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Relations of Friends' Activities to Friendship Quality

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Abstract

Two studies were conducted to examine the age and sex differences in friends' activities and the relations of participation in these activities to friendship quality. In the first study, 52 fourth and eighth graders were asked open-ended questions about the activities that they did with their best friends. In the second study, 105 fourth and eighth graders reported both on the quality of their friendships and on how often they participated in the 40 activities that were most frequently mentioned in Study 1. Eighth graders participated in more school, maintenance (e.g., eating lunch), media, and socializing activities with friends than fourth graders did. Boys participated in more sports and media activities with friends than girls did. Students who did more socializing, school, and maintenance activities with friends perceived that their friendships had more positive features. These results suggest that engaging in some but not all types of activities with friends may enhance the development of high-quality friendships.

Relations of Friends' Activities to Friendship Quality

Activities with friends are an important part of the daily lives of children and adolescents. These activities provide children and adolescents with enjoyment, a sense of accomplishment and belonging, opportunities for instruction and learning, and a context in which to explore their social worlds (Larson & Richards, 1991; Hartup, 1992; Zarbatany, Hartmann, & Rankin, 1990). While engaged in activities, friends can get to know one another's likes and dislikes; disclose private thoughts; reveal their academic, social, and athletic competencies; and build shared social relationships. Stated differently, what friends do together defines the substance of their friendships. Furthermore, their views about the importance of these activities may affect the relations between the activities themselves and the quality of the friendship. Thus, activities done with friends are likely to contribute to the development of friendships, and particularly to their quality. One purpose of this research was to examine this hypothesis by investigating the relations of friends' activities to friendship quality.

Research on activity involvement has focused on understanding how participation in specific types of activities (e.g., extracurricular, leisure, volunteer) is related to specific developmental outcomes (i.e., school dropout, school achievement, self-esteem, delinquency) (Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 2001; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Only a few researchers have focused on the relational aspect of shared activities. For example, Raffaelli and Duckett (1989) found that friends had high positive affect when socializing (i.e., talking together). Larson, Kubey, and Colletti (1989) also found that youth reported more positive affect when participating in media activities with friends. Finally, adolescents themselves report that extracurricular and community-based activities provide them with an opportunity to develop peer relationships and peer knowledge (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003).

Previous research on friends' activities has examined one of two age periods, childhood or adolescence (e.g., Zarbatany, Hartmann, & Rankin, 1990). Although the activities of children probably differ from those of adolescents, developmental examinations of friends' activities are rare. Moreover, some research has supported the idea that boys and girls differ in their activities with friends (e.g., Richards & Larson, 1989). Consequently, another purpose of this research was to see how friends' activities change with age and how they vary with sex.

An activity was defined as an "occupation, pursuit, or recreation in which a person is engaged" (Webster's Dictionary, 1993, p. 22). Thus, activities are more general than behaviors, but the range of behaviors in a particular activity may be narrow. For example, sharing secrets is a typical behavior during a conversation at a friend's house, but it is not a typical behavior when playing soccer. Conversely, heading a soccer ball is a typical behavior when playing soccer but not when conversing at a friend's house.

Rather than trying to examine the enormous variety of individual activities in which children and adolescents participate with friends, previous researchers have generally classified activities into general categories. For example, Zarbatany, Ghesquiere, and Mohr (1992) examined adolescents' perceptions of five types of activities with peers: academic, telephone conversations, media (watching TV/listening to music), sports, and games.

Larson and Csikszentmihalyi (1983) obtained a comprehensive list of adolescents' activities by paging adolescents at various times every day for a week. Then they classified these activities into categories. Using this method, Larson and his colleagues found that adolescents spend most of their time (over 75% of their waking hours) in seven categories of activities: school, maintenance, socializing, media use, sports, extracurricular activities, and games (Larson & Richards, 1989). The school category includes activities that were related to school, like

doing homework. The maintenance category includes activities such as, “eating, grooming, resting and transportation, [and other] activities that dealt with the care and maintenance of the self” (Larson & Richards, 1989, p. 504). The socializing category is defined by activities that are conversation-based, such as talking at school or “hanging out.” The media category includes activities that are related to the use of electronic equipment, like watching television or listening to music. The sports category involves structured, formalized activities or “an active leisure choice,” like football or basketball (Larson & Richards, 1989, p. 505). Extracurricular activities are defined very broadly as activities that are structured but perhaps not sponsored by a school. They include “club participation, religious activities, and work at a job” (Larson & Richards, 1989, p. 506). Finally, the play and games category encompasses activities that are more informal and less physical than sports activities, like board games and “dress up.”

Larson’s categories were used in our studies because these categories are broad enough to encompass all activities but still narrow enough to be meaningful and interpretable. In other words, many activities fit into each category, but those activities have common attributes and involve similar behaviors. Therefore, theories and research can provide a basis for hypotheses about how participation in these categories of activities varies with age and sex and is related to perceptions of friendship quality.

