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## Friendship During Adolescence: The Necessity for Qualitative Research of Close Relationships

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### Abstract

The article deals with theoretical and methodological problems related to research on friendship during adolescence. It presents methods used in psychological research for determining the specificity and essence of friendship and its applied measurement. A review of such completed studies includes not only the results and views showing the developmental advantages of friendship but also indicates the negative influence of a close friend (the so-called “friend effect”). The reason for such resultant ambiguity may be the lack of a uniform and comprehensive theory of friendship and/or the specificity of applied methods (questionnaires) and research procedures (quantitative research with the use of large samples). The proposed concept is one developed by Aelred of Rievaulx, which introduces different kinds of friendship and connect its essence to a transcendental dimension. The paper also includes the specificity of qualitative methods and some research results from their application. Pursuant to her own research experience, the author has formulated the rules of research on friendship with the use of qualitative methods.

**Keywords:** friendship, adolescence, qualitative methods

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Friendship is one of the intimate relationships recognised as a significant source of support throughout life. Adolescence – due to its pace and critical nature of changes – is the time when friendly relationships are of special importance. In practice, a close relationship with a peer lends support to each type of developmental task

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undertaken in this period. Pursuant to a psychologists' emphasis of its psychodynamic aspects, the role of friends in the process of separation from one's parents is necessary to achieve a mature identity (Lerner 1987, quoting: Coleman, 1997, p. 91). Friends also help to shape the ability to manage oneself and thus increase one's autonomy (Daddis, 2008). Discussions among groups of friends contribute to the definition of one's world view and values, thus giving direction to one's life; these discussions assist in planning educational and professional paths. Having a friend decreases anxiety in situations where a teenager is a novice, thus increasing self-confidence and general well-being (Rabagliatti & Ciaviano, 2008). Friend support is also important for learning new social roles connected with aspects of sexuality which are associated with the emergence of romantic relationships (Collins, Furman, Welsh, 2009). It may also improve one's self-esteem because it allows for experiencing respect and interest in one's own thoughts and experiences (Berndt, 1982, quoting: Birch, 2005). Apart from personality aspects, a friend's support is also connected with cognitive functioning; for example, it improves problem solving functions (Brendgen et al., 1999). High-quality friendship coexists with success at school and positive adaptations to the school environment (Berndt et al., 1995). Friendship is also helpful in shaping a wide spectrum of social competences (including the ability to provide support in close relationships) and emotional competences (Buhrmester, 1990; Gauze, Bukowski et al., 1996). One of the most appreciated functions of this relationship is the assistance in crisis situations arising from adverse circumstances in life. W. Hartup, one of the most renowned researchers of peer relationships in childhood and adolescence, believes that friendship in adolescence is one of the most important contexts of youth development (Hartup, 1993).

### **Methods of defining friendship in psychological research**

In psychological research, friendship is considered as one of the interpersonal relationships having the features which distinguish it from other types of relationships. A literature review provides numerous sets of such features. They concern the following aspects:

- 1) the content of friendship (precisely, the quality of interactions creating it);
- 2) the functions and effects of friendship (Hinde, 1996; Bukowski, Motzoi, Meyer, 2009).

The first type is proposed by for example Auhagen, who defines friendship as dyadic, that is, as a personal and informal social relationship where the partners find themselves mutually attracted. It is voluntary, long-lasting, and positive by nature and it does not involve open sexuality (quoting Hinde, 1996, p. 14). It is

necessary to note that the author dealt with friendship between adults. Stability as a condition of friendship between both children and teenagers does not have to be fulfilled. Thus, permanence is not the essence of friendship when viewed from the perspective of one's entire life. Undoubtedly, time is important. However, this aspect is better defined by J. Dunn, who researched friendship between children; he applied the term "being together" as one of the conditions of this relationship. Pursuant to a review of the literature on the subject, the author defines friendship as a type of reciprocal voluntary relationship which is characterised by the following:

- being together,
- intimacy (closeness),
- the partners like each other,
- loyalty, and
- mutual commitment. (Dunn, 2008)

This list characterises friendship in the period of adolescence and adulthood. On the other hand, Bukowski et al. characterise friendship between teenagers as having the following features:

- reciprocity,
- similarity of partners, and
- coordination and responsiveness of activities (Bukowski et al., op. cit. p. 217).

