# FRIENDSHIPS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

## Abstract

This paper explores a qualitative study which concentrates on friendships among undergraduate students from Liverpool John Moores University. The study has been conducted from two interviews which focused on friendship. The interviewees in these interviews have been referred to as Shazia and Louise. Both of them talk about the topic of friendship at length. The study was conducted through initial coding and finally developing themes which elaborated more on the topic. The main themes discussed are: companionship, comfort, propinquity, similarity, self-disclosure and reciprocity. Other themes have not been discussed due to lack of weight on the matter. The interviewees show how these factors have affected their friendships. The study focuses on how people become friends, how they stay friends, factors that help them keep friendships and reasons why friendships come to an end. There was also research on previous data and it supported the findings of this study.

## Introduction

### Background and Rationale

This qualitative study is aimed at discussing in details themes in young people’s friendships. A friendship is a relationship involving committed people who share affection, awareness and ideas (Foster, 2005). These relationships usually take long with the involved parties caring for one another. However there is no main criterion that makes people friends. (Allan, 1996). Some particular features characterize friendship and they include: dyadic relationship meaning the relationship is of two individuals who know each other; it involves reciprocated effort, is also voluntary, egalitarian and must have companionship. It also occurs in the different stages of growth and development with adolescence being the most critical stage. Research has proven some factors that influence friendships among people but this study shows in details how these factors affect friendships in adolescents and youths.

### Research Questions

The study is focused on answering these questions: How are friendships formed? What factors affect or contribute to friendships, what factors end friendships and what are the real world situations in friendships of a university student?

## Methodology

### Participants

The study was performed on two girls, Shazia and Louise who are undergraduate students at Liverpool John Moores University.

### Data Collection

This interview was made available at a Psychology class to make students understand friendships at length therefore the data was to be used for teaching. The questions were open ended to allow personalized answers. The interview transcripts were then used to generate codes the later themes.

### Analytical Approach and Procedures

The interview was undertaken through a semi-structured interview which was open-ended and the interviewers were a research assistant and a tutor at the university. A thematic approach was used since data was coded and was later used to develop theme from the interviewees’ life experiences. I understood the interviews well then generated code. I then looked for codes that were similar in both interviews and used them as themes for my study. Many codes were found but only four were used for the purpose of the study. Shazia also bonded better with her Asian friends. Louise however finds it easier to make friends with different people.

### Ethics

The interviewees were made aware of the fact that this data was to be used for teaching and they were allowed to edit the interview transcript before it was made available online. In some instances the interviewees were reluctant to answer some questions.

### Reflexivity

Coding was not easy before I understood the two interviews. I also wondered how these two interviews could give conclusive information about friendships among university students. I also read, coded and themed prior to the report because I wanted an in-depth study of the same without relying on past research. These themes however correlated with the ones from previous researches.

## Findings

From the interview I generated many codes and later themes which include companionship, comfort, commonality, propinquity, similarity, support, self-disclosure and reciprocity. I then realized that some of these themes were not very important on their own and they could be merged with other themes to produce themes with more weight from the matter.

### Propinquity

This is accidental proximity or being near someone coincidentally. Generally getting more exposed to people gives leads to higher chances of friendships developing. Physical proximity encourages people to interact with one another. This encourages friendships. According to psychologists, close distance between people increases their chances of liking one another (Selterman, 2011). People are likely to like each other due to repeated exposure a mere effect of exposure. (Zajonc, 1968).

Both Shazia and Louise developed new friendships because they studied in the same university and lived in the same halls of residence. Shazia also became friends her German friend with because they live in the same town, Milton Keynes. When both of them joined college they made friends easily at their halls of residence.

### Companionship

This is that state in friendship whereby there exists closeness, true fellowship and familiarity among friends. From Shazia’s answers she spends a lot of time with her university friends and she acknowledges Eva as her longest friend. They do things and spend most of time together. Louise also spent a lot of time with her friends. She was even going to Ireland to be with her friend.