Previous studies have shown that as children move into adolescence, they spend less time with their parents and siblings and more time with their friends (e.g., Larson & Richards, 1991). Thus, the first hypothesis of this study was that the frequency of most categories of activities with friends should be higher for adolescents than for children. More specifically, the hypothesis was that eighth graders in junior high would report more frequent activities with friends than fourth graders in elementary school.

In addition, many researchers have suggested that self-disclosure and gossip do not become important processes in friendship until adolescence (e.g., Berndt, 1996a; Hartup, 1996). That is, highly intimate self-disclosure is much more frequent for adolescents than for children. Furthermore, time spent with friends increases in this time period. For example, in one study, time spent talking with friends increased dramatically from fifth to ninth grade (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989). Thus, a second part of the first hypothesis was that the difference between fourth and eighth graders in friends' activity participation should be greatest for the socializing category. Socializing is likely to allow individuals to establish a stronger relationship than other activities do, by encouraging more intimate self-disclosure.

Current theories and previous research do not lead to firm hypotheses about the age changes in friends' participation in other categories of activities. For example, research has shown that adolescents spend much less time in sports activities than do younger children (Kirshnit, Ham, & Richards, 1989; Pate, Long, & Heath, 1994; Rowland, 1990), but whether this trend holds for sports with friends is unclear. In another study (Leone & Richards, 1989), overall time spent in academic activities decreased between fifth and ninth grade but time spent in academic activities with friends increased. Moreover, there have been no empirical studies that have examined the perceptions of the importance of these activities for friendships. Since neither theories nor empirical research provide a firm basis for hypotheses about age differences in other categories of activities, no hypotheses about these categories were proposed.

Participation in activities with friends may also vary for boys and girls. Adolescent girls spend more time talking and socializing than boys do (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and girls have intimate discussions at an earlier age than boys do (Berndt, 1996b, Buhrmester & Furman, 1987, Hartup, 1996). In contrast, boys like sports activities more,

participate in more sports activities, and engage in more competitive physical activity than girls do (Kirshnit, Ham, and Richards, 1989; Stoneman, Brody, & McKinnon, 1984; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). The previous studies did not focus on activities with friends, but it was expected that the results of friends' activities should mirror the general results in these categories. Thus, the second hypothesis of this study was that socializing activities with friends should be more frequent for girls, and sports with friends should be more frequent for boys.

Finally, a few researchers have discussed how friends' activities might be related to the features of friendship. For example, in play and games children may develop stable friendships (Doll, 1996; Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995) because they learn the social skills needed to maintain friendships (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk & Foster, 1990). Participation in media activities (e.g., listening to popular music) may help adolescents explore their concerns and issues with their friends (Thompson & Larson, 1995). Through maintenance activities, children and adolescents can learn about the daily lives of their friends while spending unstructured time with them. Consequently, children and adolescents may learn to develop their relationships within this type of activity (Larson & Richards, 1989).

If these categories of friends' activities do influence the features of friendships, participation in the activities should be significantly related to the quality of those friendships. Furthermore, the perceptions of the importance of these activities should also be significantly related to the perceived quality of those friendships. Berndt (1996b) defined friendship quality as referring to both the positive features and the negative features of a friendship. Some positive features of friendship include the degree to which friends are companions, their helpfulness to one another, and their enhancement of one another's self-worth (Parker & Asher, 1993). Some of the negative features of friendship include inequality, rivalry, and conflict (Berndt, 1996b).

Not all categories of activities with friends are likely to affect the positive features of friendship to the same extent. Some researchers have theorized that socializing is an especially significant activity for children and adolescents (Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989). While socializing (e.g., talking and communicating), friends can build the intimacy and trust that are critical for friendships (Rawlins & Holl, 1987). Furthermore, children and adolescents often state that intimacy and self-disclosure are important features of friendship (Berndt & Perry, 1990; Parker, 1986; Rawlins, 1992), so they might consider socializing as more important than other activities for the positive dimension of friendship quality. Thus, the third hypothesis of this study was that children and adolescents who perceive their friendships as higher in quality should have a higher frequency of socializing activities and should judge activities in the socializing category as more important for their friendships.

Less attention has been given to negative features of friendship, such as the frequency of conflicts between friends and the extent of their rivalry with each other (Berndt, 1986; Berndt, 1996b). Consequently, neither theories nor previous research provide a basis for definite hypotheses about how the negative features of friendship are related to the categories of friends' activities. For example, conflicts might arise when friends are engaged in any type of activity (Berndt, 1996b). Therefore, no hypotheses about how the negative features of friendship are related to the activity categories were proposed.

