The Features and Effects of Friendship in Early Adolescence

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BERNDT, THOMAS J The Features and Effects of Friendship in Early Adolescence CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 1982, 53, 1447-1460 Early adolescent friendships have often been assumed to be especially intense and especially significant for psychological development Recent research indicates that the intimacy of friendships increases dramatically between middle childhood and early adolescence In competitive situations, early adolescents act more prosocially toward their friends than do younger children because they more often try to achieve the mutually satisfying outcome of equality During early adolescence, friends are similar in their orientation toward school and toward peer culture (rock music, fashion, and so on) Similarity is due partly to the selection of friends like oneself and partly to the influence of friends on each other In certain other ways, early adolescent friendships do not differ substantially from those among younger children or late adolescents Recent research suggests that the stability of friendships changes little between fourth and eleventh grade Girls often seem to have more intimate and exclusive friendships than boys do, although the overall pattern of sex differences in friendships is more complex The features of early adolescent friendships appear to be determined partly by the biological, social, and cognitive changes during this period of life The effects of these friendships on social and personality development have been extensively discussed, but supporting evidence currently is scarce

In most descriptions of psychological development, special importance is attributed to friendships during early adolescence, that is, during the period from roughly 12 to 16 years of age (Kagan & Coles 1972) Douvan and Adelson (1966), for example, argued that same-sex friendships are closer and more intense in early adolescence than in any other phase of the life span They also suggested that friendships at these ages have a major influence on the development of personality, social skills, and social behavior

Three general types of explanations have been given for the special significance of early adolescent friendships First, adolescence traditionally has been defined as beginning with the onset of puberty The biological changes associated with puberty may be troubling or disturbing to adolescents, they may turn to friends for assistance in understanding and adapting to them (Douvan & Adelson 1966) This view of early adolescence is reminiscent of the popular conception of the period as one of storm and stress Although systematic research does not provide strong support for the popular notion (Hartup, in press, Hill 1980), it is implicit in much of the literature on adolescent friendships

Second, the social environment of the early adolescent is different from that of the child or the later adolescent Social relationships with parents are transformed as adolescents acquire greater independence This independence is fairly limited, however, because the social status of the early adolescent is a marginal one Early adolescents are not treated as children, but they are not treated as adults either In American society and many other societies, adolescents are required to remain in school and not allowed to drive or take a full-time job until they reach age 16 Consequently, this age is a convenient social marker for the end of early adolescence (Bakan 1972) In addition, although adolescents soon develop the ability to engage in sexual behavior and bear children, they are strongly discouraged from doing so Close relationships with the opposite sex normally are tolerated and encouraged only in later adolescence

These social conditions partly determine the nature and functions of friendships during
early adolescence. Close friends and other peers become the primary partners in adolescents' social interactions. According to their own reports, adolescents spend more time talking to peers than in any other single activity, they also describe themselves as most happy when talking to peers (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott 1977). In addition, friendships may have an important influence on adolescent development because of their formal or structural features. Unlike the hierarchical relationship between parents and their children, friendship is an egalitarian relationship. Therefore, interactions with friends can serve as a foundation for egalitarian relationships with colleagues, neighbors, or spouses in adulthood (Piaget 1932/1965, Youniss 1980).

Third, cognitive abilities continue to develop during adolescence. Adolescents acquire a new consciousness of self and of their own identity, a more sophisticated understanding of other people and events, and greater skill in the logical analysis of ideological positions and social institutions (Hill & Palmquist 1978, Kohlberg & Gilhgan 1972). Increases in adolescents' cognitive abilities are likely to affect their friendships as well. For example, adolescents should be more able to understand their friends' thoughts and feelings and be more aware of the importance of mutuality or reciprocity in friendships.

The impact of friendships of the biological, social, and cognitive changes during early adolescence has rarely been examined directly. For a long time, the popular and theoretical literature on adolescent friendships greatly exceeded the empirical research. The situation has changed dramatically in recent years (see Asher & Gottman 1981, Duck & Gilbour 1981, Foot, Chapman, & Smith 1980, Hartup 1978, Rubin 1980). The new research has yielded a large amount of descriptive information about the features of early adolescent friendships. In contrast, there is much less information about the relation of these features to other developments during adolescence or the effects of these friendships on adolescents' personality and social behavior.

Four features of friendship have received the greatest attention: the intimacy of the friends' conversations and their knowledge of each other, their responsiveness to each other's needs and desires, the degree of similarity or complementarity between friends, and the stability of friendships over time. Each of these features and its potential effects on development are discussed in one section of this review. When possible, the evidence on early adolescent friendships is compared with that on friendships during middle childhood and later adolescence, so that the distinctiveness of friendships during early adolescence can be assessed. In addition, sex differences in friendship are considered, because many writers have suggested that girls have closer and more intimate friendships than boys (e.g., Douvan & Adelson 1986).

