

Intergenerational Relationships in Young People's Friendship Narratives

Exploring Intergenerational Friendships

April 12, 2018

Trinity College Dublin

Riikka Korkiamäki, PhD

University Lecturer, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Tampere, Finland

Visiting Research Fellow, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity Collage Dublin

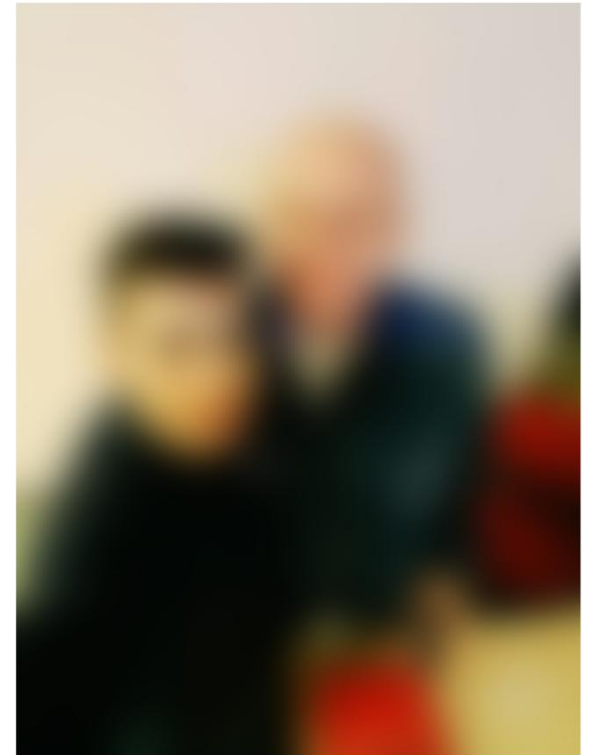
riikka.korkiamaki@uta.fi



Why friendships?

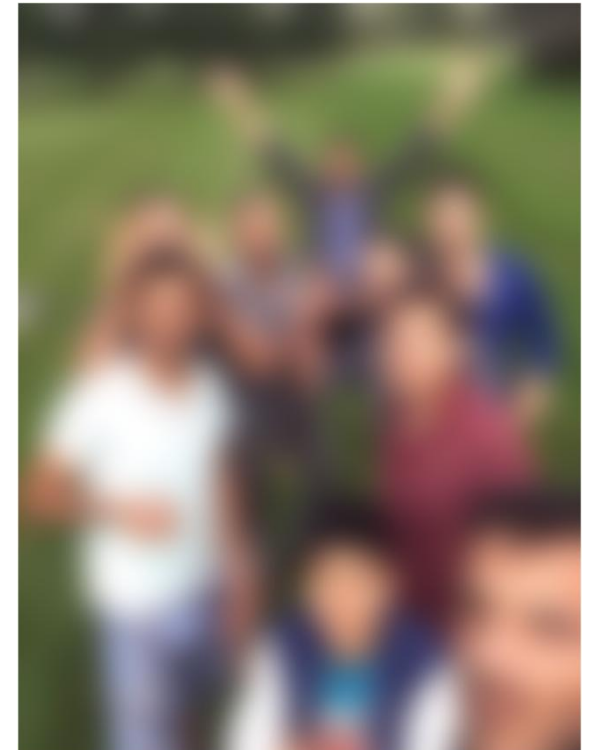
"Friend is important because, for instance, if you have a problem, if you are sad you can talk to them, if you are sick, friend comes to see you. To have a friend in life, I mean, your life is good, it's nice. ... a friend wants to like me, and I like him, and when I move out [of the Group Home], then my friend can stay as my friend, you understand? It is really important that you have a good friend, a best friend, then it is all good for you, it's all better."

(Behnam, 17)



Why friendships?