In summary, this study focused on age and sex differences in friends' activities and on the relation of friends' activities to friendship quality. Two studies were conducted with separate randomly selected samples recruited at the same time from the same population of fourth and eighth graders (both schools were within one school district). In the first study, students were individually interviewed with open-ended questions about the activities that they did with their

best friends. Students' answers were used to generate lists of friends' activities. In the second study, students answered questions about the activities mentioned most often in Study 1. In particular, they reported how frequently they participated in those activities with friends and how important they thought each activity was for friendships.

Study 1

Method

Participants. The sample included 52 students from an elementary school and a junior high school in a small Midwestern town. The sample included 26 fourth graders (13 females and 13 males, mean age = 10.5 years old) and 26 eighth graders (13 females and 13 males, mean age = 14.4 years old). Including participants from these grades made it possible to test the hypotheses stated earlier about the changes in the experience of friendship between childhood and adolescence. One child was Asian American, two were African American, and three classified themselves as "other" in ethnicity. The rest of the students were White. Parents gave informed consent and children assented to participation before the study began. Consent was obtained from over 75 percent of the sampled population.

Procedure. Students were individually interviewed by one of two interviewers. Both interviewers were trained with pilot interviews and each interviewer completed both fourth and eighth grade interviews. All interviews were audiotaped. To elicit descriptions of activities done with friends students were first asked very general questions (e.g., "What kinds of things do you like to do with your friends?"). If a student only listed one or two activities, the researcher then probed with more specific questions (e.g., "Are there any activities that you do with your friends in class?"). All children were given three probes regardless of the number of activities they mentioned. All students described at least five activities.

The students were required to generate specific activities as their answers to the questions, ones that fit the definition given earlier. That is, they had to describe a pursuit, occupation, or type of recreation. If students provided an answer that only gave setting information (e.g., "Go to each other's houses"), they were asked specific questions intended to tap concrete activities (e.g., "What did you do at your friend's house?"). If students only described a behavior (e.g., "Talking"), they were asked questions designed to elicit the pursuit, recreation, or occupation in which the behavior occurred.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done to examine age and sex differences in the number of activities generated. There was a significant main effect for age, $F(1, 48) = 7.09$, $p < .05$. Fourth graders mentioned fewer activities than eighth graders ($M = 12.85$, $SD = 4.36$, and $M = 16.58$, $SD = 5.51$, respectively, $p < .05$), but no other effects were significant. These results suggest that the eighth graders were participating in a greater range of activities with friends than the fourth graders were.

As expected, many of the students mentioned the same activities (e.g., playing basketball). The number of students who mentioned each distinct activity was tabulated. Each of the 40 activities listed in Table 1 was mentioned by at least 10% of the students.

A coding system adapted from Larson and Richards (1989) was used to classify each of these activities into one of seven categories: socializing, school, maintenance, play and games, media, sports, and extracurricular. Two coders independently classified the activities into categories with 95% agreement. For the two activities on which the coders disagreed, a third coder resolved the disagreement. Table 1 shows the categories into which each activity was coded. No extracurricular activities were coded, so this category of activities was dropped from

the coding scheme.

The greatest number of activities meeting the 10% criterion (i.e., 11) fell into the category of socializing; the most frequently mentioned activities in this category were spending the night and talking at school. The sports category included nine activities, and one of those activities, basketball, was mentioned by more than three fourths of the students. Other frequently mentioned sport activities were riding bikes, swimming, and baseball. The play and games category included seven activities, although not more than 25% of students mentioned any activity in this category. Board games and jumping on the trampoline were the most commonly mentioned activities in this category. For the maintenance category, eating lunch together was the most frequent activity. In the media category, going to the movies at the mall and watching TV were mentioned most often. Having class with friends was the most frequently mentioned school activity. Overall, the results indicate that no single activity in any category could represent the entire category.

Study 2

The students in Study 2 answered questions about the activities most often mentioned in Study 1. They reported the frequency with which they engaged in the activity and rated its importance for a friendship. Then they answered questions about the quality of their friendships. These questions allowed a test of the hypothesis about how friends' activities are related to students' perceptions of friendship quality. In addition, age and sex differences in friends' activities could be examined.

Method

Participants. The sample included 105 students from the same elementary school and junior high school as in Study 1, although none of the participants took part in both studies. The

sample included 54 fourth graders (22 boys and 32 girls, mean age = 10.6 years old) and 51 eighth graders (21 boys and 30 girls, mean age = 14.4 years old). One student was Asian American, one was Hispanic, one was African American, and three classified themselves as “other” in ethnicity. The remaining students were White. As in Study 1, parents gave informed consent and children assented to participation before the study began. Similarly, consent was obtained from over 75 percent of the sampled population.

Procedure. After consent was obtained, students completed the written questionnaires in their classrooms while following the instructions of the first author (i.e., questionnaire administrator). Students did not communicate with one another as they completed the questionnaires.

