

# Friendship Concepts among Female Medical Students: A Qualitative Approach

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## ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study which explained the concepts about reasoning of friendship among girls which they used to prefer while making somebody their companion. Aimed at this purpose, 8 medical students were conveniently sampled from a private medical college for a focus group discussion. Initially, a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of fifteen open-ended questions was designed. During a two-hour discussion, similarities and differences in opinion were noted down for further content analysis in order to generate themes and subthemes out of them. 5 main themes elicited were, definition of friendship; qualities to be considered for making a friend; importance of a good friend in life; more loyal friend, a girl/boy; and ingredients of a genuine friendship. It was concluded that a genuine friendship depends on several psychological, social and emotional aspects of human behavior and gets strengthened by mutual understanding, support, and cooperation. This bonding as a friend plays the role of a therapist by sharing and managing stress as well as a motivator by boosting up their morale to achieve the set goals in life and as an entertainer by making them feel happy and satisfied.

**Keywords:** friendship, focus group, content analyses.

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## INTRODUCTION

As man is known as a social animal and the foremost basic instinct of a human being is to socialize. The most needed ingredient to socialize is to create relationships that would last. (Maslow, 1943). Friends act as stress relievers and add a bit of excitement in life. When the person is passing through tough times, it is the good friends and supporters that make all the difference (Copeland, 2002).

A friend is perceived to be a person who loves irrespective of whether he is being loved in return or not. Friendship can exist irrespective of race, age, sex, and religion. The basis of friendship thus is freedom, equality, choice and volition. The concept of friendship needs to be further elaborated because our friends do mirror a rejected or acknowledged trait in us. They happen to be our friends because of sharing the same vibes and the similar experiences (Chandran, 1999).

Friendship exists for the sake of friendship when virtue is the reason; where both develop a liking for one another and cherish each other mutually for some creditable values in the other's personality. It is somewhat platonic in concept because one may not be intelligent or good looking or may even not be capable of giving the pleasure as expected. Another kind of friendship is formed for the utilitarian value of it. It remains until the conditions are right and once the goals are achieved the friendship eventually dies. A third kind of Friendship is formed essentially on

account of the pleasure that the relationship is capable of giving. Virtue-based relationships are formed mostly during childhood and adolescence, when we live in a state of blissful ignorance. But once one tastes the bitter realities of life and enters the professional life, the circumstance demands one to have friendships on the basis of usefulness/pleasure. Virtue-based friendship is presumed to last till eternity! Though it is disheartening to realize that most of the virtue-based relationships are formed during the early years of our lives where the mind is yet immature and the heart accepts all without any prejudice and external influences. Though less in number, these relationships are formed, surprisingly, in a short span and lasts a considerable amount of time (Chandran, 1999).

Girls very much seek out interactions and friendships that work to appease their need for social interaction and acceptance. Girls rely on their friends for support, listening and providing advice and guidance much more than boys of the same age group. The importance of friendship as a source of security and to keep up one's self-esteem is surely a principle source of the impulse to romanticize relationships (Rawlins, 1992).

In life all good things come to an end. Similarly friendships can also break up naturally. There may be number of different reasons for this to happen. Sometimes friends simply outgrow one another. At times friends tend to develop different outlook towards different spheres of life whereby there may be no further basis for the continuation of the friendship. Rivalries, peer-pressure, irrational behavior serve as the primary motives for tearing apart the

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relationships. When such relationships unravel, as they often do, the parties usually move on to more profitable relationships. However they do pass through a variable period of adjustment, grief or mourning (Lombardo, 2006).

The terms *friend* and *friendship* mean different things to different people and different things to the same people at different times. To justify the behavior people find it necessary to use distinctions such as true friends, casual friends, best friends, social friends, good friends, work friends, and/or just friendly acquaintances. In spite of friendship's vague and seemingly indefinable quality, friendships contributes immensely both to physical and psychological development of any individual (Fischer & Oliner, 1983).

Prior to the late 1960s, social and behavioral scientists devoted little attention to friendship. Since then, however, friendship has become one of the more favored topics among social scholars. The study of friendship is interdisciplinary in nature, concerning researchers from various sub-fields within psychology as well as anthropology, sociology, communications, family studies, social work, and psychiatry (Parker & Asher, 1993).

Friendship is a relationship of mutual feelings between two or more people. Friendship is a stronger form of interpersonal bond rather than a simple association. Good friends let you see light where previously you see none relieve stress, prevent loneliness and isolation as well. But close friendships don't just happen. Many of us struggle to meet new people and develop quality connections. Whatever your age or circumstances, though, it's never too late to make new friends, reconnect with old ones, and brighten up the only life that we have (Pahl, 2000).