The authors quote research showing the specificity of friendship against the background of other peer relationships pursuant to the listed features.

An example of defining friendship through its performed functions and effects is the suggestion by Wright (1984), who considers friendship as a relationship facilitating the fulfilment or expression of individual expectations concerning:

- the confirmation of one's uniqueness and importance,
- growth (development), and
- avoidance of threats.

Another example of this type is the definition by Wiseman (1986), who refers to friendship as an unwritten contract for providing support and reciprocal kindness.

The multitude of definitions of friendship applied in psychology may be a sign of the uncertainty of the researchers themselves as to the essence of this relationship. Friendship is a multidimensional phenomenon which is difficult to define. On the other hand, almost everyone has their own experience of being a friend and we may assume that this relationship is intuitively understood. This uncertainty concerns not only psychologists. When examining the context in which the word "friendship" occurs, one may have well-grounded fear that its meaning is obscured. People say for example that *friendship* between spouses is one of the conditions of

marital stability or that parents desire to maintain *friendly* relations with their maturing children (Bee, 2004)—not to mention the colloquial *friendly* prices, companies, et cetera. It is worth noting that friendship is also placed in political discourse when we talk about *friendship* between nations or countries. In such a context, the meaning of *friendship* comes down to a generally desired goodness (value) with a rather indefinable character. In view of such difficulties, it is worth making reference to traditional concepts of friendships included in the European cultural heritage.

### **Concept of friendship pursuant to Aelred of Rievaulx**

The reflections of Aelred of Rievaulx are valuable because they are based on a most renowned ancient treatise by Cicero entitled “Laelius on Friendship” and are at the same time the result of studies on the legacy of Christian thinkers made by this Cistercian monk. Aelred of Rievaulx lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in England. He was educated in the Benedictine school in Durham and his further intellectual development took place at the court of King David I of Scotland. His career as courtier quickly progressed and he enjoyed the trust and recognition of the king. In 1133, during his diplomatic mission in England, he visited the Cistercian monastery in Rievaulx and stayed there. He was the abbot of the monastery for many years, which at that time had great influence on the church and political life in England and Scotland. He wrote numerous books, of which the most important are “*Speculum caritatis*” and “*On Spiritual Friendship*”.

The point of departure in Aelred’s reflections on friendship was in defining it as a virtue (in a theological sense). Although it is a way of showing love, it is not identical to love. Friendship is always reciprocal, faithful and safe, while love is a broader category: it may be unrequited, and may also be felt towards opponents and even enemies. The application of virtue expresses the belief in the spiritual nature of this relationship. Its “spiritual” meaning is not limited to the experience between persons but opens people to transcendental reality. Therefore, if it is real – it is eternal (because it is a type of transcendently understood love). This belief can be also found in writings by Cicero who – similarly to Aelred – claimed that real friendship is possible only between righteous people. Aelred’s view is that a person violating the moral rules betrays one’s own soul, wounds it and thus is not able to love other man’s soul. For both thinkers, the ability to be friends is connected with respect for the moral order, not necessarily for wisdom. Therefore – though they both agree that real friendship is rare – they do not claim that it is exclusive, in the sense that it is available only to wise men. It is rather characterised by mutual concern for what is righteous. Pursuant to Aelred, we more often experience other kinds of friendships where the intentions are not as pure,

and different benefits related to the supportive character of the relationship come to the fore. The author describes two kinds of such friendship:

- **worldly friendship** is a kind of mutual agreement concluded to obtain some advantages; it is temporal (it ends when the profits end) and therefore characterised with uncertainty and lack of security;
- **youth (or corporeal) friendship** is a kind of emotional covenant bordering on emotional dependency; it is carefree, irresponsible, and impermanent.

