# The Meaning of Friends for Javanese Adolescent
## A Preliminary Study in Indonesia

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*Abstract—* **This exploratory research done by Indigenous psychological approach aimed to understand the meaning of friend especially for Javanese adolescent in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Going through adolescent phase they have longer getting along with friends than with parents. Furthermore, friendship was part of the social relationship that could not be separated by cultural influence. The sample of 346 teenagers was gained by multistage cluster random sampling identified themselves as Javanese based on their parents' ethnicity. An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data with two questions i.e. "How do you describe a friend? And "Where do you make friend mostly?" Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Result analysis showed that boys and girls had the same point of view in describing friends, firstly from the function of friends leading the labeling of friends that categorized friends horizontally; secondly from the criteria of friend such as depth of emotional bonding leading to friends level that categorized friends vertically. But there was a difference in prioritizing friends in which girls needed friends as a best friend for sharing (emotional aspect) while boys needed friends as a good friend for playmate (physical aspect); and difference in prioritizing criteria of friends. Companionship is more needed than closeness for boys, but girls are to the contrary. Girls tend to need closeness first then companionship. However, in trustworthiness, both of them put it on the top priority. The existing label and level in friendship implied the existence of quality in friendship. From the media, although friendship through social media (online friendship) developed broadly, friend relation in the real world (offline friendship), especially at school, still become the main need of Javanese adolescent.**

*Keywords— meaning of friend; Javanese adolescent; psychological indigenous approach*

## I. INTRODUCTION (*HEADING 1*)

Friendship is an interpersonal relationship that is important to be developed. Having friend may lessen loneliness and the anxiety in facing new situation [1], may increase happiness, and psychology well-being [2][3][4][5][6], and support social-emotional development [7]. Students who have positive relationship with their friends was proven to get theiracademic tasks [8][9] and academic achievement better [10] [11][12][13].

But not all of students are able to have a positive experience in friendship. Often school friends become the source of conflict ended in intimidation or peer victimization [14][15][16][17][18][19]. Ironically, the victims choose to be silent or object when the doer is going to be reported because of their afraid of being threatened. Others feel worried when the doer is reported; they will not have friends anymore. Is the doer suitable to be called friends? If not so who is can be considered called a true friend? What is the real meaning of friends?

An indigenous psychological approach was used in this study and it was aimed to explore the concept of friends especially for Javanese adolescent in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Why this study took priority on Javanese adolescent and used indigenous psychological approach?

Friendship is a part of social relations which cannot be separated from cultural influence [20][21]. Javanese societyvalues harmony and respect as the main principles [22][23], including in Javanese family in Surakarta, Central Java [24][25].

Besides that when someone started the period of adolescence, the times spent with his/her friends is longer thanit is with the family [26] The relationship in this period is so dynamic [27], and adolescents have the biggest peer pressure [28]. While Selman [29], Yager [30], and Guroglu [31] underlined that empathy and care should be the main characteristics in adolescent in developing his/her social relationship. Tepa sarira as one of the Javanese ethics that can grow to care [32][33], and empathy [34].

Based on that background it could define a problem statement as follows (1) what the meaning of friends to Javanese adolescence? (2) where does Javanese adolescence make friends mostly?

## II. METHODS

### A. Participants

The study participants consisted of 346 middle school students ($\underline{M}$ 14.63, SD 1.66). There were 187 females, 159 males who live in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia and they identified themselves as Javanese based on their parents' ethnicity. The sample was gained by multistage cluster random

sampling [35]. Sampling stages were started from districts, schools, and class that was done in sequence randomly.
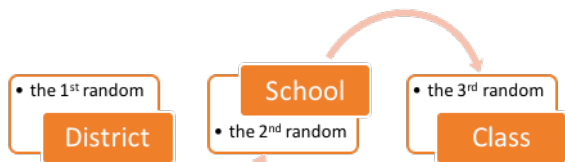
The following figure showed the stages well.



Figure 1. Stages of sampling technique

## B. Measures

The data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire with two questions as follows "How do you describe a friend?" and "Where do you make friends mostly?" Respondents were asked to describe the meaning of friends based on their experience, not their knowledge.

## C. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using an indigenous psychological approach of analyzing the content of the response. Almost all of respondents give multiple responses. The first statement that was described by respondents was mentioned about friend status then followed by a statement which explained the criteria of that. Qualitative data analysis was conducted following the steps as explained by Strauss [36], namely; (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding. In the analyzing of data, three graduate students were involved to perform categorization together to ascertain the inter-rater reliability of the category. After qualitative data was done in the form of categorized themes by coding, a further step of the data analysis was taken by using descriptive statistics by cross-tabulating to compare boys and girls responses.

## III. RESULTS

### A. How do teens describe their friends

Generally, respondents described the meaning of friends in two points of views. The first view was the description that represents states or function of friends. This description was initiated by a statement "someone who can become my……", for example, "someone who can become my close friend" or *kanca cedhak* in Javanese term, or "*kanca sing isoh dadi kanca apikku*", literally it can be translated as someone who can become my good friend. Table 1 showed that the frequency of the main themes based on friend's status.