Frequency and importance of friends' activities. Students were asked to rate how often they participated with friends in each of the 40 activities mentioned most often in Study 1 (see Table 1). Students first were asked to rate how often they participated in each activity with one best friend (e.g., “How often do you do each of the following activities with just one best friend OR how often have you done each of the following activities with just one best friend?”). Students responded on a 5-point scale that for most activities ranged from never (scored 1) to everyday (scored 5). For some activities (e.g., “go on trips together”) the response scale ranged from never (1) to more than four times (5), because these activities could not be done everyday.

Then students were asked to rate how often they participated in each activity with a group of friends (e.g., “How often do you do each of the following activities with more than one best friend OR how often have you done each of the following activities with more than one best friend?”). The response scales for these questions matched those for the previous questions.

In order to highlight the distinction between these two sets of questions, the questionnaire

administrator provided direct instructions about doing activities with one friend (i.e., with just one friend) as compared to doing activities more than one best friend (i.e., with a group of friends rather than one friend at a time). Average ratings of the frequency of participation in each activity category with one best friend and with a group of friends were calculated from students' responses. For example, a measure of the frequency of dyadic socializing was created by averaging students' scores on the 11 items about socializing activities with just one friend. Scores for the frequency of participation in each dyadic activity category were strongly correlated ($r_s = .60$ to $.85$) with those for the frequency of participation in the corresponding category of group activity. Because of these high correlations, a final score for the frequency of participation in each category of activities was created by averaging the scores for dyadic and group activities. The internal consistency (alpha coefficients) for the resulting scores was $.89$ for socializing, $.75$ for school, $.84$ for maintenance, $.76$ for play and games, $.85$ for media, and $.86$ for sports.

Next, students rated how important each activity was for their friendships ("How important are each of the following activities for a best friendship?") and how much each activity made their friendships better ("How much does doing each of the following activities with friends make your friendship better?"). Five-point scales were used with the endpoints not at all (scored 1) to very (scored 5). Scores for each activity were averaged across the two questions for a composite measure of importance.

Then the average ratings for each activity category were calculated. The internal consistency of the final measures of importance was high, with alpha coefficients of $.92$ for socializing, $.90$ for school, $.86$ for maintenance, $.85$ for play and games, $.84$ for media, and $.82$ for sports.

Friendship quality. Students were asked to write down the names of three of their best friends. Of the 105 students, 102 named at least three best friends. Two students named only two best friends and one student named only one best friend. Then students were asked to answer 25 questions from a modified version of Keefe and Berndt's (1996) questionnaire about the features of each of these friendships. Fifteen questions referred to three positive features of friendship: (a) intimacy (e.g., "How often do you tell this friend things about yourself that you wouldn't tell most friends?"), (b) prosocial interaction (e.g., "How often does this friend help you when you can't do something by yourself?"), and (c) self-esteem enhancement (e.g., "When you do a good job on something, how often does this friend praise or congratulate you?"). Ten questions referred to two negative features of friendship: (a) conflicts (e.g., "How often do you get into arguments with this friend?"), and (b) inequality, which refers both to dominance attempts (e.g., "How often does this friend try to boss you around?"), and unpleasant rivalry (e.g., "How often does this friend 'show off' or brag about doing something better than you?"). Students responded to all questions on a 5-point scale ranging from never (scored 1) to very often/everyday (scored 5).

Students first answered the questions about their very best friend. Then they answered the same set of questions about their second best friend, and, finally, about their third best friend, if they had named at least three best friends. Scores for each participant were averaged across their best friendships. By examining students' perceptions of three friendships rather than one, a more reliable measure of perceived friendship quality was obtained. The alpha coefficients for specific friendship features were .91 for intimacy, .85 for prosocial interaction, .90 for self-esteem enhancement, .81 for conflicts, and .85 for inequality.

Results

Frequency and importance of activity categories. To test the hypotheses, an ANOVA was done with grade and sex as between-subjects factors, the six categories of activities as a within-subject factor, and scores for the frequency of activities in each category as the dependent measure.

There was a main effect for Category, $F(5, 505) = 116.77, p < .001$, and a Grade X Category interaction, $F(5, 505) = 18.73, p < .001$ (see Figure 1). Across categories, students spent the most time in socializing and school activities and the least time in play and games and sports activities with friends. As predicted, eighth graders spent more time in socializing activities than fourth graders did, but they also spent more time in school, maintenance, and media activities than fourth graders did. In contrast, fourth graders spent more time in play and games than eighth graders did. The frequency of sports activities did not change significantly with grade. To test the specific hypothesis that the grade difference would be greater for socializing than for the other activity categories, tests of grade contrasts for pairs of categories were done using the Bonferroni procedure to control the probability of a Type I error. None of the contrasts was statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis that socializing would increase with age more than the other activity categories was not supported.