Both kinds of relationship bring about joy, mutual acceptance (also of negative acts and features) and support. They are reciprocal, they connect the people who like each other and are similar in the scope of predilections, interests and customs. They are devoid of spirituality (being focused on friendship itself) and therefore characterised by uncertainty and impermanence. In such relationships, one cannot be entirely open and honest, which is the condition for feeling unity and full community. It is difficult to expect the partners in this type of relationship to display the noble radicalism which is characteristic for friends who are ready to sacrifice their life for the other person (since we sacrifice our life for something we are uncertain of). Aelred also provides a number of valuable hints concerning the ways to select friends and test and cherish friendship.

### **Selected results of psychological research on friendship**

The psychological studies include the majority of characteristic features of friendship mentioned in Aelred's writings. However, they most often pass over what is the most important for Aelred: its spiritual dimension and the related reservation that real friendship is a rare phenomenon. When defining the essence of friendship disregards goodness (interpreted as value) and righteousness which is also called for by Cicero (Aelred understands it rather as sensitivity to transcendental values), we are left with a kind of close and loyal relationship which may be supportive or just quite the opposite – destructive to both partners or one of them. It happens not only when a friend turns out to be disloyal, by disclosing a secret or disregarding their partner. Research on the peer influence in adolescence reveals the occurrence of the so-called "effect of a friend". It turns out that friendship does not prevent or even buffer adolescent risk behaviour. On the contrary, it increases the probability of its occurrence (Jaccard et al., 2005; Urberg et al., 2003; Allen & Antonishak, 2008). The adverse influence of a close friend was shown in such behaviours as cigarette and marijuana smoking, alcohol drinking, risky sexual behaviour, juvenile delinquency, aggression, and depression symptoms. The buffering nature of friendship occurred only in cases of serious offences (crimes). It should be emphasised that the study covered close friendships (not just acquaintances) and

measured the quality of relationships and their reciprocity (which turned out to be of no importance, that is the negative influence occurred both in reciprocated and unrequited relationships (Urberg et al., op.cit.). The independence of group influence and a friend was also proved (Heilbron & Prinstein, 2008). Bearing in mind such results, friendship as an advantageous environment for individual development should be given careful consideration. This caution is expressed in Harup's view, cited earlier, who believes that close friendship is one of the most important yet not the most advantageous contexts of development. The duality of effects related to having a friend may result from the fact that adolescents use different concepts of friendship. Some suggestions concerning a different understanding (and also experience) of friendship by youth are given by Niebrzydowski. In his studies, he compared a youth's friendship (measured with Wright's ADF) with some disorders (behaviour disorders) with another youth not having them. The results showed that friendly relationships in both groups were perceived as long-lasting, involved and close, although the youth with disorders expected greater dependence and stronger support. Friendly relationships of the youth with disorders were much more often characterised as a relation between a dominating and a subdued person rather than as a symmetric relation, and the friendship was treated instrumentally. At the same time, those youth believed that their friendly relationships fulfil social and cultural standards and the expectations of close and significant persons (parents, brothers and sisters, and also teachers). Niebrzydowski suggests that youth with disorders idealise friendship (Niebrzydowski, 1992). It may also happen that those youth perceive it in a specific way, for example they believe that symmetry is not necessary. This view is not the only one. Friendship understood in this way is perfectly illustrated in Oscar Wilde's „The Devoted Friend”<sup>2</sup>.

The views of Aelred of Rievaulx on friendship adopt assumptions about transcendental reality and the objective way this transcendentalism manifests itself as existential values. A literature review on the psychological aspects of friendship shows that researchers most often do not refer to some specified theoretical concept of friendship or indicate the possibility of making different choices in this scope (Bukowski et al., op.cit.). Some associate the research on friendship with studies on moral development because they believe – as L.Kohlberg and H.S. Sullivan do – that both phenomena have much in common (Dunn, 2008; Bukowski et al., op.cit.). The similarity of friendship and moral development consists in the fact that both phenomena – friendship and moral rules – can be treated as goods of transcendental character. So the development of understanding of these two phenomena by an adolescent leads to his comprehension of their transcendental character.

