



Perceived Meaning and Relevance of Friendship; A Qualitative perspective among College Students

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Abstract

The present study aims to understand the perceived meaning and relevance of friendship among college students. The sample for the present study consisted of 40 students (20 girls, 20 boys) from Farook College, Calicut. Structured interview schedule has been administered to the sample. The study findings highlight that college friendship provides mental support and academic support to students. And friendship has a strong influence on college student's outcomes. The results of this study have an important implication for school counsellors and educators and also for tool construction.

Keywords: Perceived meaning, Relevance, Friendship, College students.

Introduction

Close friendships are essential for the development of interpersonal intimacy, empathy and perspective talking skills and a high quality friendship might lessen the harmful effects of low peer and acceptance (Buhrmester 1990). Despite these benefits, close friendship may also have negative features such as conflict, pressure and exclusion (Furman and Buhrmester 1985). As a result of transition into college, many changes take place in adolescents. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development states that task of establishing close intimate relationship confronts the individual in his early 20's. The developmental significance of peer relationships during childhood and adolescence is undeniably strong. Support from peer group influences individual's emotions and motivational process (Hartup, 1999). Individuals who are more surely attached are more likely to self-disclose to friends (Mikulimer and

Nachlon, 1991), report greater intimacy (Grabill and Kerns, 2000) and expect more support and trust from friends (You and Malley - Morrison, 2000). Aristotle and Cicero argued that friendship were among the most important aspect of human development (Shushok, 2008) psychological research has provided abundant evidence for the significance of social support in the lives of individuals. Hartup and Stevens (1999) found that having friends are correlated with a sense of well-being across one's life span and that the development outcome depend upon quality of friendship. Longitudinal studies have found friendships perceived to be high in positive quality were associated with increases in self –esteem (Berndt & keefe, 1995) and low levels of loneliness (Parker & Asher, 1993). Friends has been linked to various aspects of an individual's development.

In the 1970s Jean Piaget and Harry Stack Sullivan proposed theories to the growing interest to friendship. Most relevant to children friendship is the theory of moral development in Jean Piaget's early book: *The moral judgement of the child* (Piaget 1965). Harry Stack Sullivan's best known statements about friendship are contained in the interpersonal theory of psychiatry (Sullivan, 1953). Arthur Chickering is considered one of the seminal theorists in college student's development, and his theory on identity development in college has been used for decades in student's affair practice and research. . In the classic text, *what matters in college*, Alexander W Astin (1993b) argued that "the students peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years. Astin (1993b) defined a student's peer group in two perspectives: the psychological view; and the sociological view. From the psychological view, he defined the peer group as "a collection of individuals with whom the individual identifies and affiliates and from whom the individual seeks acceptance or approval". In sociological view "any group of individuals in the members identify, affiliate with, and seek acceptance and approval from each other".

College students are strongly influenced by friendship; it even depends on what they do every day during campus life. For college students, friendships are often an easy and ubiquitous feature in campus (Astin 1993b; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Scholars found that friendship quality was a significant predictor of people's happiness (Demir and Weitecamp, 2007).For college students; college provides a larger group in which to belong. In most cases students are forced to leave their high school best friends and form new friends. Thus, adjustment plays a major role in college life. Latest researches show that depression and mental health problems are reality to college students, to a very far extend friendship is the solution to these problems. Majority of college students have come far away from family; therefore, friends play an important role in students. In the classic text, *what matters in college*, Alexander W.Astin (1993b) argued that "the students peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years."

The campus environment isn't the same as in 90s. It has now what we call today the "the next generation" creating an internet culture, therefore acquiring a new meaning for friendship. The chance of falling in fake relationships is prominently high during campus life especially in this era. In fact, there has been vast research why friendship may be a powerful predictor of student's success, particularly in light of the new online social networking so prominent on college students today. The main goal of current study is know how college students perceive friendship and its relevance. The college students are comprised of unique and complicated groups, with different views and needs (Howe & Strauss, 2006).The influence that friendship has on academic performance has been largely unaddressed in the higher education literature, and examined in brief formats on adolescents children. In fact, much of that literature in the influence of friendship on young children deals with more with the negative aspects rather than potentially positive behaviours. When students are unsuccessful in developing emotional closeness to others or lack social connection, they can experience physical and mental health related problems (Bruhn, 2005). Emotional closeness to others has been strongly linked to subjective wellbeing and ultimately protects individuals from the deleterious effects related to high stress levels (Ammar, Nauffal and Sbeity, 2013; Rayle, and Chung, 2007). Family, friends, romantic and co-worker relationships are independently and robustly related to happiness (Helliwell and Putnam 2004).Conflict is another aspect of friendship quality. Conflicts within social relationship are inevitable and may be both a danger to the relationship and an opportunity to improve it (Laursen, 1993). Both positive and negative effects of conflicts have been found.