**Intimacy in Friendships**

Intimacy in close relationships has been defined in several different ways. Occasionally, the concept of intimacy is used to refer to any and all features of a relationship that make it seem close or intense (see Huston & Burgess 1979). Sullivan (1953) defined intimate friendships in this way, but he also used the term in the more narrow and specific senses that are typically employed in the research literature. He referred, first, to intimate self-disclosure, the sharing of personal or private thoughts and feelings with friends. He also referred to actual knowledge of personal and private information about a friend, such as the friend's worries, fears, or personality traits (see also Selman 1981). These two aspects of intimacy are related but distinct. Adolescents could acquire knowledge of a friend during interactions or activities with him or her as well as during conversations about intimate topics.

*The development of intimate friendships*—Most theorists have assumed that intimate friendships first emerge during early adolescence (see Maas 1968). Sullivan (1953) suggested that children may form intimate relationships during the years shortly before puberty, but he also commented that many children develop such friendships later. Selman (1981) argued that intimate friendships only are possible when children reach a certain level of role-taking ability. Before they can share their thoughts and feelings with a friend and respond appropriately when the friend shares with them, children must be able to keep their own views and another person's views in mind at the same time. According to Selman, this level of role-taking normally is achieved during early adolescence.

Douvan and Adelson (1966) presented a more psychodynamic explanation for the appearance of intimate friendships in early adolescence. They proposed that adolescents need friends to help them cope with the sexual
Impulses and drive energy that are aroused at the onset of puberty. During intimate conversations, adolescents can express their feelings about the changes that they are experiencing and receive the friends' advice and support. Intimacy is especially important in early adolescence because impulses and drives are most intense during this period. Moreover, in late adolescence heterosexual relationships become more intimate than same-sex friendships.

The greatest amount of evidence on the development of intimacy in friendships has been obtained from research on friendship conceptions. Children and adolescents have been asked one or more open-ended questions about friendship, such as "What is a friend?" or "How can you tell that someone is your best friend?" In some studies, the questions refer not to friendship in general but to one of the subject's own friendships. Regardless of the exact form of the questions or the details of the interviewing technique, similar results have been obtained. Comments about the intimate sharing of thoughts and feelings with friends and references to intimate knowledge of a friend increase dramatically between middle childhood and early adolescence (Berndt 1981c, Bigelow 1977, Douvan & Adelson 1966, Reisman & Shorr 1978, Selman 1981, Youngs 1980). References to intimacy do not occur most frequently in early adolescence, however. They are even more frequent after age 16 (Bigelow & LaGapa 1980, Douvan & Adelson 1966).

Intimacy in friendships also has been assessed with more structured techniques. In one study (Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman 1981), adolescents described one of their own friendships by rating their agreement with statements about intimate self-disclosure (e.g., "I feel free to talk with him [her] about almost everything") and intimate knowledge (e.g., "I know how he [she] feels about things without his [her] telling me"). Agreement with these statements increased regularly between fifth and eleventh grade. In another study (LaGapa 1979), adolescents rated the importance of various dimensions of a best or close friendship. Surprisingly, ratings for intimate self-disclosure decreased between 12 and 14 years of age, between 14 and 20 years of age, these ratings remained fairly stable. Sharabany et al. (1981) also found a decrease in overall ratings of same-sex friendships around 13 years of age, but the drop occurred for dimensions of friendship other than intimacy (e.g., statements about the exclusiveness of the friendship).

Actual knowledge of intimate information about a best friend was assessed in one recent study (Diaz & Berndt, in press). Fourth and eighth graders were asked about external or observable characteristics of a best friend, such as the friend's birthdate. They also were asked for more intimate information about the friend's preferences and personality characteristics, for example, what the friend worried about most. To determine the accuracy of the subjects' responses, they were compared with their friend's self-reports. Fourth and eighth graders did not differ in their knowledge of external or observable characteristics of a friend, but eighth graders knew more intimate information about their best friends than fourth graders did. In addition, subjects with greater cognitive abilities as judged by performance on the Raven's Progressive Matrices had more intimate knowledge of their friends.

In sum, the research data are largely consistent with the hypothesis that intimate friendships first arise in early adolescence. Compared with younger children, early adolescents have both more concern about intimate self-disclosure to friends and more intimate information of their own friends. On the other hand, intimacy is not a unique feature of early adolescent friendships. Friendships may be even more intimate in later adolescence. These findings are not consistent with the hypothesis that intimacy in same-sex friendships decreases when adolescents form heterosexual relationships. On the contrary, Sharabany and her colleagues (1981) found that ratings of intimacy in same-sex and in cross-sex friendships increased simultaneously during adolescence.

Developmental changes in the intimacy of friendship appear to be related to cognitive development, because early adolescents with greater cognitive ability have more intimate knowledge of their friends. They may also be related to changes in the social environment during early adolescence. The decline that has been reported around age 13 in positive ratings of friendships could be explained in various ways, but two intriguing possibilities are that it reflects a temporary period of conflict when cross-sex friendships first arise (Sharabany et al. 1981), or that it is due to changes in friendships that accompany the transition to junior high school (cf. Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg 1973). There is less direct evidence that the development of intimate friendships is related to the biological changes at puberty. These changes probably do affect the content of intimate conversations, however.
boys discuss sexual behavior with their friends (Fine 1980), girls probably do the same, although relevant data are unavailable.