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<sup>2</sup> I deliberately do not summarise it; it is so good and short that it is worth reading!

Apart from this the adoption of Aelred of Rievaulx's differentiation into types of friendly relationships described herein would be useful in analysing peer influence between friends in adolescence.

### How is friendship measured?

The fact that the researchers (considered as a whole) in studies on friendship understand it in different ways is probably connected with their different methods of measuring it. The majority of researchers believe that the object of their study should be friend dyads, that is, the actual relationship itself. In such a case, the results are compared with this person's friend's results (Allen et al., 2006; Allen & Antonishak, 2008; Bukowski et al., op.cit.; Daddis, 2008; Shulman & Knafo, 1997; Urberg et al., 2003). The selection of friend dyads is done in several ways:

- with the use of a sociometric questionnaire (nominal: one friend is selected) when the dyad includes persons who indicated each other,
- rating scales used to assess how much peers like one another: friends are those people who gave one another the biggest number of points (this method is used to determine the friendly relationship between more than two people), and
- with the use of two aforementioned methods at once, for example Jones selected dyads in such a way that one person nominated another one as their friend and both persons obtained high results in the rating scale (Jones, 1985; quoting: Bukowski et al., op.cit.).

The determination of dyads is not easy. Very often there occur unrequited or weakly reciprocated friendships, or groups of close friends. Sometimes a partner in a romantic relationship is called a friend (especially by girls). The correct reflection of dyads also depends on research conditions, since the studies are usually conducted with the use of large samples – they often take place in schools, that is places which do not facilitate reflection on who should be called a friend and why they should be called one. Such inaccuracies resulting from the possibility of nominating as friends those people who *de facto* are not friends (because they are, e.g., good acquaintances) can be avoided by the use of questionnaires measuring friendship quality. The most popular questionnaire is the one developed by Bukowski et al. (1994) for studying children, which was then adapted for studying youth. In the version for children it measures friendship quality in five dimensions: conflicts, intimacy, companionship, security and help. When adapting the questionnaire to studyteenagers, Rabaglietti et al. determined two dimensions as statistically significant: (1) support, trust and sharing, and (2) conflicts. The task of the tested person is to use the 4-point scale to rate their agreement with the statements of the following type:

- *My friend helps me when I am in trouble.*
- *We do funny things with my friend.*
- *I also think about my friend when they are not with me.*
- *We disagree about many issues with my friend.* etc.

The first dimension is connected with statements concerning spending time together, talking about their problems, helping each other, sharing joys, finding solutions to conflicts, and thinking about him/her when they are not present. The second dimension is connected with statements concerning frequency of conflicts, feelings of anger even after the end of an argument/fight, lack of agreement about many issues. (Rabaglietti et al., op.cit.). A similar yet less accurate method of verifying friendship quality has been adopted by other researchers, for example Jaccard et al. who determine the closeness in friendship by asking five questions: how much time the friends spent together and where they spent it during the previous week, what they did, whether they talked to each other, and whether they talked about their problems (Jaccard et al., op.cit.). It is easy to notice that such methods for determining relationship quality disregard the level of friendship as a transcendental value. They also do not assess the security and permanence of the relationship, which may be considered as a measure of its spiritual dimension; nor do they consider responsibility for each other as having value (also moral value) of the present and future life of a friend. Therefore, the applied method – due to the scope of questions included therein – sets the scope of the phenomenon which does not necessarily correspond to the scope perceived by the subjects.

Not all researchers on friendship include the determination of dyads in their procedures. If the subject matter of the study includes the youth's views on the perception of friendship and their possible correlations, only the questionnaire-based methods are applied, without a comparison of results between partners in the relationship. (Laursen et al., 2006; Lefkowitz, 2007; McElhaney et al. 2006; Niebrzydowski 1992; Yu Rueger et al.; 2008, La Greca & Mackey, 2007; Rabaglietti et al. 2008; Vernberg et al., 2006). In those studies, the study subjects are given the task of for example assessing the size of friend' support or the number of conversations held with a friend about some topic, which is then correlated with the perceived quality of friendship and other peer relationships.