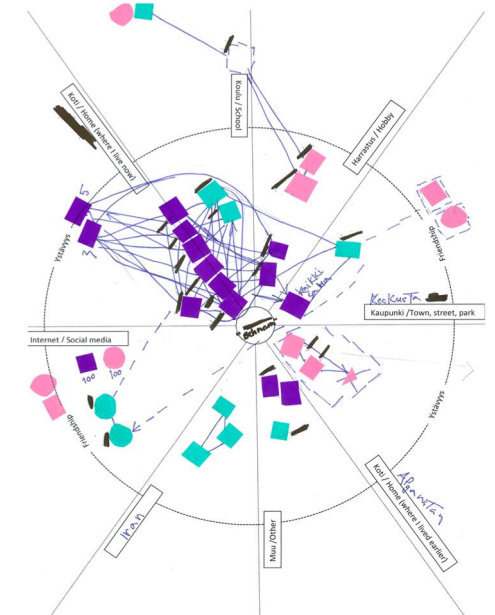
- 'Friendship is an integral part of an increasingly complex and demanding social world.' Ridge (2002)
 - source of subjective wellbeing
 - significant societal issue
- 'If we do not interest ourselves in children and young people's friendships, we are missing a huge part of what is important in their lives and focal to their wellbeing.' (Dunn 2004)
- Friendships and young people
 - friendships are perceived as the most important social relationships to/by young people
 - typically, young people's friendships networks are seen to constitute of same age-peers and apart from family ties
 - cf. intergenerational relationships usually seen as vertical and defined by generational order



The study

FRIENDSHIP AS POTENTIAL? Inclusionary friendship practices and managing teenagers' risk of marginalization

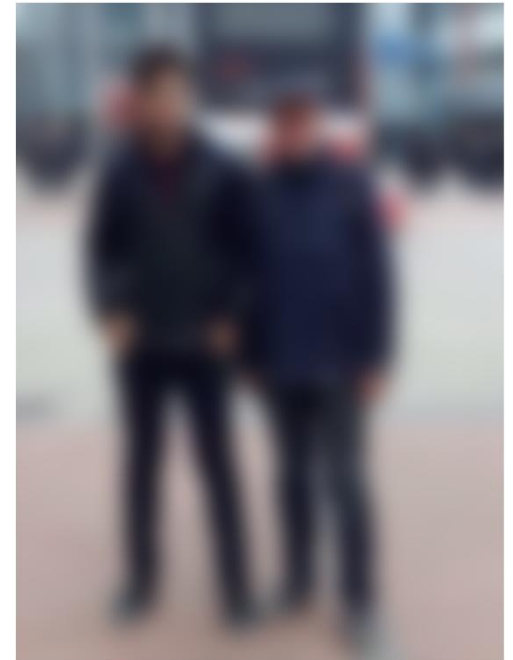
- Postdoctoral research project, Academy of Finland, 2016-2018
- Can friendship nurture inclusion beyond peer group, i.e. in relation to a broader community and/or society?
- Data
 - qualitative multi-method study with 31 young people (23 boys, 8 girls), aged 13-18
 - accompanied (11) and unaccompanied (15) asylum-seekers and refugees (5) from Afghanistan, Irak, Iran, Syria and Marocco
 - data produced in school through photo-elicitation, actor-centered network-maps, individual interviews, and informal observation
- Theoretical concepts
 - inclusion, belonging (e.g. May 2011, 2013)
 - agency (e.g. Evans 2007)
 - generational order (e.g. Alanen 2009)



Earlier study: Inclusion through peer and intergenerational friendships

Korkiamaki R, Kallio KP. *Experiencing and practising inclusion through friendships*. *Area* 2018;50:74–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12352>

- In young people’s narratives of their everyday life, ‘friends’ referred to people from many generational positions
 - family members – siblings, parents, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles – were sometimes introduced as friends rather than as relatives
 - friendships developed between youth and non-kin adults such as godparents, neighbours, hobby instructors and friends’ parents
- Friend-like relations with peers and adults generated inclusive environments that crossed the categorical borders of age groups, families, schools, neighbourhoods, towns, regions and nation-states
- “Friendly” youth–adult relationships lead to different kinds of spatial attachments and inclusionary relations compared with those created solely with peers. Whereas peer groups tend to connect people into socially and emotionally tight communities, the connections formed in intergenerational friendships are often more porous in nature, thus opening up opportunities to create alternative social relations and activities.