There was also a Sex X Category interaction, $F(5, 505) = 8.28, p < .001$. Sex differences were significant for the sports and media categories. As expected, boys spent more time in sports than girls did ($M = 2.12, SD = .74$, and $M = 1.62, SD = .45$, respectively, $p < .001$). Boys also spent more time in media activities than girls did ($M = 2.83, SD = .91$ and $M = 2.36, SD = .68$, respectively, $p < .001$). However, contrary to the hypothesis, girls did not spend significantly more time in socializing activities with friends than boys did ($M = 3.06, SD = .61$ and $M = 2.94, SD = .70$, respectively).

A comparable ANOVA was used to assess the effects of grade and sex on students' reports of the importance of the activities. There were effects of Grade, $F(1, 101) = 8.75, p < .001$; and Category, $F(5, 505) = 138.75, p < .001$; and a Grade X Category interaction, $F(5, 505) = 21.55, p < .001$ (see Figure 2). Overall, students reported that socializing was most important for their friendships, followed by school-related activities, while play and games and sports were the least important for their friendships. Eighth graders reported that socializing, school, maintenance, and media activities were more important for their friendships than fourth graders did. In contrast, eighth graders rated sports and play and games as less important to their friendships than fourth graders did.

There was also an effect of Sex, $F(1, 101) = 16.55, p < .001$, and a Sex X Category interaction, $F(5, 505) = 10.92, p < .001$. Sex differences were significant for three categories. Compared to boys, girls rated socializing ($M = 3.15, SD = .86$ and $M = 3.77, SD = .79$, respectively), school activities ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.16$ and $M = 3.36, SD = 1.16$, respectively), and maintenance activities ($M = 2.31, SD = .79$ and $M = 2.83, SD = .74$, respectively) as more important.

Relations of friendship quality to the activity categories. To test the third hypothesis, the correlations between the frequency of participation in each category of activities and the perceived friendship quality were calculated (see Table 2). As predicted, students who spent more time participating in socializing activities described their friendships as higher in all three positive features: intimacy, prosocial interaction, and self-esteem enhancement. But significant correlations were not confined to the socializing category. Students who spent more time in school and maintenance activities with friends also reported that their friendships were higher in all or most positive features. By contrast, the frequencies of students' participation in play and

games, media, and sports activities were not related to any positive features of perceived friendship quality. Participation in activities with friends was largely unrelated to the negative features of friendship, conflict and inequality. However, greater participation in media and sports activities was related to greater perceived inequality in friendships.

As Table 3 shows, the correlations of perceived friendship quality with students' reports on the importance for friendship of the various activity categories were similar but not identical to those with activity frequency. As predicted, students who rated socializing as a more important activity also judged their friendships as higher in intimacy, self-esteem enhancement, and prosocial interaction. But scores for the importance of school, maintenance, and media activities were also related to all the positive features of perceived friendship quality. In other words, students who rated all these types of activities as important for friendship judged their friendships more positively. Thus, these correlations show that other categories of activities besides socializing are related to the positive features of friendship. In additional analyses, both the frequency and importance correlations were computed separately by sex and by age. The correlations did not differ significantly for boys and girls or for fourth and eighth graders.

Overall, the significant correlations show a pattern that indicates the value of particular activities. That is, the most consistent correlations were between socializing activities and importance of activities. These activities may strengthen students' perceived friendship quality and help to lessen perceived inequality between friends. Other activities like school, maintenance, and media activities, which include elements of social interaction, illustrate a pattern comparable to socializing activities, although not as consistent across the features of friendships. Finally, the correlation between ratings of the importance of play and games and perceptions of self-esteem enhancement in friendships suggests that this category of activities

has some importance for friendships, but is less important than other activities.

Discussion

Taken together, the results partly confirm but also qualify the original hypotheses about how friends' activities change with age, vary for the two sexes, and are related to perceptions of friendship quality. Consistent with the first hypothesis, friends reported more frequent participation in socializing activities in eighth grade than in fourth grade. As noted earlier, previous research has shown that intimacy increases in friendships as children enter adolescence (Berndt, 1996a). While socializing with friends, adolescents have opportunities for the self-disclosure that fosters intimate relationships. The current findings extend previous research by showing that adolescents not only engage in socializing with friends more often than younger children; adolescents also judge socializing as more important for friendships.

The eighth graders in the current study also spent more time in school activities with friends than the fourth graders did. This age difference may partly reflect the changing nature of schoolwork. In high school, students may have greater opportunities to work in groups and thus may choose to work with friends.