### **Friendship between teenagers from the perspective of developmental psychology**

Regardless of whether or not Aelred's concept of friendship is convincing to researchers, the basic question is do teenagers experience it at such an elevated level. There is considerable evidence to suggest that adolescence creates particularly favourable conditions for experiencing it in such a way. When observing

how teenagers function, one may find evidence to support the fact that adolescents are able to create at least the likeness of true friendship (as interpreted by Aelred).

### *Cognitive abilities*

Teenage thinking achieves a formal level (Piaget, quoting Bee, op.cit.), which means that teenagers are able to use notions, think abstractly, and propose hypotheses on the basis of logically concluding from circumstances. Such network thinking allows for simultaneous consideration – in a systematic way – of different alternatives in the explanatory process. The hypotheses are verified through reasoning, without the necessity of their actually being tested. A teenager is able to create theoretical models expressed in the language of theory and to use them in forecasting. Within this scope of possessed mental tools, it is a completely mature way of thinking. The development of formal operations results in thoughtfulness, criticism, and the ability to formulate opinions by the adolescents. The imagination manifested in dreams and artistic works also develops. Teenagers write poems, diaries and short stories, play their own works in bands, and express themselves in art works. The social network websites (Youtube or Polish *wrzuta*) are crowded with manifestations of such artistic activities. Their sensitivity increases, attention becomes more focused and all types of memory function in a fully mature way.

### *Social development and personality development*

Adolescence is a time for deepening and broadening interpersonal relations. The social context of development expands and diversifies, and a teenager spends more time with peers than with parents. Apart from dyadic friendly relationships, elements of the social network include different types of groups (closer and more distant acquaintances, gangs of friends, quasi-subcultural groups<sup>3</sup>, sports teams, artistic teams and other groupings) and romantic relationships. There is a new phenomenon of virtual communities and acquaintances. Self-reliance increases; the same happens with their independence from parents who now monitor the peer relations of their children to a lesser degree, which means that those relations become more autonomous. They are also more intimate and open. The discussions with a friend and common experiences significantly contribute to the creation of a world view, plans for life and the concept of oneself. The teenager's autonomy also grows at this time. Observation of personal matters decided upon by a friend often encourages efforts to increase one's own independent decisions (Daddis,

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<sup>3</sup> It is not easy to find contemporary teenage subcultural groups like the former punks, hippies or metal music fans. Even skinheads form diversified and dispersed groups of chavs, and football fans are transformed into a network of associations managed by adults.

2008). Investments in friends' and acquaintances' support – characteristic for this developmental stage – is connected with greater trust in the opinions of peers, especially those who are in close relations. Contacts with parents, despite being more conflicting and distanced, do not weaken deep family ties based on affection. The majority of teenagers consider their parents as the ones to whom they are the most attached (Bee, op.cit., 373).

#### *World view and moral development*

The described developmental changes and their cultural and social context create the conditions for reflecting on the model of the world, its assessment and one's place in it. A teenager creates their own vision of the world and searches for meaning in their activities. Planning one's own future (the educational and professional path) is connected with the necessity of establishing one's goals for life. Their choice results from the hierarchy of values they adopt in this issue, which is typical of this age. Attention should also be drawn to youth's idealism (Szuman, quoting Kielar – Turska, 2000), which consists in an optimistic vision of the future connected with the belief in being able to realise one's own desires and dreams. Teenagers confidently project themselves into the future since they are convinced that everything is within their reach. On the other hand, understanding moral rules becomes increasingly mature and involves formal operations. Teenagers are able to create theoretical models of moral principles through which they can distinguish between the spirit and the letter of the law.