The current investigation

Question

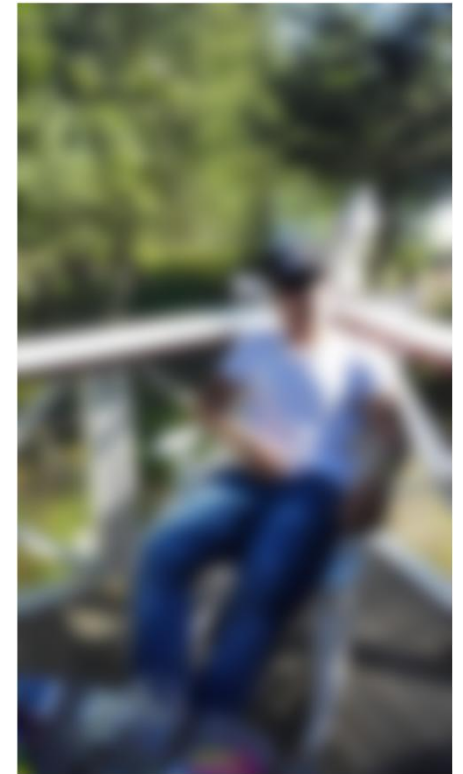
- young people's views, definitions and the meaning of friends and friendship
- looking at the narratives that the young people produced with respect to older/other generations as part of their friendship accounts
- how the young people, in the particular context of seeking asylum, talk about their relationships to friends other than same-age peers
 - who counts as a friend and why
 - what kind of meanings they give to friendship
 - how they position themselves in relation to the 'older' people that they categorize as friends

Findings

- being something special
- care, support
- shared interests
- companionship
- broadening spaces
- mutual learning

Conclusions

- defining friendship
 - mutuality and reciprocity
 - from age to agency
- belonging and inclusion



Overview

- 13/26 young people mention friends from other generational position
- family members classified as friends, e.g. mom, deceased dad, aunt/uncle
- non-kin adults classified as friends, e.g. godfather/godmother, friend's mom/dad/aunt/uncle, friend of parents, friend volunteer, teacher/ school assistant/principal, sports coach, friend from the journey
- small children classified as friends
- accompanied youths mention more intergenerational friendship ties than the unaccompanied minors

Mitra: My best friends at school, Pallab and Marat.

Riikka: Oh. Okay. How old is Pallab? He is quite little.

Mitra: Yes he is seven. Marat, I don't know, old, he's a little old, he is teacher, not teacher but... [assistant teacher]

Riikka: Yeah he's an adult.

Mitra: Yeah. Marat is best, then Pallab, my second best friend in school. Then Simon.

Vertical relationships > not friends

Riikka: Would you say Maija is your friend?

Amin: Maija [laughs] is my teacher. Not friend. She only helps me, I can't help her.

Behnam: She is not a friend but, care workers [in the Group Home] help me sometimes..

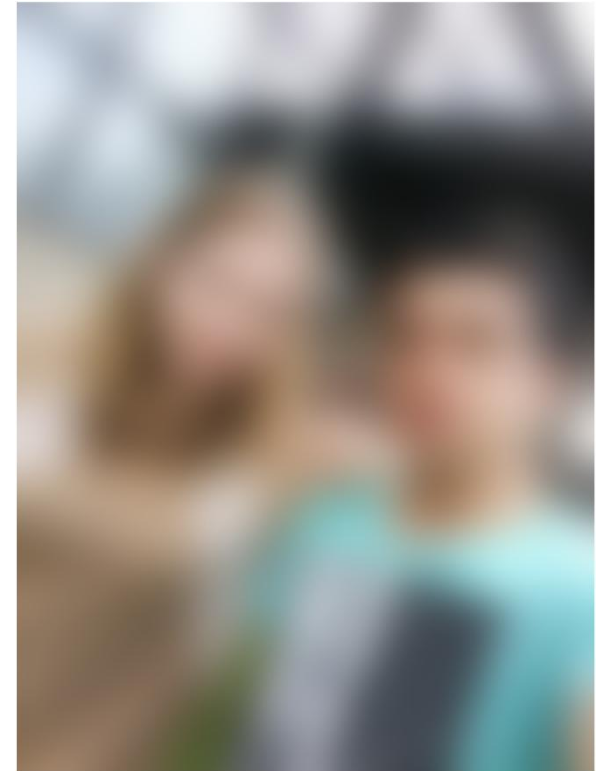
Riikka: But you don't want to put them in as your friends because..?