Table 1. The frequency of the main themes based on friends status.

| Categorization | Boys | | Girls | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | N | % | n | % |
| Kanca apik (good friend) | 60 | 17.34 | 46 | 13.29 | 106 | 30.64 |
| Sahabat (best friend) | 26 | 7.51 | 50 | 14.45 | 76 | 21.97 |
| Kanca cedak/akrab (close friend) | 12 | 3.47 | 43 | 12.43 | 55 | 15.90 |
| Kanca biasa (casual friend) | 26 | 7.51 | 12 | 3.47 | 38 | 10.98 |
| Kanca dolan (playmate) | 24 | 6.94 | 8 | 2.31 | 32 | 9.25 |
| Kanca curhat (to study with) | 6 | 1.73 | 16 | 4.62 | 22 | 6.36 |
| Kanca sinau (for sharing) | 5 | 1.45 | 12 | 3.47 | 17 | 4.91 |
| Total | 159 | 45.95 | 187 | 54.05 | 346 | 100 |

The description in this point of view also was explained by the activities done together, for examples: "*kanca dolan*" or someone who plays together, "*kanca sinau*" or someone who company studies, or "*kanca runtang runtung*", literally it can be translated as "someone who always goes everywhere together", or someone who shares feeling", "….secrets", etc. It showed the depth of closeness among friends. Secondly was the one referred to criteria or characteristic of friends? For examples: ''someone who respects me for who I am', or' "someone who is reliable", "….honest", "….who kept my secret well", "……that won't telling others my secret". These responses referred to trustworthiness.

From so many various responses, they were categorized into eight main themes based on criteria of friends i.e. trust trustworthiness, closeness, companionship, support & caring, humble, respect, reciprocity, religiousness. Table 2 showed that the frequency of the main themes based on criteria of friends.

Table 2. The frequency of the main themes based on criteria of friends.

| Main themes of criteria | Boys | | Girls | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | N | % | n | % |
| Trustworthiness | 50 | 14.45 | 68 | 19.65 | 118 | 34.10 |
| Closeness | 24 | 6.94 | 62 | 17.92 | 86 | 24.86 |
| Companionship | 40 | 11.56 | 29 | 8.38 | 69 | 19.94 |
| Support & caring | 23 | 6.65 | 15 | 4.34 | 38 | 10.98 |
| Humble | 13 | 3.76 | 5 | 1.45 | 18 | 5.20 |
| Respect | 4 | 1.16 | 3 | 0.87 | 7 | 2.02 |
| Reciprocity | 2 | 0.58 | 4 | 1.16 | 6 | 1.73 |
| Religiusness | 3 | 0.87 | 1 | 0.29 | 4 | 1.16 |
| Total | 159 | 45.95 | 187 | 54.05 | 346 | 100 |

Finally, the main themes in both point of views lead to two category horizontally and vertically friendships. In the first category showed that there were three kinds of friends based on what activities they perform together that lead to labeling of friends i.e. *kanca dolan* (playmate), *kanca sinau* (friend to study with), and *kanca curhat* (friend for sharing). And the second one there were five types of friends based on the depth of their emotional bonding that leads to level of friends i.e. *kanca biasa* (casual friend) at the lowest level; *kanca cedak* (close friend), *kanca apik* (good friend), and *kanca akrab* (intimate friend) in the middle level. While on the top level is

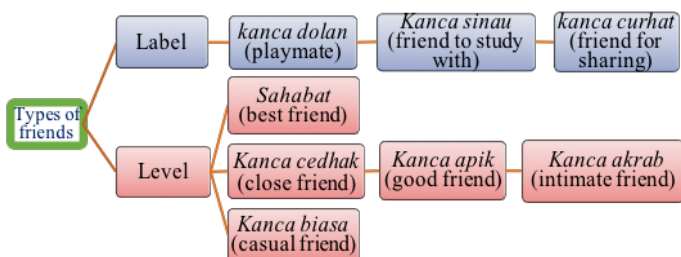best friend or sahabat. Figure 2 showed the end of recategorization.



Figure 2. Types of friends for Javanese adolescence

Observing the figure above, the close friend, good friend, and an intimate friend were put on the same level because the terms were described similarly.

### B. Gender and the meaning of friends

Girls and boys were not different in the meaning of friends mentioned. They described the meaning of their friends in the same way ($X^2$=2.818, p=0.421; p>.05) both tend to level and labeling friends. Although they were same in describing friends, there was a difference according to the priority of the type of friends ($X^2$ = 9.41; p=.02; p<.05). In the level of friends, boys tend to need friends as a good friend, and girls need friends as sahabat or best friends, not merely as the good friends or casual ones. From labeling or functional friendship, boys give priority to the existence of friends as *kanca dolan* or playmate, but girls need their friends more than that. Girls need friends as *kanca curhat* (friend for sharing) to fulfill their emotional needs. Because of that, it was not surprising if although they described criteria of friends similarly, there was a difference according to the priority of the criteria ($X^2$=26.581;p=0.001; p<0.05). Companionship is more needed than closeness for boys, but girls are to the contrary. Girls tend to need closeness first then companionship. But in trustworthiness, both of them put it on the top priority.