The eighth graders in this study reported more maintenance activities with friends and viewed these activities as more important than fourth graders did. Previous research on maintenance activities, activities that involve eating or traveling (e.g., carpooling), has suggested that these activities occupy a considerable portion of children and adolescents' lives. For example, Duckett, Raffaelli, and Richards (1989) found that students in the fifth to ninth grades were doing maintenance activities almost 25% of the time, although they did not find significant age differences in maintenance activities. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the students in the previous study interpreted maintenance activities differently than in the

current study. In the current study, students only reported on maintenance activities that they did with friends. Consequently, maintenance activities such as doing chores or resting that are usually done alone or with family members were not included in the present study. Furthermore, maintenance activities also include elements of social interaction. While eating or carpooling, students may be also talking and socializing. Thus, the distinction between maintenance activities and other activities like socializing may be blurred. This may explain why the maintenance activities that were included in this study were more important to friends.

As in past research (e.g., Larson & Kubey, 1983; Larson, Kubey, & Colletti, 1989), eighth graders spent more time in media activities such as listening to music than fourth graders did. The category of media activities included going to the movies and renting videos, which may be more common in adolescence because adolescents can more easily travel to a theater or rental store. Even media activities such as watching TV and playing video games may be more frequent in adolescence because adolescents can travel to their friends' houses more easily than children can.

The first hypothesis also suggested that the age change in socializing with friends would be greater than the age change in the frequency of activities in the other categories. This part of the hypothesis was not supported. The increase between childhood and adolescence in school, maintenance, and media activities did not differ significantly from that of socializing activities. As suggested earlier, these other types of activities may incorporate some form of social interaction, blurring the distinction between them and the socializing category.

The significant age difference in the play and games category was also consistent with past theory and research (Larson & Richards, 1989; Rawlins, 1992). Fourth graders spent more time playing games than eighth graders did. Fourth graders also judged the games category to be

more important for their friendships than eighth graders did. Many theorists have suggested that games are important contexts for children and that this category of activities helps children establish friendships (Rawlins, 1992; Youniss & Volpe, 1978), but adolescents have many other ways to establish their friendships. In addition, the activities in this category might be viewed as somewhat childish (e.g., jumping on a trampoline, playing tag), and adolescents may seldom participate in these activities.

Surprisingly, sports participation with friends did not change with age. Past research has shown consistently that formal sports participation declines with age (e.g., Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996; Gould & Horn, 1984; Kirshnit, Ham, & Richards, 1989; USDHHS, 1996). However, some students may continue to participate in sports with their friends. Indeed, one motive that adolescents give as a reason for participating in sports is to form friendships (Gould & Horn, 1984). Moreover, friendships formed through common sports activities may be maintained by continued participation in sports. Worth noting, though, is that eighth graders judged sports activities as less important for friendships than fourth graders did.

Also worth noting is that some of the activities in the sports category were not formal sports (e.g., basketball). This category also included informal activities such as bike-riding and rollerblading. Consequently, one possible explanation of the nonsignificant age difference is that adolescents continue to engage in informal sports and related physical activities even as their formal sports participation decreases.

Contrary to hypothesis, girls did not report greater participation in socializing activities with friends than boys did, although they viewed socializing as more important for their friendships. In fact, boys and girls reported similar levels of participation in most categories of activities with friends, but differed in their ratings of importance of these activities. Besides

socializing, girls viewed other activity categories that had elements of social interaction, the categories of school and maintenance activities, as more important for their friendships than did boys. One possible explanation of these findings is that the measure of importance is a more sensitive measure of friendship expectations than the frequency measure. In other words, girls may expect socializing with friends to contribute to the intimacy of their friendships, and these expectations may be tapped when they are asked about the importance of activities linked to social interaction. In contrast, the frequency measure may tap only the amount of interaction, which may be constrained by factors less closely related to beliefs about the benefits of activities for friendships. Some evidence for this explanation of the findings comes from research showing that girls report enjoying social activities more than boys do (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

Boys did, however, participate in significantly more sports activities with their friends than girls did. The results are consistent with past research on sports activities (see Kirshnit, Ham, & Richards, 1989, for review). Furthermore, other research on time spent in sex-typed activities suggests that these sex differences in sports activity involvement become more pronounced in later adolescence (Timmer, Eccles, & O'Brien, 1985). This sex difference in sports may reflect differences in gender socialization. That is, boys might be socialized to think that sports participation is a masculine activity and girls might be socialized to think that sports participation is not a feminine activity (Kleiber & Hemmer, 1981) and thus the participation in these activities with friends highlights these socialized beliefs.

Boys also reported more frequent participation in media activities than girls. The sex difference in media activities is somewhat surprising. Larson, Kubey, & Colletti (1989) found that only for different types of media are there sex differences. That is, girls listen to music whereas boys are more likely to watch television. However, this research did not examine overall

differences in media activities. Yet, the Larson et al. (1989) study points out that the media category may reflect sex differences in the individual activities themselves rather than the overall category. For example, in the current study, secondary item analyses showed that boys watched more television and played more video games than girls did and these two activities may account for the sex difference. More recent research suggests that media activities not only reflect divergent interests in particular forms of media of boys and girls, but also may reflect a lack of availability of media that targets girls specifically (e.g., electronic games) (Wright, Huston, Vandewater, Bickham, Scantlin, Kotler, Caplovitz, Lee, Hofferth, & Finkelstein, 2001). Thus, this research also could help to explain the sex difference found in the current study.