No selection of the above characteristics of adolescence would be complete without a comment concerning the diversified pace of changes typical of this age. While also bearing in mind the social and cultural differences, it is worth emphasising that the category of teenagers is not uniform. The majority of research procedures take into account cultural differences by selecting the study subjects with diversified cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Consequently we obtain general results concerning the group, which in fact does not exist. This comment also concerns studies of friendly relationships. One may believe that adolescents experience this relationship in different ways. Depending on the individual pace of development and the circumstances, friendship may be experienced in the following ways (pursuant to Aelred): youth, worldly and spiritual.

#### **Specificity of qualitative methods applied in psychology**

Qualitative methods applied idiographically focus on description and interpretation. This is what distinguishes from quantitative methods, which are applied nomothetically to describe and explain. Interpretation in the social sciences con-

centrates on discovering the sense (meaning) of behaviour of an individual or a group. An individual plan is characterised by taking a comprehensive and subjective stance on the object of such a position. The idiographic approach is associated with the humanities, which do not determine cause and effect relations – hence the establishment of laws and theses as in the natural sciences – but rather focus on understanding the phenomena (determining their meaning). It results from the specificity of the object of research, namely the personal nature of man. Man is considered an entity which cannot be reduced, is endowed with freedom and is intentional (pursuant to Husserl). Such an attitude may be found in the psychological works of M. Straś-Romanowska (2008), A. Gałdowa (2005), M. Opoczyńska (1999), and Z. Uchnast (2002). The most outstanding representative of this way of thinking in Polish psychiatry is A. Kępiński (1978), who emphasises the necessity of combining the medical and subjective perception of a man in treating him. The qualitative approach in psychology is used to describe the manner in which a man intentionally refers to themselves or to another element in their world (quoting Husserl: *Lebenswelt*). Such an experience includes biological, social, psychological and transcendental elements. When relating the aforementioned to the phenomenon of friendship, one may state that such studies – where friendly relationships are determined with the use of questionnaire-based methods or even through observations in friend dyads – do not give the possibility of discovering how friendship is experienced in this comprehensive and intentional manner. In other words, quantitative research strategies cannot capture the transcendental dimension of friendship, and thus cannot give its full picture.

### **Selected results of qualitative research on friendship**

Methods of gathering data which are typical of the qualitative approach include interviews with open questions and narrative interviews. The results, in the form of long accounts, are then analysed according to their topics (content) and/or to formal features of the expression: its structure and/or language. The accounts are coded and then interpreted by competent judges. Such generalised results require the analysis of numerous interviews, which is extremely laborious. An example of such research on friendship includes works by M. Azmitia et al. (2005). They obtained interviews concerning the philosophy of friendship from 196 teenagers (early, medium, and late adolescence), who were ethnically and socioeconomically diversified. After a series of quantitative studies, it was decided to apply the qualitative approach to determine what the philosophy of friendship is, whether it changes depending on age and sex, and whether and how it is connected with the current experience of friendship. Since the researchers

– following E. Erikson – placed friendship in the context of searching for one’s identity and obligations, they were interested in relations between a philosophy of friendship and self-esteem (as an indicator of identity development). Some results coincided with the results of quantitative research; for example loyalty and emotional support are perceived as key factors throughout adolescence. For older teenagers, an important topic to discuss with their friends includes values and a world view. On the other hand, applying a qualitative approach enabled researchers to determine individual changeability in the importance of topics within philosophy of friendship. It turned out that self-esteem does not influence philosophy of friendship; that is similar philosophies of friendship are adopted by people with both low and high self-esteem. The differences between people with low and high self-esteem occurred mainly when there were conflicts in a friendly relationship. Adolescents with high self-esteem work out the problem and solve it, while those with low self-esteem avoid talking about difficult subjects and their narrations include more episodes describing conflicts and difficulties. It was also possible to obtain a more detailed picture of differences between boys and girls. In early adolescence, already identified differences consisted in attaching more importance to the intimacy of a relationship by the girls and to skills/abilities by the boys, but such differences in a later period were not that significant. In late adolescence, boys concentrated on relationships as much as girls (searching for intimacy vs preserving its identity).