### C. Where do teens make friend mostly?

Although the use of social media is flourishing, in fact only a few Javanesse adolescents in Surakarta who use of that to make friends. Only four (1.16%) participants knew their friends for the first time through Facebook and one person (.29%) found a new friend as a playmate in the online game. But on the other side, undeniable if some of them may use social media such as Facebook to keep their relationship that they built starting from school.

Table 3. "Where do you make friend mostly?"

| Categorization | Boys | | Girls | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | n | % |
| • At school | 140 | 40.46 | 163 | 47.11 | 303 | 87.57 |
| • At home | 18 | 5.20 | 19 | 5.49 | 37 | 10.69 |
| • Soc-med/FB | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1.16 | 4 | 1.16 |
| • Game online | 1 | 0.29 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.29 |
| • Blank | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.29 | 1 | 0.29 |
| • Total | 159 | 45.95 | 187 | 54.05 | 346 | 100 |

Table 3 showed that both boys and girls saying the school is still becoming the main media to make friends. Friends at school can be gotten from the same as well as different levels, be higher or lower grades. Meanwhile, friends at home are those who live in the same neighborhood or the ones from school coming or visiting to play with or to do the task together.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The existence of friends labeling in Javanese adolescence point of view is in line with four basic principles of function friendship [20], namely friends as the source of fulfillment emotional needs, cognitive, social skills and prototype of further relations. Succeed in friendship at the high school might become the basic in the success of making a good relationship to the next level such as in higher education or in the job world. Fulfillment of those needs could be reached by having a positive relationship with peers, having good friends at school, and be actively involved in extracurricular activities [21]. In line with these findings, it was not surprising that Javanese adolescence said that school is the main media of making, having, and keeping friends.

On the other hand, the degree of friends as leveling friendship is consistent with the findings obtained by [22] [23][24][25]. According to Clark & Mills [26], friendship hierarchy appeared because of the difference in the communal strength. Referred to the Hierarchy of Communal Relationship [26] it was seen clearly that friendship has four levels i.e. acquaintance as the lowest communal strength, and then casual friend, increasing with a close friend, and best friend as highest communal strength. In accordance with those level, Van de Bunt et al [22] stated that the status of friends started from the lowest level i.e. somebody unknown then become friendly (this term equals with an acquaintance), after that become friend, increasing with a best friend. Meanwhile, in this my study showed that there were three levels in friendship i.e. *kanca biasa* or casual friend as the lowest level, then *kanca apik* (good friend), *kanca cedhak,* and *kanca akrab* as the middle level. The top-level was a best friend or sahabat. Even some teens called them as BFF (best friend forever). Those three levels of friends found in Javanese context were in line with the research findings by Antonucci and Oswald, Clark, & Kelly [23][24]. Their study just stated that there were three levels of friends, i.e. casual friend, close friend, and best friend. The acquaintance is not included.

Friendship level implied that there was quality in friendship that aroused because of the difference in frequency and intensity of companionship, closeness, caring, and trust on friends [24][25][26][27]. The higher states of friendship, the bigger the companionship, closeness, trust, and caring. In the finding of this study could be seen clearly that friends who have closeness and trustworthiness will increase its functions as friends who are not only as a playmate or friend to study with but also as a reliable friend for sharing anything.

Research result showed that both boys and girls told that school is still becoming the main media to get friends. These proved that friendship in adolescence still needs direct or face to face interaction.

This reality was not separated from situational factor in which Indonesian formal education put students during 8-10 hours at school for classroom learning activities, time break as well as extracurricular activities. The relatively long hours in school give wider opportunity to make and keep friends. This result is in line with the one found by Heiman, Thompson et al, Blum & Libbey, Libbey [28][29][21][30]. They said that a school is a place that has an important role in adolescence social life and gives wider chance for friendship forming.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The meaning of friends for Javanese adolescent could be explained in two points of view, i.e. describing friends from the friends status or what activities they perform together which then lead to level and labeling friends; and from the criteria of friends or the depth of their goodness and emotional bonding which then lead to level of friends. Although the criteria of friends related to the end categorization of the meaning of friend but how and how much each component of those criteria contributed is needed to be studied further.

The development of social media in the virtual world truly developed friendship online could be supported but in the Javanese context, this media could not substitute the true friendship in the real world especially the one made at school.

The existence of label and level in friendship implied that there is a quality in friendship. Based on the fact, further studies aimed at exploring the concepts and dimensions of friendship quality not only in Java but also in Indonesian context are needed to be done.

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