Students who reported greater participation in socializing, school, and maintenance activities, and students who judged these activities as more important for friendships, perceived that their friendships were higher in intimacy, self-esteem enhancement, and prosocial interaction. The relationship between school and maintenance activities and the positive features of friendship was not hypothesized, but participation in these activities likely involves unstructured time that allows for social interaction. For example, while studying and while engaged in eating lunch together, friends undoubtedly talk with one another and have other types of positive interactions. While working on schoolwork together, friends may ask one another for help and praise one another for figuring out problems. It is not surprising, then, that school and maintenance activities, like socializing activities, are related to students' perceptions of the positive features of friendship quality.

By contrast, students who reported greater participation in media activities perceived greater inequality, defined as dominance attempts and unpleasant rivalry, in their friendships. One possible explanation for this correlation is that some media activities, such as playing video

games, are competitive. Students who do these activities frequently with friends might perceive greater inequality in their friendships because the competition leads to hostile rivalry. Another possible explanation for this correlation is that in many media activities, one student can claim ownership of the media being used. For example, the student who owns the video game console might assert special rights over the activity, and so try to dominate over the friends present. For these reasons, joint participation in media activities is not necessarily beneficial to friendships.

The frequency of sports activities was also related to perceived inequality in friendships. As with certain media activities, the rivalry associated with intense competition can violate the assumption of equality in friendship. In addition, some children or adolescents may be more skilled at sports than their friends. In such cases, those who are more skilled might be directive or bossy towards their friends.

Taken together, these results provide partial support for the third hypothesis. As expected, the frequency and importance of socializing activities were significantly related to the perceived positive features of friendship. However, school and maintenance activities were also linked with students' reports of the positive features of their friendships. But not all types of activities enhance positive friendship quality and some, such as media use and sports, may contribute to perceptions of negative friendship quality.

Conclusions

Participation in activities with friends must have a major effect on the development of children's and adolescents' friendships. These activities provide friends with a sense of enjoyment and fun while affording them an opportunity to learn new skills and instruct one another (Zarbatany et al., 1990). In addition, some activities like socializing can enhance the quality of a friendship. Previous research has not shed much light on the content of friends' activities or how these

activities change with age. Both of the current studies are novel in that they provide a comprehensive examination of activities done with friends specifically as opposed to general activities completed alone or with a variety of partners. Furthermore, as study 2 shows, the content of social interactions with friends, the activities that friends do together, are related to their reports of the quality of their friendships.

The findings of Study 1 indicate that the friends engage in a wide range of activities that are representative of daily life. That is, students engaged in socializing, sports, and school activities with friends; they also participated in maintenance activities (like eating lunch and carpooling) with friends. Furthermore, the results of the current studies show that adolescents spend their time with friends differently than children do. The eighth graders in Study 2 participated in more activities with friends than the fourth graders did. In particular, eighth graders spent more time than fourth graders in socializing, school, media, and maintenance activities. They also judged these activities as more important than fourth graders did. The age changes in these categories of activities reflect the increased participation of friends in adolescents' academic and social lives.

Sex differences that were found in this study partly replicate previous work on activity involvement (e.g., Kleiber & Hemmer, 1981; Richards & Larson, 1989). That is, the results in this study show that boys participated in more sports with their friends than girls did. In contrast to previous research, girls did not participate in more socializing with their friends than boys did, although the girls rated socializing as more important than boys did.

Finally, participation with friends in many categories of activities may be beneficial to friendships. Students who participated more often in the activities that allowed for frequent social interactions (e.g., school, socializing, maintenance) perceived that their friendships were

higher in quality. Students who frequently participated in sports and in media activities perceived their friendships as having more negative features (i.e., more inequality). Consequently, simply doing things together does not always enhance or improve friendships. These results highlight the importance of examining the content of interactions with friends when trying improve (or develop) children's and adolescents' friendships. Future research on friends' activities should explore how specific activities with friends are related to other facets of friendships (e.g., their satisfaction and stability) and individual characteristics (e.g., the friends' competence, well-being).

One limitation of this study is that the activities examined are somewhat specific to a location or region. Students who live in other regions of the country might participate in different activities. Rather than playing basketball, for example, they may play hockey. Researchers will need, therefore, to assess the most frequent activities of friends in specific locations, using methods like those in Study 1. On the other hand, the general categories of activities are likely to be less specific than activities themselves. Hockey would fit in the general category of sports. Thus, the overall categories may be used in various locations even if some of the individual activities change.

Another limitation is that the sample, although representative of the community in which the schools were located, was fairly homogenous. It would be important to examine how these activities differ for children and adolescents of different races and nationalities. Children of different races and nationalities may endorse specific activities such as soccer to different degrees. However, as just mentioned, the overall categories may still be used with children of different races or nationalities.