Boys' and girls' friendships—Douvan and Adelson (1966) argued that girls have more intimate friendships than boys during adolescence because, in the socialization of girls, great importance is attached to interpersonal relationships. In contrast, boys are oriented toward assertiveness and achievement rather than warmth and empathy. Intimacy among boys also may be discouraged because of fears that it will lead to homosexuality.

Sex differences have been consistently found in research on adolescents' conceptions of friendship. More often than boys, girls refer to intimate conversations with friends and to intimate knowledge of friends (Berndt 1981c, Bigelow & LaCapa 1980, Douvan & Adelson 1966). Girls also express greater concern about the faithfulness of friends and greater anxiety about rejection by friends (Berndt 1981c, Bigelow & LaCapa 1980, Douvan & Adelson 1966). The girls' comments about faithfulness and rejection may be due to their concern that their former friends will tell their intimate secrets to someone else. On the other hand, sex differences were not found in adolescents' ratings of their intimate self-disclosure and intimate knowledge of a best friend (Sharabany et al. 1981). Sex differences in actual knowledge of intimate information about a best friend also were nonsignificant (Diaz & Berndt, in press).

The inconsistencies in results cannot be attributed simply to differences between measures of intimacy, because the various measures show similar developmental trends. It is possible, however, that the greater verbal fluency of girls than boys has a stronger effect on responses to open-ended questions about friendship conceptions than on ratings or responses to specific questions about a friend's characteristics. Alternatively, girls and boys may differ in the type of intimate friendships they have. Boys may spend less time in conversations about their emotions and ideas than girls, but they may acquire a deep understanding of each other by spending time together. To test this hypothesis, studies including multiple measures of intimacy are needed. Measures of intimacy in actual conversations between friends would be especially desirable.

Effects of intimate friendships—The benefits of an intimate friendship for adolescent development were discussed most extensively by Douvan and Adelson (1966) and by Sullivan (1953). They suggested that intimate conversations with friends can contribute to adolescents' self-esteem or, in Sullivan's terms, to the validation of self-worth by showing adolescents that another person respects their ideas and wants their advice. In addition, intimate adolescent friendships can contribute to the development of the social skills and the sense of security that are necessary for intimate relationships later in life. Finally, intimate conversations with friends may reduce adolescents' fears and anxieties about the physical and emotional changes that occur during early adolescence and, therefore, improve their actual adjustment.

These hypotheses about the effects of intimate friendships have rarely been tested. Using data from a life-span longitudinal study, Maas (1968) selected groups of adults who appeared to be high or low in the intimacy of their relationships with other people. Then he examined the records on these adults' friendships when they were between 8 and 12 years of age (rather than during adolescence). The less intimate men seemed, as children, to have been more critical and jealous of their friends and less sensitive to their friends' feelings than the more intimate men. More significantly, the men and women who were low in intimacy often reported that they were bored and lonely as children. Their reports imply that they may have been socially isolated or rejected by their peers, even though they claimed to have friends. In other words, their behavior as adults might reflect the long-term consequences of not having close friends during childhood rather than the specific effects of not having intimate friendships.

Mannano (1978, 1979) attempted to test the hypothesis that intimate friendships contribute to adolescents' self-esteem. He selected one group of sixth graders who (a) named the same person as a best friend on two occasions 2 weeks apart, (b) stated that they preferred to spend time with a single friend rather than a group of friends, and (c) indicated that their friendship was close and satisfying in various ways, for example, they frequently interacted with the friend and often had intimate conversations with him or her. The comparison group included sixth graders whose friendships did not meet these criteria but who matched the subjects in the first group on IQ and on popularity. As expected, subjects with a close and stable best friendship reported higher self-esteem than those who did not.
The differences in self-esteem between the two groups of sixth graders could be due to the effects of friendships on self-esteem or vice versa. That is, children with higher self-esteem might be preferred as friends and so have closer and more stable friendships. In addition, because the selection of sixth graders for the close-friendship group was based on several criteria, it is not clear that their higher self-esteem was related to the intimacy of their friendships rather than to the other criteria. Finally, it is impossible to tell if friendships have an especially strong influence on self-esteem in early adolescence, because the studies did not include any younger children or late adolescents. Nevertheless, the methods used in these studies might be adapted for more focused investigations of the consequences of intimate friendships during early adolescence.

Mutual Responsiveness in Friendships

The responsiveness of friends to each other's needs and desires has usually been equated with the degree to which they share and help each other. Sullivan (1953) presented the first hypotheses about the development of mutually responsive friendships. He stated that during middle childhood friends and nonfriends are more likely to compete than to help each other. Children become sensitive to their friends' needs only when they develop intimate friendships. Intimate friends try to maximize each other's happiness, they try to assure that their interactions will be mutually satisfying.