It is evident that these groups of friends like doing things together and they do not mind staying together. Shazia even spent fresher’s week with her made new friends when they joined the university.

### Comfort

Good friends provide comfort and joy and keep us from feeling lonely. In Shazia’s interview both Comfort and comfortable have been used very many times. Both girls are comfortable in friendships in which they are accepted for who they are:

Shazia is definitely sure comfort matters in her friendships. The same applies for Louise because she feels more comfortable with the people in her hall of residence.

### Similarity

Definitely we always end up liking people with whom we share values and beliefs. Similarity is mandatory for people to become friends. Individuals’ preference for people of same personality to them is called interpersonal attraction (Parker & Seal , 1996). For Shazia and Eva they spoke English, shared similar interests and lived close to each other. They mostly did things with each other when they had stayed apart it was easy to begin from where they left. The same applies to Louise, both her and her closest friend smoke and with others they all like the fake and tan of one other:

Spiritual, physical, personality and emotional factors does not limit similarities rather this concept base is ideally on the fact, understanding each other, not lacking something in common and to talk about. (Parker & Seal , 1996). With different interests, they number of activities and the amount of time spent together reduces. (Lickerman, 2013).

### Self-disclosure

Friend open up to each other on secretes among other things to symbolise trust. Self-disclosure is therefore the act of sharing details with others. . It leads to deeper relationships an easier coordination of activities because you know abilities and preferences of the other person. Shazia says when she called her friend to tell her about something that had upset her both of them cried and her felt good. She did not feel judged by her. Shazia prefers having few friends she knows very well than having many she knows nothing about. Louise says when sad and Anna is not around she goes to speak to Philip and they are very close. Both girls know a lot about their friends and their friends know them too. Self-disclosure enables us to know what our friends would do in certain situations.

When friends open up to each other, there is the norm of reciprocity. Eva confides in Shazia, who is older, about things that happen to her. It therefore helps us learn how our friends feel and what they think (Wicker, Thoms, & McGrath, 2005).

### Support

Being supported by our friends makes us feel secure and protected. Eva supported Shazia by teaching her German. Each friend was taken under the others wings which show how much they were willing to support each other. When Shazia is worried that they would grow apart Eva offers her support by telling her that would not happen. Nobody will therefore choose to be without friends even if the person possessed all good things (Doyle & Smith, 2002). Louise also says as friends they are always there for one another. Not only friendship per se that, but also rather trust, feelings of self-esteem, security, and feelings of being loved (Pahl, 2000)

## Discussion

With the central themes of friendship from previous research being support, companionship, self -disclosure and similarity, these themes continually manifest in both Shazia and Louis friendships with more themes manifesting themselves. These are comfort and propinquity. Both Shazia and Louise become friends with the people they stay within the halls of residence. Also the further away people stay the more they drift apart and their friendships change. Shazia mentioned in the interview that she was worried they would grow apart.

Shazia and Louise talk about the activities they did with their friends. This elaborates more on companionship. Both groups of friends would spend time together watching movies, talking or even going out. There are different stages of friendship and companionship is an important factor. Eva and Shazia became friends when they were young and they clearly needed the company of the other person. This provides evidence that at each stage in life companionship remains constant.

With companionship, both Eva and their friends took part in similar activities. They got comfortable with each other and even ended up supporting each other in all situations. Shazia advised Eva and Eva in turn helped her with German. Cicero is therefore right for talking about genuine friendship and benefits occurring naturally even when we do not expect them to. According to Aristotle genuine friendship between people who want the good in each other is genuine.

The themes in Shazia’s friendship are similar to those at Louise’s friendships and they correlate to studies from previous researches. Also the two are worried that later they would grow apart and people would change. Their friendships have been affected by their relationships with their boyfriends and even marriage. Also going to different colleges has made some friendships change. From the interview there are sections where the interviewees are reluctant to answer questions or do not know how to answer them. Many interviews would have provided more information.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Memo

The interview was conducted through semi structured interview questions and the interview was face-to-face. The main reason for the study was to develop themes from interviews about friendships among two university students, Shazia and Louise.

