

Friendship is mainly about 'me, me and me'

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Young people mainly select their friends according to the image they have of another person, irrespective of whether the person concerned actually satisfies that image. Dutch researcher Maarten Selfhout has demonstrated that young people consider themselves to be the most important factor in a friendship. Nevertheless friendship can still exert a significant influence: boys become criminal and girls become depressed.

Selfhout analysed the data from two long-term studies, CONAMORE and Mijn Eerste Jaar [My first year]. In CONAMORE young people aged 11 to 20 years completed questionnaires. In the project Mijn Eerste Jaar, 205 first-year students completed online questions over a period of four months. The research revealed that the image young people have of their friends is more important than the actual character of these friends.

Young people seek friends who are similar to themselves. For example, they look for similarities in [personality](#). Young people who consider themselves to be friendly and extrovert look for friends with these characteristics. In the case of young adolescents musical preferences also play a significant role. Young people with a preference for non-mainstream music such as hiphop or heavy metal will frequently become friends with young people who share this musical taste.

Boys become criminal and girls become depressive

Selfhout investigated not only how friendships develop, but also the influence of these friendships on young people. He discovered that the criminal behaviour of boys often increases if they have criminal friends.

Yet that was absolutely not the case with [girls](#). They could, however, experience other harm from [friendships](#): they run a greater risk of becoming depressive if they experience a low quality of friendship. Boys, however, are scarcely affected by this.

In 2009, Maarten Selfhout received a Rubicon grant from NWO (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research).

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
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