Youniss (1980) suggested that Sullivan's hypotheses could be integrated with Piaget's (1932/1965) early theory of the development of reciprocity in peer relationships. Piaget suggested that young children view reciprocity as a straightforward exchange of actions, but that older children construe reciprocity in a more ideal sense, which means treating other people as one would wish to be treated. According to Piaget, there is an analogous change in children's conceptions of equality. Young children insist on the equal allocation of rights or resources in all cases, unless an adult intervenes. Adolescents recognize that treating people unequally may be more fair in certain circumstances. For example, when two boys are running a race, it is fair for the smaller and younger boy to get a head start. Adolescents advocate inequality in starting positions because they want both boys to be equal in the most important sense, that is, equal in the chance to win the race.

Youniss assumed that the changes between middle childhood and early adolescence in conceptions of reciprocity and equality were particularly obvious in friendships. Adolescents act prosocially toward their friends and trust that their friends will do the same. In addition, adolescents consider equality between friends as most satisfying. If one friend has a toy or game that the other lacks, they share it equally. If one friend is hurt or depressed, the other tries to comfort him or her so that they can both feel good.

The actual research on mutual responsiveness in friendships can be summarized most easily when divided into three categories: (a) research on conceptions of friends' prosocial behavior, (b) studies of actual sharing and helping when friends were working on tasks for which they received rewards, and (c) studies of reported intentions to behave prosocially toward friends in situations where no rewards were involved.

Conceptions of friends' prosocial behavior—When first through eighth graders have been asked open-ended questions about friendship, age changes in comments about friends' sharing and helping have not been consistently found. Over this age range, references to friends' prosocial behavior sometimes increase (Berndt 1981c) and sometimes do not show any regular age trends (Bigelow 1977). Mixed results also have been obtained in studies that included early and late adolescents. Douvan and Adelson (1966) reported that girls' references to friends as cooperative and unselfish decreased between 11 and 18 years of age. They did not have comparable data for boys. Adolescents in two other studies rated their agreement with statements about sharing and helping in close friendships (LaGarpa 1979, Sharabany et al. 1981). These ratings did not change substantially between 12 and 20 years of age, although in some cases they declined around seventh grade.

Youniss (1980) reported that consistent age changes occur not in comments about sharing and helping per se but in statements about the conditions in which friends help and share with each other. He found that comments about sharing when one friend was in need or was worse off than the other increased between 6 and 14 years of age. These data support the hypothesis regarding the gradual
development of a new conception of reciprocity and equality between friends. They also imply that mixed results can be expected when investigators fail to determine when and why children or adolescents expect friends to help and share with each other. In other words, there may be clear developmental trends only for references to prosocial behavior in specific contexts.

**Prosocial behavior versus competition**

In research on friends’ actual behavior, the context for sharing and helping is specified by the situation in which these behaviors are assessed. Most investigators have asked pairs of friends to work on a task that provides them with opportunities to help or share with each other. Helping or sharing has some cost for each person, because it reduces the time that they have to work on their own portion of the task. To make these costs salient, the subjects are told that each of them will receive rewards that depend on how well he or she does on the task. When the task is structured in this way, it can be perceived as a competitive one. Instead of helping or sharing with each other, the friends could try to get more rewards than their partner.

In several recent studies with tasks of this type, boys in kindergarten through fourth grade shared less with friends than with other classmates (Berndt 1981b, Staub & Norenberg 1981, Wheeler, Note 1). The boys apparently viewed themselves as competing with their friends, and they shared less to avoid losing the competition. At these ages, competition between friends may be particularly intense because children often compare their performance with that of their friends and they do not want to seem inferior to them (Rubin 1980, Tesser, Note 2). Boys may compete with friends more than girls do because they are generally more competitive (Skarn & Moely 1976) or because they considered performance on the experimental tasks as more important than girls did.

Sullivan’s (1953) hypothesis regarding the change from competitive to mutually responsive friendships around the time of puberty was tested in another recent study (Berndt, Note 3). Fourth, sixth, and eighth graders were paired either with a close friend or with another classmate. The pairs of subjects worked on tasks during which they had opportunities to behave generously and helpfully toward each other. At fourth and sixth grade, the behavior of friends and classmates was not significantly different. At eighth grade, friends were more generous and more helpful toward each other than other classmates were. In response to a posttask questionnaire, eighth graders said that their friends most often tried for equality (i.e., “he [she] tried to get the same amount as I did”), they said other classmates most often tried to compete with them (i.e., “he [she] tried to get more rewards than I did”). Attributions about the partner’s motives did not differ for friends and other classmates at fourth or sixth grade. These findings support the hypothesis that increases in the preference for equality over competition lead to changes in friends’ prosocial behavior between middle childhood and early adolescence.

Age changes in friends’ behavior were not found in a second study with second- and sixth-grade boys (Newcomb & Brady 1982). In this study, however, the boys were not given an explicit choice between sharing and competing with their friends. Instead, pairs of boys were asked to explore a large puzzle box together. As they explored the box, their talking, smiling, laughing, and other behaviors were recorded. Although the boys received rewards at the conclusion of the task, they apparently did not view it as a very competitive one. The boys showed similar behavior when told that their rewards would be equal and when told that the boy who did better would receive more rewards.