After reading the interview I extracted codes from which I developed themes. This study was mainly meant to show how friendships develop, factors that influence these friends and even how these friendships would end. I also compared data from Shazia’s interview with the ones from the interview with Louise and came up with the themes for this stud. I have included a table to show how coding was done to develop themes.

### Appendix 2: Theme

Table 1 Emergent themes and their subsequent codes based on the analysis of response

| Theme and codes | Examples from interview responses |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Propinquity   1a)Same Town  1b) Same halls of residence | Yeah she lives eh in the same town as me, Milton Keynes(Shazia 13)  Well we live in ((HALLS OF RESIDENCE NAME), ( Louise 26) |
| 1. Companionship   2a) Activities together  2b) spending time together | where we see each other every day, we do stuff together every day, so we’re still very close,( Louise 122)  just any little thing, we just like sit there for hours just talking and doing nothing, (Shazia 50) |
| 1. Comfort   3a) Comfort in friendship  3b) Sign of true friendship | More confident with the people I live with( Louise 251)  so to you that’s an important sign of, of friendships that ability to feel comfortable?( Shazia’s Interviewer 100) |
| 1. Similarity   4a) Same mind set  4b) Common interest | like if one of us woke up earlier than the others we’d wake each other up and have breakfast and then we’d revise. ( Louise 311)  I think it’s there’s that common interest of having a crazy first year (Shazia 192) |
| 1. Support   5a) what it means to support a friend  5b)Helping each other | , it can just be a conversation, or even just like a little bit of affection, and the look they give you that they know something, just saying like ‘It’s gunna be alright’ ( Louise 373)  and I’d help her out and she’d help me out( Shazia 19) |

**Appendix 3: Coded Transcript**

This appendix comprises the coded transcript of both interviews. The column on the right indicates the initial codes that mainly cut across both interviews.

| Talks about leaving in the same town  Illustrating how they spent time together.  They even stayed together when doing nothing  She says how at ease she feels with the friends she lives with.  Friends having activities they all like |
| --- |

Transcript Interviews with both Shazia and Louise

INT: Oh I see. OK so she moved over and then she’s living-

SHAZ: Yeah she lives eh in the same town as me, Milton Keynes. INT: Ehm so what kind of things do you do with your friend? What, what kinda things would you do with her?

SHAZ: Well we’ve tried making up diets, because for the past three years we’ve been saying that we’re gonna diet and then we’re gonna go on holiday and it’s gonna be really good, but that’s just not happened, and then we used to go swimming, but then we’d just end up going and getting like a kebab or something and then that would just wipe out any good that we do [laughs], and we just watch films and go out, normally just go for a drive or something and just do that really, just any little thing, we just like sit there for hours just talking and doing nothing, and yeah, once we just spent a whole hour just trying on different hats [laughs].Yeah bit sad but that’s what we do, yeah.

INT: Like how so?

LOU: Like I’m more, more confident with the people I live with, you know to be yourself like sometimes you hold back don’t you and things, I’m like that with the people on my course, like I have to get to know them before I let them get to know me, it’s quite strange, I don’t know why I do it, but [chuckles], it’s like if I go in to, you know when you start a new job [INT: yeah], and everyone’s already formed their friends that’s when I’m more like self-conscious and a bit, cause you’re going into a new group, whereas at uni it was quite easy because everyone was in the same position so you just be yourself, that’s all you can be.

INT: Yeah. And then so, so why, so what’s the difference then do you think between that initial group of friends and the group the two girls that you stayed more in contact with?

SHAZ: Em, I think it’s there’s that common interest of having a crazy first year [INT: yeah] and going wild and doing absolutely everything that you can do cause they’re, I suppose the girls on my floor they’re a lot more sensible and the fact that they, like they worked like when they, when it was time