The definition of a friend has gone through tremendous changes in today's technologically connected world. In the context of social media, the term "friend" is often used to describe *contacts* rather than *relationships*. Nowadays making friends is not an issue, maintaining the relationships is the difficult unmet task. This is because true friendship cannot survive without these three aspects: Love, Respect and Honesty. If any of these aspects are lacking in the friendship, it will slowly disintegrate. Therefore, to maintain true friendship, you need to have the whole package, just not a part of it (Blum, 1980).

Strong social ties are long considered to be the key to happiness. Studies show that if you have five or more close friends with whom to discuss an important matter, you are far more likely to describe yourself as "very happy". Strong relationships don't just make you happier but also lengthen life, boost

immunity, and significantly decrease the chances of developing depression (Selman, 1980).

Love is naturally a part of any relationship. The formation of a friendship is the start of a new no ceremonial relationship. Once formed, friendships are largely free of clear social norms or expectations that dictate what, when, where and how to stay together. Generally friendships do end abruptly at times due to obvious breaches of good will such as dishonesty or betrayal (Pahl, 2000).

Finding a good friend may as well be one of the most difficult tasks in life. The dictionary's definition of a good friend is a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard. Being kind, trustworthy, loyal and dependable are the traits that should be sought when finding friends (Bukowski & Sippola, 1996).

## METHODOLOGY

Sample of this study consisted of 8 female medical students; age ranged 20-25 years old, taken from a private medical college of Lahore. The sample was selected through convenient sampling technique. The method adopted for data collection was "focus group". Initially, a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of fifteen open-ended questions was designed. On the basis of the similarities in the nature of the questions, certain questions were removed from the questionnaire and then the questionnaire was narrowed down to five questions. After the final setting for data collection, selected participants were informally invited for focus group discussion. They were informed about the time, venue, date and purpose of the study. Focus group discussion lasted for about two hours. Proper instructions were given to the participants regarding focus group, prior to the discussion. The responses of all the participants were recorded. The similarities and differences in their opinion were highlighted and shared with the participants, at the end of the discussion.

## RESULTS

Data collected through focus group discussion was then analyzed by using "content analysis" technique. Data was first summarized and then arranged in a logical order. Main themes and sub-themes were generated and the data was divided into different categories based on similarities and differences in the responses of the participants. Codes were assigned to the categories and the responses in each category were counted and presented into tabular form.

Table 1: Content analyses

Categories	Words and Phrases Used by the Participants
<i>Definition of friendship</i>	
Trustworthy relationship	Based on trust; positive relationship; honorable relationship; reliable companion
Loyalty	Faithfulness; regard; devotion; strong bonding
Mutual understanding	Commitment; good rapport; mutual affiliation; stable relationship
<i>Qualities that should be considered while making friends</i>	
Not judgmental	Doesn't become overcritical; undemanding; not rejective; undiscriminating
Good listener	Patient; humble; understanding; listens to your problem
Forgiving	Charitable; accepts apologies; ignores your shortcomings; soft-hearted
Personal advisor	Helps you in need; gives wise suggestions; be with you at every step; boosts your sense of self-worth
<i>Importance of a good / best friend in life</i>	
Free therapist	Reduces your stress and depression; helps you in blue days; lessens your worries; makes you feel light
Motivators	Makes you enthusiastic to achieve your goals; positive guiding force; helps you move ahead in life
Entertainers	Makes you feel happy; helps you make good memories to cherish; relaxes you; boosts up your mood
<i>More loyal friend – Girl or Boy &amp; Why</i>	
<i>Girls</i>	
More sharing	Shares most of their problem, views and thoughts with each other; Shares feelings and emotions easily with each other
More secretive	Can keep secrets to herself; doesn't usually disclose information; can hide things better than boys
More understanding	Can better understand a problem; more considerate; comprehend easily; sympathetic
<i>Boys</i>	
Good listeners	More patient than girls; listens to you attentively; open-hearted
More co-operative	Supports you through tough times; more compassionate; more lenient; thoughtful
Less jealous	Expressive; less selfish; un-doubtful; doesn't poke nose into others' affairs
<i>Ingredients of a genuine friendship</i>	
Trust and loyalty	Trustworthy relationship; loyal to you; can rely on them blindly; can ask for favors
Supportive	Makes you feel better after spending time with them; helps you to cope up with problems,
Good understanding	Accepts you for who you; feels comfortable sharing things about themselves with you
Good companionship	Shows a genuine interest in what's going on in your life; tells you how to think, feel and react
Strong bonding	Pays attention to you and your activities; shows interest in your problems; tries to figure out difficult situations; gives strength to your relationship.