Behnam: No, because they are care workers, it's their job, I'm not their friend like that.

Being something special

"Yes he helps others in [the reception centre], but he is friend just with me. ... Maybe because he like me, because I talk to him and I tell him my home country and he is interest and he wants learn, and I can help him and tell him everything." (Amin, 17)

"...and she is a teacher, to all, to many children, but she is my friend. ... She likes me, too,..." (Hamasa, 15)

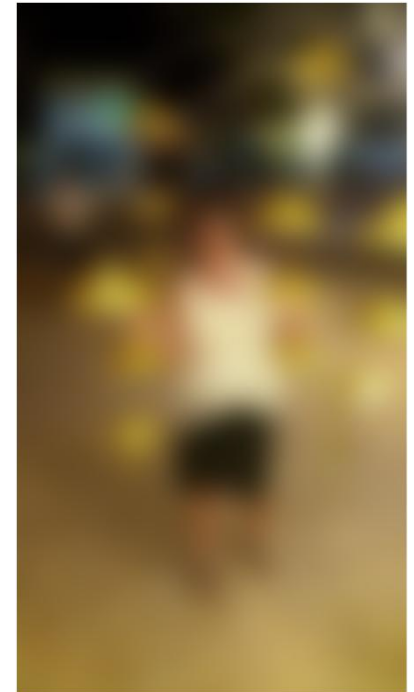


Care, support, shared interests

"...and we do things together, and we like same things. Yeah, she helps me always. Yeah, she visits me, and I go to her house, she has, two small girls and, I go to their house sometimes, and we play with them and we cook, and it is my Finnish friend, she always helps me, what ever I need, ... and I can help her too, I can play with girls and I can tell her what I know ... and I like her and she likes me, and then, I think maybe Finnish people are nice." (Hamasa, 15)

"This is my granny. Granny Ulla. What can I say, only she helps me. Then she goes shopping with me, I carry the stuff, and we go and eat hamburgers, me and her, she only helps. ... and she calls me and I call her, and she asks how is school and do I need something and did you sleep well. And sometimes I tell her but not always and then she is not angry." (Zemar, 17)

"This Finnish man, Martti. ... If I want ticket, to bus, get ticket to Helsinki, Turku, I call him. And, he takes me shopping if I need something. To Lidl and Prisma. Like this. Just I call Martti. ... he come by car and I can go with him because I don't have car ... just go to Prisma and Lidl, just with Martti, one time we go to beach. Martti took me, my brother, my uncle, I can say who come. ... I say him what I want and where want to go and sometimes he says. ... No no no no, yes together, we decide together." (Amin, 17)



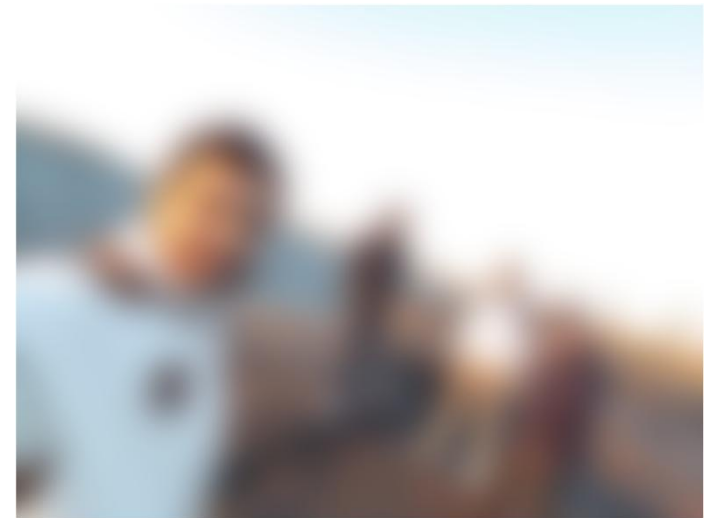
- **Companionship and broadening spaces**