Human beings are motivated to be associated with others and have a sense of belongingness in and relationship outside that of family and lack of these relationships have a negative impact on psychological, emotional and physical health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hill, 1987). Close and meaningful relationship may be important in experiencing high well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002).Thus friendship can be considered one major factor in being psychologically adaptive and in a state of good mental health.

Significance of study

College life is considered as a time with lot of friends and more of communications. It's been considered as the most striking time in everyone's life. Even then the latest news given by The Daily Universe (November 22, 2016) reported that depression and mental illness is a reality to college students and 4 out of every 5 college students who either contemplates or attempt suicides show clear warning signs. Why it happens? So, does it mean that quality of friendships have no role in our life? This thought make us to study how friendship to an extend serve as a protective function to students and how it can promote a high-wellbeing. Thus we explore the role of

friendship in college students and outcomes .Specifically, this study describes how college students perceive friendship and its relevance in their life.

Method

The present study focused on perceived meaning and relevance of friendship; a qualitative perspective among college students.

Objectives

- To study the perceived meaning and relevance of friendship among college students.
- To find out the relation between friendship and family.

Research Questions

- 1) How college students view their friendship?
- 2) Whether friendship is necessary for their lives?
- 3) What are the benefits that they gain through friendship?
- 4) Whether they are sincere and loyal to their friends?
- 5) Whether they maintain or keep their friendship in same strength?
- 6) Whether they give more importance to friends than their family?
- 7) How their friendship had influenced their lives?
- 8) Whether they are satisfied with their current friendship?
- 9) Does their family accept their friends?
- 10) Whether they believe that value of friendship had got diminished?

Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 40 college students from different programmes of Farook College, Calicut. Of the 40 participants (20 boys, 20girls) 22 were hostellers and 6 were married .Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique and had their full consent.

Inclusion criteria

- Participants should have at least 1 -1/2 years of college experience.

Exclusion criteria

- Participants who have any form of mental or physical disability
- Foreign students

Instruments

Demographic data sheet

Prior to the structured interview schedule, participants were administered a demographic form to collect data such as age, gender, no. of close friends, no. of time spend in social networks and other socio-economic factors. It was prepared by the researcher.

Structured interview schedule

In the scheduled interview participants were asked open end questions prepared by the researcher. The interview ranged from 30-40 minutes. All the interview took place in college campus and were audio taped with the consent of participants.

Data collection

The present studies consisted of 40 participants and were selected using purposive sampling technique. Prior to the interview, rapport was established and then participants were administrated with a demographic data form. Then participants were given proper constructions regarding the interview. All the interviews were audio taped.

Ethical Issues Considered

Participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all the study

Subjects for interview and audio taping and the date and time of interview were decided as per their convenience. All the participants were ensured about confidentiality of the information.

Data analysis

Content of the interview were analysed based on research questions. The views given by each participant were analysed. Tally marks were made according to the answers shared by the students on each enquiry areas of friendship. Then answers we got from analysis were tabulated in a tally table.