Obviously, these few studies do not provide a firm foundation for conclusions about the development of mutually responsive friendships. Nevertheless, the studies do illustrate that friends’ prosocial behavior depends not only on their age but also on the situational context. Prosocial behavior between friends seems to increase with age when it depends on the friends’ preference for equality in outcomes over competition. This age change may be jointly influenced by cognitive and social factors. Adolescents have more mature conceptions of reciprocity and equality than young children. Adolescents may also appreciate that competition between friends makes it difficult to maintain an intimate relationship. Age changes in friends’ prosocial behavior are not apparent when motives to compete are less strong (see also Newcomb, Brady, & Hartup 1979). The friends’ behavior in these situations may reflect the need at all ages for friends to cooperate with each other and resolve conflicts when they arise (see Gottman & Parkhurst 1980).
Sex differences in prosocial intentions —
In many situations, sharing and helping do not affect friends' rewards or their relative performance. For example, a boy may let his best friend ride a bicycle that he just received for his birthday. Evidence on friends' actual behavior in situations of this type apparently has not been obtained, but friends have been asked to say how they would behave in such cases. In other words, they have been asked about their prosocial intentions toward each other.

In two studies with children ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade (Berndt 1981b, Berndt, Note 3), subjects were asked about their prosocial intentions toward one of their close friends or toward another classmate in situations like that of sharing a new bicycle. Boys and girls agreed about how much they would help and share with classmates who were not close friends. However, girls said they would help and share with a close friend more than another classmate and boys said they would treat close friends and other classmates similarly. The boys' and girls' responses did not vary with age. Comparable differences have been found in the actual behavior of children and adolescents (Feshbach 1969, Feshbach & Sones 1971). When two friends were talking together, they less quickly allowed a third person to join the conversation if they were girls rather than boys.

The girls' responses in both types of studies have been attributed to their preference for relatively exclusive friendships. By treating friends more positively than they treat other classmates, girls indicate who is and who is not in their friendship group. Boys seem more willing to include other classmates in their group of friends, because they rapidly let other classmates join their conversations and they say they will help and share with them as much as with their current friends. The sex differences may be related to previous evidence that girls prefer interactions with smaller groups of peers than boys do (Savin-Williams 1980). The differences also may be related to boys' greater involvement in team sports (Lever 1978). Finally, girls may prefer exclusive friendships because they are more intimate. At the present time, none of these hypotheses has been tested directly.

Effects of friends' prosocial behavior —
Sullivan (1953) assumed that adolescents who behave unselfishly toward their friends would begin to show similar behavior toward other people as well. Mannarino (1976, 1979) tested this hypothesis in the same studies described earlier. In selecting sixth graders for the close-friendship group, one of the criteria that Mannarino considered was whether or not they reported helping and sharing with their friend. Then he recorded the sixth graders' altruistic responses on a questionnaire measure and their altruistic behavior during an experimental game. The sixth graders were told that they were playing the game with a partner who was not present and who was a stranger to them. As expected, sixth graders with a single best friendship gave more altruistic responses on the questionnaire and showed more altruistic behavior during the game.

Of course, these findings raise the same questions as those discussed earlier. Friendships may affect adolescents' altruistic behavior or vice versa. The differences between the friendship groups may be due to features of friendship other than mutual responsiveness, and the results do not show that early adolescent friendships have greater effects than those at other ages. The research reviewed earlier implies that friendships during early adolescence may have the most influence on prosocial behavior in competitive situations. This hypothesis might be tested in future research that builds on the studies by Mannarino.

Similarity between Friends
The degree of similarity between friends on various characteristics has been investigated in a large number of studies dating back to the 1920s (see Hartup, in press). Throughout childhood and adolescence, friends are similar in age, sex, and race (Hallinan 1979, Kandel 1978b, Tuma & Hallinan 1979). These results are not surprising, because children most often interact with peers who are similar on these characteristics.

The similarity between friends in personality and social behavior is more controversial (Douvan & Adelson 1966, Gottman & Parkhurst 1980). During early adolescence, similarity between friends may make it easier to achieve an intimate relationship. Friends' similarity may also reflect an aversion to differences between people at these ages. On the other hand, early adolescents sometimes are described as choosing friends with complementary interests and traits, friends whom they can idealize or friends who engage in behaviors that fascinate them but that they are afraid to perform themselves.
The debate over similarity and complementarity is difficult to settle by empirical research. It is possible to determine how similar friends are on specific characteristics. It is more difficult to determine whether or not the remaining differences reflect a conscious choice of friends with complementary interests. Consequently, the research data are less suited for resolving this issue than for showing the types of similarity that are most important during early adolescence.

**Similarity in early adolescent friendships**

Early adolescents appear to be similar to their friends in two general classes of attributes and behaviors. First, friends have a similar orientation toward school. Friends are similar in their school attitudes, their educational aspirations, and their actual achievement (Ball 1981, Kandel 1978b, Epstein, in press-a). These findings indicate the importance of schooling in adolescents' lives and the need for agreement between friends on its importance. If friends have different attitudes or values regarding school achievement, they are likely to have frequent conflicts with each other. For example, one of them may want to play basketball or go to a shopping center rather than working on assigned homework. If the friend insists on completing the homework, they may start to argue and their friendship may weaken. Conversely, adolescents with similar views of school are likely to have more pleasant interactions and a more stable relationship.