Qualitative studies not only give a more penetrating description of the phenomenon. Some interesting results concerning the negative influence of friends on cigarette smoking were obtained by M. Denscombe (quoting: J.J. Arnett, 2007). His conclusions based on focus group interviews of 126 teenagers (15–16 years old) are polemical in relation to the belief that low teenager autonomy increases peer pressure effectiveness (here: a friend) to smoke cigarettes. The study subjects firmly defended their independence and freedom in making the decision on smoking. They believed that emphasis on conformism destroys friendship. Those results show the contradiction between quantitative studies (“friend effect”) and qualitative studies (the subjective view of teenagers on the problem of peer influence). The studies by Denscombe may be the basis for concluding that assertiveness training for teenagers has no influence on the prevention of addiction for the simple reason that teenagers consider themselves free and autonomous, and thus assertive.

The contradiction discovered by Denscombe may indicate the existence of other differences between teenagers’ beliefs and the experience of social situations. One may think that the individual concept of friendship in adolescence, bearing in mind its developmental possibilities, does not differ from its mature form – even

the one including idealistic traits – in accordance with the concept formulated by Aelred of Rievaulx or Cicero. Pursuant to Rabaglietti, it probably depends on the type of education undergone by a teenager. On the other hand, experiencing the belief is something different. One can presume that lower secondary school pupils idealise real, friendly relationships. It is also evidenced by Denscombe: teenagers defended their friends against suspicion of having adverse influence on them while they themselves assumed the responsibility for risk behaviour. Those results may indicate a yearning of youth to experience deep and unique close relationships following the cultural message of indispensable value in friendship. On the other hand, they do not have enough skills, abilities and experience to realise those idealised views. Therefore, a friend for them is a person whom they like and who reciprocates their sympathy. The remaining conditions of a friendly relationship are perceived by them as a priori assumptions. It would be true provided that teenagers have knowledge concerning those conditions (trust, loyalty, caring for the well-being of the other person, and reciprocal commitment). The author's own studies, aimed at reconstructing the manner of understanding friendship by adolescents, were devoted to this issue. The results show that the teenagers do have knowledge about the essence of a mature, friendly relationship. However, such conditions as loyalty and reciprocal commitment occurred least frequently, while the most often occurring were intimacy and support. Occasionally, there were such epithets as the "brotherhood of souls" to indicate the spiritual nature of the relationship; however, the procedure did not seem to develop such issues and therefore it was difficult to assess the exact meaning of such epithets (Žurko, 2010). Research on "friend effect" evidences that negative influences increase as friendship progresses. It is curious because knowledge about the essence of friendship increases with age. It may happen that this knowledge is not applied to relationships existentially. Some light on this issue is shed by the results concerning the relation between behavioural problems and the perception of a friend's support by girls and boys (Yu Rueger et al., op.cit.). The statistically significant and positive relation between behavioural problems and lower social competence and the perceived size of a friend's support among girls (such a relation did not occur among boys) is explained by the authors, who indicate that girls have a higher level of affiliation needs than do boys. Pursuant to Sullivan's opinion, friendship compensates for dysfunctional family life (quoting: Bukowski et al., 2009). However, since behavioural disorders coexist with a teenager's family dysfunction, such compensation may lead to cases of "difficult" girls. On the other hand, evidenced low social competence is the basis for assuming that those girls may have problems with recognising a real friend, and thus they search for support from improper people. Such an assumption may be verified by means of longitu-

dinal studies to evidence whether girls manifesting problematic behaviours and being in stable friendly relationships will either increase or decrease the number of alarming symptoms.

This problem can be also seen in another way: real friendship is experienced in adolescence but – pursuant to Cicero – it is as rare as in adulthood and occurs under the same conditions. The best way to answer this question is to apply qualitative methods which allow for determining individual differences in the friendship experience. It is probable that real friends are lost in statistical procedures which are focused on inter-group comparisons.