Results

Table 1

College students view on their friendship

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Intimacy	24	28.57
2	Enjoy	14	16.66
3	Support	14	16.66
4	Help	17	20.23
5	Self interest	8	9.52
6	Trust	7	8.33

Table 2

Whether friendship is necessary for their life

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Necessary	38	95
2	Not necessary	2	5

Table 3

Benefits gain through friendship

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Support	20	15.625
2	Help	21	16.406
3	Enjoyment	18	14.062
4	Intimacy	21	16.406
5	Share	14	10.93
6	Acceptance	8	6.25
7	Comfort	17	13.28
8	Personal Development	1	0.781
9	Identity	1	0.781
10	Self interest	1	0.781
11	No Opinion	1	0.781

Table 4

Whether they are sincere and loyal to their friends

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sincere	21	52.5
2	Not Sincere	18	45
3	Both	1	2.5

Table 5

Whether they maintain or keep their friendship in same strength

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Same strength	23	57.5
2	Not same strength	12	30
3	Depends	5	12.5

Table 6

Whether they give more importance to friends than their family

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Family	19	52.7
2	Friends	14	38.8
3	Equally important	6	16.67
4	No opinion	1	2.78

Table 7

How their friendship had influenced their life

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Influence	37	92.5
2	Not Influence	1	2.5
3	Depends	2	5

Table 8

Satisfaction with current friendships

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Satisfied	27	67.5
2	Not Satisfied	12	30
3	No Opinion	1	2.5

Table 9

Acceptance of friends by their family

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
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1	Accept	30	75
2	Do Not accept	6	15
3	Depends	4	10

Table 10

Belief that value of friendship is got diminished

Sl.No	Answers	Frequency	Percentage
1	Diminished	16	40
2	Not Diminished	24	60

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand perceived meaning and relevance of friendship among college students. Further this study aims to understand the relation among demographic variables on perceived meaning of friendship among college students. The study was investigated based on research questions. The research questions began with how college students view friendship. Students with positive perceptions in friendship found trust, intimacy, emotional security and enjoyment in friendship. Students with negative perceptions in friendship stated friends are to satisfy one self's desires and needs and is of no importance.

Different aspects of friendship emerged from the data in this study, there was significant findings related to benefits and necessity of friendship in college campus. The results suggested that friendship provides support, help, enjoyment, comfort, and intimacy. Majority of the students suggested friendship is necessary. Students with more positive qualities in their friendship reported less social anxiety. This suggest that a good quality friendship may serve as a protective function in terms of social anxiety. Over 92% of college students suggest that their friendship influence their values, attitudes, behaviours and believes. The results of this study generally support sex-stereotypical assumptions about the nature of male-male and female-female conversations. From the results we can interpret that girls have more number of close friends than boys.

College student's relationship at school and at home has been shown to predict a variety of outcomes such as behaviour at college and academic performance. The study results show that most of the students give importance to family over friends. The students whose family is not actively involved and supporting find to be close to their friends in contrast. 77% students reported their friendship circle is accepted by family. The study also shows that majority of students are satisfied in their friendship

though they had difficulties in the first year in forming relationship with peers. It is also evident that college friendships are more sincere and long lasting than school friendship. One by third of students suggests that the true and loyal friends are from college. 62% of college students reported that they maintain the strength of college friendship throughout. 32 % students suggest that they maintain friendship only up to their college studies.

The study also suggests that girls or boys who belong to friendship circle of smoking or other habits or different clothing styles are very likely to follow their friend's habits. For the question; whether they believe value of friendship had got diminished, majority students reported day by day the friendship bond is increasing and they strongly believe that college friendship is forever. On the other hand, students who reported value of friendship is getting diminished day by day strongly believe school friendship lasts forever. Though they have online friends more in number, they give importance to offline friendship. Out of 20 girls, 4 were married; they reported husbands are closer to them than friends and they feel a strong and forever bond with them.

The findings provide consistent evidence that online friendships are not valued by college students although many studies are conducted on the influence of online networking among students. Most of the college students show negative attitude towards the online friendship, defines it as a masked relationship.

Conclusion

The study concluded that friendship has a strong influence on college student's outcomes. Most of them perceived positive qualities in their friendships. Intimacy is seen as one of the main views of friendship. Though they are close to friends, family is always their first priority. To the end of the interview, students concluded, 'Friendship builds the base of the college'. The study found that college friendship provides mental support and academic support to students. Students who failed to create college friendship live in past memories of school friendships.

Implications

These findings have implication for college programming that improves likelihood of making campus friendship .The results of this study also suggests some areas of possible future research extending number of students and test/tool construction on friendship. This study has an important implication for school counsellors and educators.

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