Second, friends are similar in their orientation toward contemporary teen culture. They like the same kind of music, have similar tastes in clothes, and enjoy the same kinds of leisure-time activities (Ball 1981). Moreover, if an adolescent frequently drinks alcoholic beverages or uses drugs, his or her friends are likely to do so as well (Kandel 1978b). Once again, the similarity between friends on these attributes and behaviors indicates their importance in early adolescents' lives. Adolescents who disagree about these matters probably will not become friends.

Finally, in almost all of the research the degree of similarity between friends was examined across an entire sample of adolescents. For certain purposes, an idiographic or case-study approach may be more illuminating. Ball (1981) studied the social relationships of early adolescents in one British school over a long period, using the technique of participant observation. He concluded that friends usually were similar in their orientation toward school and peer culture, but that some friendships were based on more specific interests. One pair of girls had a common interest in horses. They spent most of their time after school riding or working at a stable. Three boys seemed to be close friends because they were in the scouts together. These examples demonstrate that adolescents prefer friends who share interests that are important to them, whether these interests are common in the peer group or relatively idiosyncratic.

**Similarity and social influence**

Until recently, most writers focused almost entirely on the role of similarity in the formation of friendships. Similarity can develop during the course of a friendship, however, as friends influence each other's interests and behavior. As Kandel (1978a) pointed out, the selection of friends similar to oneself and the development of similarity through social influence cannot be distinguished in cross-sectional studies. In a longitudinal study, it is possible to separate these two processes by examining changes in friends' similarity over time.

Kandel surveyed a large sample of ninth through twelfth graders at the beginning and the end of a school year. Data were obtained on the adolescents' self-reported marijuana use, involvement in delinquent activity, educational aspirations, and political identification. During the school year, there were changes in friendships and in the other measures. Information on the initial distribution of the adolescents' responses and the overall frequency of changes in the measures and in friendships was used to form estimates of the contribution of selection and social influence to the similarity between friends at the end of the year. It is not surprising that both selection and influence appeared to have significant effects on all measures of attitudes and behavior. It is interesting to note that the effects of selection and social influence seemed to be relatively equal in strength.

Epstein (in press-a) obtained measures of self-reliance, school attitudes, college plans, school grades, and academic achievement from fifth, sixth, eighth, and eleventh graders during one academic year and again a year later. To examine the effects of social influence, Epstein compared groups of adolescents whose friends at time 1 had scores that were generally similar to, higher than, or lower than the adolescents' own scores. On nearly all measures, adolescents' scores improved over time if they had higher-scoring friends. Adolescents' scores...
declined if they had lower-scoring friends. The size of these effects did not change regularly with grade.

Epstein emphasized that selection and social influence normally operate together in friendships. Adolescents select friends who are similar to themselves on certain characteristics, but because the friends differ on other characteristics, there is still room for further similarity to develop through social influence. Friends also could become less similar over time, because of differences in their rates of development or changes in other aspects of their social environments. For these reasons, friendships always involve a blend of similarity and complementarity.

Unfortunately, the processes that contribute to similarity between friends have not been examined directly or even considered carefully. Few writers have investigated the mechanisms by which similarity in specific characteristics facilitates the formation and maintenance of friendships (but see Gottman & Parkhurst 1980). Few writers have investigated the mechanisms by which friends influence each other’s characteristics (but see Youniss 1980). An understanding of these processes seems more important than further explorations of the type and degree of similarity between friends.

Finally, little attention has been given to developmental changes in friends’ similarity or the processes responsible for it. If friendships are particularly significant during early adolescence, either the selection of similar friends or the production of similarity through social influence might be particularly obvious during this period. Epstein’s (in press-a) findings suggest that friends’ social influence does not vary greatly with age, but additional research is required.

**Stability and Change in Friendships**

Hypotheses about the stability of early adolescent friendships usually have been derived from more general hypotheses about early adolescence itself. Douvan and Adelson (1966) suggested that the onset of puberty is associated with rapid changes in moods and needs and, therefore, with instability in friendships. Other writers have argued that the stability of friendships should increase between childhood and adolescence because it is related to the maturity of children’s friendship conceptions, which in turn is related to cognitive development (Bigelow & LaGapa 1980, Selman 1981). From a third perspective, changes in friendships are due to differences between friends in their rates of development (Rubin 1980). Because of these differences, friends who mutually had similar interests and attributes may find at some point that they are no longer similar. Then each of them may try to select a new friend with whom they feel more compatible. If differences in rates of development were larger (or smaller) during early adolescence than during other periods of life, then friendships should be less (or more) stable at these ages. Without evidence on the variability in rates of development at different ages, specific hypotheses about age changes in stability cannot be stated.

