the table. Results indicated significant gender difference for closeness (2.82, $p < 0.01$) and help (3.12, $p < 0.01$) dimensions of friendship. Significant gender difference was also found in overall friendship quality (2.58, $p < 0.01$). However no gender differences were found for the safety and acceptance dimensions of friendship. Gender differences were found in overall friendship.

Table 2- Test of significant differences on friendship quality across males and females

INDICES	MEAN		STANDARD DEVIATION		t	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE		
SAFETY	31.50	33.00	5.86	4.80	1.14	
CLOSENESS	25.34	28.81	5.10	4.71	2.82**	* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$
ACCEPTANCE	16.65	18.43	4.20	3.01	1.94	
HELP	12.12	14.25	3.25	2.04	3.12**	
FRIENDSHIP	85.62	94.18	14.90	11.41	2.58**	

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to assess the gender differences on four indices of friendship quality among adolescents. The participants were in the age range of 17-19 years. The main finding was that there was gender difference between males and females on closeness and help dimensions of friendship quality, whereas there was no gender difference found on dimensions of safety and acceptance. Mean scores indicated that the females have overall good quality of friendship than males. Hence our hypothesis was not rejected. This is consistent with the existing research related to gender differences on friendship quality. Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) explained that male friends tended to give more importance to common traits (e.g., shared activities and shared experiences), while female friends tended to emphasize reciprocity i.e. help, emotional support, and confiding behaviour). An investigation conducted by Barth and Kinder (1988) on sex differences in same- sex friendships

indicated significant sex differences in the nature of same-sex friendships. Female friendships were of longer duration than those of the males. The differences in involvement and depth were found within each designated level of friendship (casual, good and close). They pointed out that women are more close, intimate and emotional in their same sex friendships than men and females do place a higher value to friendship than males do.

As explained by a study conducted by Sapadin (1988) as both sexes viewed the characteristics of an ideal friendship in similar ways, their actual experiences of friendships differed. Women's same-sex friendships were rated higher for overall quality, intimacy, enjoyment and nurturance. Men, on the other hand, rated their cross-sex friendships higher in these areas, with the exception of intimacy which was rated the same by men in both same- and cross-sex friendships. Gender differences in same- and cross-sex friendships remain strong, despite new career roles for women. The study on gender differences have always preoccupied the researchers indicating that female adolescents manifest higher quality, more intimate relationship than males (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006). Brendgen, Markiewicz, Doyle, and Bukowski (2002) found more positive and friendship features among Canadian adolescent girls than boys. A study conducted by Rands and Levinger (1979) reflected that female same sex friendships compared to male same sex friendships are expected to be more open, enhancing, and physically affectionate but not different in terms of likelihood of engaging in joint activities. In addition, a diary study by (Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977) showed that females were significantly more likely than males to study together and to talk with one another about friends, family, and personal problems. Males were more likely than females (but not significantly) to go to movies and play sports together. Paul Wright (1982) described female friendships to be “face to face” whereas male friendships to be “side by side.” This explains that females compared to males are more intimate self-disclosing in friendship. Male friends tend to do things together other than “just talking.” They share activities, such as sports, where their attention is focused on the same goals but not on one another (Winstead, 1986).

Limitations

The result of this study should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. Data was although collected from the two major colleges of the Jammu city, however it is not representative of the whole population. Though the reliability of the standardized scale used was adequate but the sole reliance on the self report measures is a methodological limitation.

Conclusion

Friends play an important role in the overall adjustment of an individual. And, how good the friendship it is, determines the strength of that relationship. The studies on friendship quality represent an important advancement over the previous research done in this field. Despite the expanding work on this topic, it would be significant to see friendship quality being studied more systematically. A common set of theoretical framework is required for integrating the findings of different studies and procedures. As evident from the result of the study, the gender differences were relatively small in magnitude and were not found for all indices of friendship quality, Therefore, more work is needed to see, whether friendship quality differs in case of males and females or not. It is also important to extend the research on friendship features to different subgroups of the adolescent population.

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