"We go out and eat and all, we go to [the shopping centre], city centre, Lidl market ... We play and sometimes we go out and have picnic and take a bus and go somewhere and it's fun ... because then I have friends and I am not alone and I have something to do. And we go to other places and I don't go alone." (Rasha, 15)

"My mom's friend yes. But now my friend too. I go to, flat at Turku, and I visit, four days ... Alone, I go alone, just me and, but in flat her husband and two child. And they have many friend in Turku and all come and we eat and we talk and we go other place in Turku and one time I went to another friend's home ... in Turku, yes, friend to my friend, my mom's friend, my friend." (Amin, 17)

- **Mutual learning**

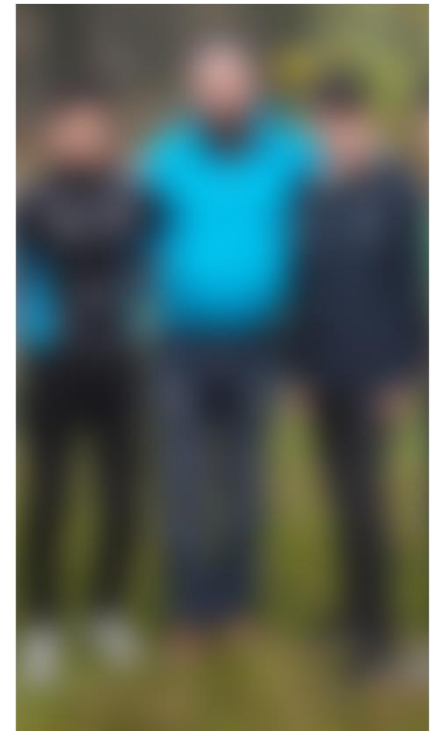
"This my uncle, Abdul, I tell you about my uncle, he is my friend, I always do every things with him and, I help him find job because he not speak Finnish and not English, only Arabia. And he help me and I work with him and I learn, dye, we dye house, and we always together when I come from school, and weekend. This is why he is my good friend. ... Yes he uncle but, he is my friend, first my good friend." (Amin, 17)



Conclusions

Intergenerational friendships...

- facilitate spaces of care, support, companionship and learning for both generations
- redefine the concept of young people's friendship and intergenerational relations
 - reciprocity and agency
 - questioning the generational order
 - questioning the peer relationship based assumptions
 - complicating the categorisations between 'young' and 'old', and 'family' and 'friends'
- provide sense of agency
- provide care, support and companionship which facilitate sense of belonging
- can act as bridging ties to broader communities and, hence, may cultivate social inclusion.



Conclusions

- While the same-age peers form a central part of young asylum-seekers/refugees' friendship networks, kin and non-kin adult friends are meaningful particularly in providing broader spaces towards social inclusion.
- Age does not seem to be a determining factor in defining and practicing friendship, but it is more about the quality of the relationship (vertical–horizontal) and the degree of agency (object–subject) seems to matter more.
- In friendships, peer relationships blend with family life and institutional relationship to adults, producing inclusionary intergenerational communities. By sharing their “friendly everyday”, young people and adults create intergenerational interplays where new opportunities may emerge.
- The focus on friendships positions the youths not only as refugees but as *young people*; not only as objects/targets of other people's help but as *agents*; not only as victims but as people with *strengths and resources*.



References

- Alanen, Leena (2009) Generational Order. In: Qvortrup J., Corsaro W.A., Honig MS. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 159-174.
- Dunn, J. (2004) Children's Friendships: The Beginnings of Intimacy. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA.
- Evans, K. (2007) Concepts of bounded agency in education, work, and the personal lives of young adults. *International Journal of Psychology* 42 (2), 85-93.
- May, Vanessa (2011) Self, Belonging and Social Change. *Sociology* 45 (3), 363-378.
- May, Vanessa (2013) *Connecting Self to Society: Belonging in a Changing World*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Ridge, Tess (2002) *Childhood poverty and social exclusion: From a child's perspective*. Bristol: Policy Press.