### **Research procedure: influence on the results**

A valuable feature of hermeneutically treated qualitative methods is to emphasise the quality of contact between researcher and a study subject. The ideal relation is the dialogue of two people who mutually make the effort to discover the transcendently understood truth. It sounds pompous, however, in the case of such personal, intimate and love-based relationships, but the strategy of dialogue seems the most appropriate. In Polish literature on the subject, the best example of a dialogue-based work, this time between a psychiatrist and an ill person and executed also in practice – is A. Kępiński's. It is worth noting that both Cicero and Aelred gave their reflections the form of a dialogue.

One's own experience in applying narrative methods to research on friendship allows this researcher to formulate several comments concerning the procedure:

- the study subjects should be selected deliberately; this means: it is necessary to apply the criteria pursuant to which it is possible to formulate the high/low quality of the relationship,
- both partners in a friendly relationship should participate in the study,
- both partners should have appropriate narrative competence,
- the research procedure should take into account the stage of establishing contact with a study subject,
- the best type of questions is the narrative one, this means: concerning events; for example: "Tell me how you met" or "Tell me about something that you both experienced" or "about the situation when your friend's help was necessary", etc. Narration about events is the best material for interpretation,
- the interviewer should not only have the appropriate training, but should also be experienced in handling individual sessions and have some formulated thoughts concerning friendship, and
- the interviewer should interfere as little as possible. It should result in providing the study subject to the conditions for free narration so that its struc-

ture arises from the narrator's intentions and not those of a researcher's (this is the requisite condition for allowing a researcher to analyse and interpret the structure of expression).

Apart from the narrative method, it is also possible to apply to the interview open questions (Stemplewska-Żakowicz, 2005). However, it is important to remember that when we prepare questions in advance for such an interview (in accordance with the adopted theory), the obtained material does not enable the interviewer to understand the relationship in the same way it was experienced by a study subject. It will so happen, since it is highly probable, that the questions will suggest what and how a study subject should say and react. In such a case, a questionnaire and quantitative studies would be more convenient. Finally, one can apply the combined technique: prepare narrative questions in advance according to assumed indicators, for example concerning different types of support, conflict management, reciprocity. Such a strategy would enable the narrator to place in their account those elements which have not been planned by the researcher in advance.

## **Conclusion**

The application of qualitative methods arising from the personalistic and existential approach is justified when we consider friendship not only as a kind of social relationship with some individual features but when we treat it as a value. Such a manner of understanding friendship is found in traditional writings on that topic, created in the times when no one even suspected that psychology would become a separate science. However, I do not think that Cicero's or Aelred's views, which strongly emphasise the relation between friendship and virtue (righteousness), are out of date. On the contrary, they are helpful in ordering knowledge concerning this phenomenon. These views differentiate between kinds of friendship and show the differences between friendship and its appearance. It may be that the majority of young people have delusions along this line, or it may be that they are simply developing. With time, partners in close relationships will have the possibility of discovering the real nature of the relationship between them and verify it in adulthood. However, it would be naive to believe that real and true friendships may happen only between adults. They also rarely pride themselves on real friendships. It seems that the risk of ending up with only utilitarian friendships is greater in adulthood than in adolescence. Bearing the aforementioned in mind, we can ask a number of questions to which it is difficult to find answers in contemporary psychological literature:

- If it is possible that stable and deep friendly relationships may be established in adolescence, then what are the circumstances that favour it?

- Which skills/abilities support the cherishing of such relationship?
- Should friendships in youth be a necessary stage for friendships lasting one's entire life, or do they completely expire after playing their role in the development of a teenager?
- What are the differences between the benefits arising from different kinds of friendly relationships?
- Is it possible to recognise real friendship in adolescence, and if yes – what are the criteria applied by youth, and what misleads them?

The answers to these and similar questions is possible, especially when we use qualitative methods based on deeper individual contact. Of course, if we can assume that we are dealing with people who are real friends.

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