Table 2: Definition of Friendship (N=8)

Categories	F
Trustworthy relationship	4
Loyalty	3
Mutual understanding	1

Table 2 indicates that four out of eight participants reported friendship as a trustworthy relationship. Three of them reported that friendship is mainly based on loyalty whereas only one participant out of a total of eight participants reported that friendship depends greatly on mutual understanding between two persons.

Table 3 indicates that four participants out of eight reported that friends need to be non-judgmental. Two participants reported that a good friend is always forgiving. One participant reported that a good friend needs to be a good listener whereas the remaining one reported that a good friend should also be a personal advisor who could advise you wisely at every step.

Table 4 indicates that three out of a total of eight participants reported that a good friend is a free therapist who reduces your stress and depression. Three participants reported that they consider a good / best friends motivator while only two participants consider a good friend an entertainer in their lives.

Table 5 indicates that there is an equal frequency of participants who reported regarding loyalty of friendship among girls vs. boys. Four

participants reported girls as more loyal friends whereas the other four participants reported in the favor of boys. Two out of four participants who reported in the favor of girls were of the view that they consider girls more loyal as friends because they have a higher sharing power than boys. One participant reported girls as more secretive whereas one reported girls more loyal friends because they are more understanding.

Table 3: Qualities that should be considered while making friends

Categories	F
Non-judgmental	4
Good listener	1
Forgiving	2
Personal advisor	1

Table 4: Importance of a good / best friend in life (n=8)

Categories	F
Free therapist	3
Motivators	3
Entertainers	2

Table 5: More loyal friend – Girl or Boy (n=8)

Categories	F
<i>Girls</i>	
More sharing	2
More secretive	1
More understanding	1
<i>Boys</i>	
Good listeners	1
More co-operative	2
Less jealous	1

Table 6: Ingredients of a genuine friendship (n=8)

Categories	F
Trust and loyalty	3
Supportive	1
Good understanding	1
Good companionship	1
Strong bonding	2

Table 6 indicates that three participants out of eight reported that the main ingredients of a genuine friendship are trust and loyalty. Two participants reported that strong bonding among friends is most important for a true friendship. Out of the remaining three participants, one reported that friends need to be supportive in order to be true friends. One reported that a good understanding is the key to genuine friendship whereas one participant was of the view that a good companionship is the true secret of a long-lasting and genuine friendship.

**DISCUSSION**

All our participants believed that a high-quality friendship is characterized by high levels of pro-social behavior, intimacy, and other positive features as well as low levels of conflicts, rivalry, and other negative features. The participants agreed that friendship has direct effect on social development including self-esteem and social adjustment. They were of the opinion that their friends make them feel comfortable with them, so they don't need to act like something they are not.

According to the results of our study, our participants have described friendship as a trustworthy relationship based on loyalty and understanding. The participants of our study think that the basic qualities that should be present in friends include a non-judgmental attitude, good listening skills, forgiving behavior and should also be a good personal advisor. According to the participants of our study, a best friend is one of the most important persons in one's life.

In opinion of the participants, the main ingredients of a genuine friendship are trust, loyalty, supportive behavior, good understanding, good companionship and a strong bonding between two persons. According to Levine (2000), people who have true and longstanding friendships are flexible and forgiving. They realize that no person or relationship is perfect. Smart, Davies, Heaphy and Mason (2012) have found that friendship is tied into the process of self-identification and so staying true to friends, even when the relationships become uneven or tiresome, can be a sign of ethical standing.

Crépel (2014) has discussed in his article that friends share a common identity which occupies a larger or smaller part of their personal identity, depending on the depth of their relationship. Yet, friendship does not merely consist in the shaping of

personality. The other consequence of this individuation is that friendship is based on a metaphysical desire which cannot be fulfilled: I will never be able to feel exactly what my friend feels, even if I rationally come close to it by sharing his life

**CONCLUSION**

We concluded that a genuine friendship depends on several psychological, social and emotional aspects of human behavior such as trust, loyalty, sharing and caring for each other. For some individuals, girls are more loyal friends as compared to boys because they are better at keeping secrets, share more than boys and are more understanding whereas for others, boys are more loyal friends as they are non-judgmental, more cooperative than girls and are less jealous by nature.

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