Finally, the age differences found in the current study may partly reflect differences in

verbal abilities rather than differences in rates of activity participation. One way to assess this possibility would be to supplement reports of activities with a measure of verbal abilities. That is, fourth graders may report a more limited range of activities because their verbal abilities are more limited than those of eighth graders. Another option would be to observe children or adolescents who are participating in socializing, school, or maintenance activities. Those observations might clarify which attributes of these activities are relationship-enhancing. Researchers might also explore how participation in activities changes as a friendship progresses from initial development to termination (e.g., starting a new friendship, increasing the number of friends).

In summary, the findings of these two studies demonstrate the value of examining how friends spend their time together. Especially as friends move into adolescence, their activities involve many spheres of daily life. However, not all activities seem to contribute to the quality of adolescents' friendships. Activities that involve talking together (socializing) may be most significant, but studying together (or working on schoolwork) and eating or going places together (maintenance activities) may also help to establish and maintain a high-quality friendship.

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Table 1

Number and Percentage of Students in Study 1 Mentioning Each Activity Listed on the Questionnaire for Study 2

| | Number | Percentage |
|---|--------|------------|
| Category | | |
| Socializing | | |
| Hangout at school | 6 | 12 |
| Spend the night | 27 | 52 |
| Shop at the mall | 18 | 35 |
| Talk at school | 25 | 48 |
| Go to Kings' Island (an amusement park) | 5 | 10 |
| Talk on the phone | 10 | 19 |
| Parties | 6 | 12 |
| Talk at lunch | 5 | 10 |
| Talk at each other's houses | 20 | 38 |
| Go on trips together | 9 | 17 |
| Hangout at each other's houses | 8 | 15 |
| School | | |
| Schoolwork | 5 | 10 |
| Work together on schoolwork | 5 | 10 |
| Class | 16 | 31 |

(table continues)

| Category | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Maintenance | | |
| Eat at each other's houses | 8 | 15 |
| Eat lunch together | 19 | 37 |
| Walk around the mall | 7 | 13 |
| Buy a drink or candy at the store | 7 | 13 |
| Walk around the neighborhood | 14 | 27 |
| Carpool/drive in the car | 7 | 13 |
| Play and Games | | |
| Play on swings | 8 | 15 |
| Play tag | 6 | 12 |
| Board games | 12 | 23 |
| Ride go-karts | 5 | 10 |
| Draw or color pictures | 5 | 10 |
| Jump on trampoline | 9 | 17 |
| Play on monkey bars | 6 | 12 |
| Media | | |
| Go to movies at the mall | 30 | 58 |
| Watch TV | 23 | 44 |
| Listen to music | 6 | 12 |
| Play a video game (Nintendo, Play Station) | 17 | 33 |

(table continues)

| | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| Category | | |
| Rent a video | 11 | 21 |
| Sports | | |
| Ride bikes | 32 | 62 |
| Swim | 18 | 35 |
| Football | 16 | 31 |
| Basketball | 41 | 79 |
| Rollerskate/rollerblade | 7 | 13 |
| Tennis | 5 | 10 |
| Soccer | 9 | 17 |
| Baseball | 18 | 35 |
| Fishing | 5 | 10 |

Table 2
Correlations Between Frequency of Activities and Friendship Quality

| Feature | Category | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------|-------------|--------------|-------|--------|
| | Socializing | School | Maintenance | Play & Games | Media | Sports |
| Positive | | | | | | |
| Intimacy | .50*** | .40*** | .33*** | -.01 | .15 | -.06 |
| Prosocial interaction | .46*** | .35*** | .26** | .04 | .10 | -.03 |
| Self-esteem enhancement | .29*** | .33*** | .11 | .11 | -.08 | -.15 |
| Negative | | | | | | |
| Conflict | .11 | .11 | .11 | -.07 | .10 | .11 |
| Inequality | -.03 | .01 | .05 | .09 | .21* | .24* |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Correlations Between the Importance of Activities and Friendship Quality

| Feature | Type of Category | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------|-------------|--------------|--------|--------|
| | Socializing | School | Maintenance | Play & Games | Media | Sports |
| Positive | | | | | | |
| Intimacy | .52*** | .42*** | .44*** | .07 | .35*** | .04 |
| Prosocial interaction | .52*** | .45*** | .45*** | .18 | .35*** | .06 |
| Self-esteem enhancement | .43*** | .46*** | .33*** | .25* | .24* | .05 |
| Negative | | | | | | |
| Conflict | .04 | .00 | .00 | -.06 | .02 | .09 |
| Inequality | -.21* | -.05 | -.12 | -.03 | -.01 | .14 |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Frequency of activities at each grade.

Figure 2. Importance of activities at each grade.