**Stability in existing friendships**—The earliest studies of stability in friendships were done by Horrocks and his colleagues (e.g., Thompson & Horrocks 1947, see also Hartup, in press). In these studies, children and adolescents were asked to name their three best friends on two occasions about 2 weeks apart. The stability of these nominations increased linearly with age, but even at 11–14 years of age roughly 50% of first choices changed over a 2-week period. On the other hand, these data may underestimate the stability of friendships for two reasons. First, the requirement that all children name three best friends could introduce errors because it forces some children to name more or fewer friends than they actually have (Hallman 1979). Second, the analyses were based on individual subjects’ choices, whether or not these choices were reciprocated. However, friendship refers to a reciprocal relationship—you like me and I like you—and un reciprocated choices usually are less stable than reciprocated ones (e.g., Kandel 1978a).

In more recent studies that are less subject to these problems, little change in the stability of friendships was found between fourth and sixth grade (Tuma & Hallman 1979), fourth and eighth grade (Busk, Ford, & Schulman 1973), or fifth and eleventh grade (Epstein, in press-b). During early adolescence, most friendships remain stable for periods of several months (Busk et al. 1973, Hallman 1978–1979). Friendships do appear to be less stable at first grade than at fourth grade (Berndt 1981a). Nevertheless, their stability does not seem to increase or decrease substantially between fourth and eleventh grade.

What explanation could be given for the lack of changes in stability across this age?
range? One argument might be that the biological changes in early adolescence that promote unstable friendships and the cognitive changes that promote stable friendships cancel each other out. Alternatively, the results could be attributed to the relative stability of the social environment in which friendships form and are maintained. In their schools and neighborhoods, most children and adolescents probably interact with a fairly stable peer group. The stability of this group both contributes to the continuation of existing friendships and places limits on the ability to "shop around" for new friends. The influence of the social environment on the stability of friendships could be examined empirically. For example, it could be assessed in schools that differ in the amount of student turnover per year, or among students who do and do not move to a new school when they move to a higher grade.

The formation of new friendships — The stability of old friendships and the formation of new ones must certainly be related to each other. It is surprising, therefore, that most investigators have examined one phenomenon or the other, not both. One of the few investigations of friendship formation in a natural setting was conducted by Eder and Hallman (1978). They asked fifth and sixth graders to name their best friends on seven occasions during a school year. From these responses, patterns of relationships among triads of children were identified. Then changes over time in specific types of triads were examined.

The changes over time in triads that included a dyadic friendship varied with sex. Pairs of girls who were friends seemed to discourage other girls from joining their dyad. If on one occasion two girls had a reciprocated friendship and a third girl named one of them but was not named in return, the third girl was not likely to repeat this choice on a later occasion. Apparently, the two girls did not recognize or accept her bid for friendship with them, so she withdrew it. In contrast, when two boys had a reciprocated friendship and a third boy nominated one of them, the third boy was likely to be named as a best friend by both boys in the dyad on a later occasion. In other words, the boys who originally had a dyadic friendship expanded their dyad into a triad of best friends.

Eder and Hallman concluded that their results demonstrated a preference by girls for exclusively dyadic friendships. On the other hand, they noted that the sex differences varied in different classrooms and were absent in one relatively "open" classroom. In addition, both their own data and other data indicate that girls do form friendship groups that are larger than a dyad. When asked to name their best friends, girls typically name several of their classmates, just as boys do. Sex differences in the number of classmates named as best friends usually are nonsignificant (Eder & Hallman 1978, Hallman 1979, Reisman & Shorr 1978), but girls sometimes name more best friends than boys (Epstein, in press-b).

Even if girls have more exclusive friendships, they would not necessarily be less willing to make new friends. They could make a new exclusive friendship after ending an old one. Thus their willingness to make new friends may be more closely linked to the stability than to the exclusiveness of their old friendships. Eder and Hallman (1978) did not report the overall stability of boys' and girls' friendships in their study. Girls' friendships sometimes appear to be more stable than those of boys (Epstein, in press-b), but differences in the opposite direction have been reported (Tuma & Hallman 1979) and mixed results have been obtained when several measures of stability were used (Kon & Losenkov 1978).

In summary, conclusions about sex differences in the features of friendships must be stated cautiously. Girls may make new friends less rapidly than boys, but this may not be true in all circumstances. Furthermore, the differences between boys' and girls' friendships can be best understood when the stability of old friendships and the formation of new friendships are examined simultaneously. More descriptive data on stability and change in friendships are necessary before specific hypotheses about the antecedents or consequences of these changes can be evaluated. Having unstable friendships is not necessarily damaging to children or adolescents if they form close and satisfying new friendships when they end old ones. Nevertheless, constant changes in friendships may be an indication of deficits in the social skills that promote enduring relationships. These hypotheses cannot be adequately evaluated with descriptive data alone. A systematic exploration of the processes that lead to stability and change in friendships also is necessary.

Conclusions

Distinctive features of early adolescent friendships — Early adolescent friendships often
are assumed to be more ideal relationships—characterized by greater intimacy and mutual responsiveness—than friendships during other periods of life. The empirical research provides moderate support for this assumption. In situations where friends could compete with each other or try for equality in outcomes, friends show a stronger preference for equality during early adolescence than during middle childhood. When asked to describe their conceptions of friendship, early adolescents refer more than young children to friends' intimate self-disclosure and their intimate knowledge of each other. Moreover, early adolescents rate their own friendships as more intimate, and they actually seem to have more intimate knowledge of their friends, than younger children do.

In other respects, early adolescent friendships do not seem to be uniquely different from those in middle childhood or later adolescence. Same-sex friendships are even more intimate during late adolescence than during early adolescence. In situations where pressures to compete are relatively weak, the degree of mutual responsiveness between friends does not change substantially between middle childhood and early adolescence. Moreover, age changes in the stability of friendships are rare between fourth and eleventh grade. Across this age range, most friendships last for several months. The stability of friendships is lower in the early school grades than later, but it does not appear to be markedly higher or lower in early adolescence than in the preadolescent or late adolescent years.

Current data are too scarce to attempt any answer to certain questions about early adolescent friendships. At all ages, friends are similar to each other on various characteristics. Early adolescents seem most similar to their friends in their orientation toward school and toward contemporary peer culture. The friends' similarity is due partly to the selection of friends like oneself and partly to processes of social influence that lead to increasing similarity between friends. Early adolescent friendships might differ from those at other ages either in the extent of friends' similarity, the characteristics on which they are most similar, or the relative impact of selection and social influence on friends' similarity. None of these issues has been adequately investigated thus far.

Finally, the distinctive features of early adolescent friendships have been explained in several ways, but the current support for these explanations is limited and largely indirect. The changes in moods, drives, or impulses that are associated with the onset of puberty may produce a need or a desire for intimate friendships, but they may affect the topics of intimate conversations more than the appearance of intimacy per se. The onset of puberty does not have a pronounced effect on the stability of friendships or, apparently, on the development of mutually responsive friendships. The age changes in friends' intimacy and mutual responsiveness seem to be more influenced by cognitive development. With increases in their cognitive abilities, adolescents become more capable of sharing thoughts and feelings with friends, they also acquire a more mature understanding of reciprocity and equality in friendships.

Less attention has been given to the influence of the social environment on early adolescent friendships. Writers commonly assume that same-sex friendships are especially intense during early adolescence because of the increase in independence from parents and the absence of close heterosexual relationships. However, the links between same-sex friendships, parent-child relationships, and heterosexual relationships rarely have been explored. Other aspects of the social environment also have been largely ignored. The relative stability of friendships between fourth and eleventh grade may be related to the stability of the same-sex peer group. The decline in ratings of friendship around seventh grade that was found in two recent studies (LaGaipa 1979, Sharabany et al 1981) may be related to the transition from elementary to junior high school. Up to now, these possibilities have not been systematically investigated.

Patterns in boys' and girls' friendships—When asked about their conceptions of friendship, girls mention the intimate sharing of thoughts and feelings more often than boys do. When asked how they would behave toward a close friend or another classmate, girls say they would help and share with friends more than with other classmates. Boys said they would treat friends and other classmates similarly. Girls also seem less willing to include a nonfriend in an ongoing conversation than boys are. If girls already have a reciprocated friendship, they seem less willing than boys to make new friends. These findings all suggest that girls' friendships are more intimate and more exclusive than those of boys.
The findings from other research cloud the picture. In one study (Sharabany et al. 1981), girls did not rate their own friendships as more intimate than those of boys. In another study (Diaz & Berndt, in press), girls did not have more intimate knowledge of a close friend than boys. Girls do not report that they have fewer friends than boys, sometimes they report more friends. Girls may be unwilling to make new friends when they already have several stable friendships, but evidence on the stability of friendships is mixed.

Taken together, the evidence on sex differences in friendships is puzzling. The differences seem to be reliable, because several of the specific findings were replicated in separate samples. The results do not suggest that girls simply have closer and more intimate friendships than boys. Rather, they imply that boys and girls have different patterns of friendships. The exact nature of these patterns and their origins remain to be determined.

Early adolescent friendships and psychological development—Numerous hypotheses about the effects of early adolescent friendships have been proposed. Most of these hypotheses have not yet been tested. There is strong evidence that friends influence one another’s attitudes, social behavior, and academic achievement. There is suggestive evidence that close and stable friendships can enhance adolescents’ altruism and self-esteem. In contrast, there is virtually no evidence for or against the hypothesis that friendships contribute to social adjustment during adolescence and later in life.

Because of the theoretical and practical significance of hypotheses about the effects of friendships, they should be one focus of future research. In the planning of future research, two major gaps in the existing literature should be considered. First, little is known about the relations among different features of friendship. Sullivan (1953) suggested that intimacy and mutual responsiveness in friendships go together. He also implied that all friendships can be placed on a single dimension of closeness. If this is true, then tests of hypotheses about the effects of specific features of friendship, such as intimacy, may be less appropriate than tests of hypotheses about the consequences of generally close friendships (e.g., Mannarino 1976). To resolve this issue, research on the relations among the features of friendships is needed.

Second, most of the recent research on friendship was designed to provide descriptive information about friendships rather than information about the processes that operate during friends’ interactions to structure and change their relationship. The neglect of processes is most obvious in the research on similarity between friends and the stability of friendships. More is known about how friends are similar than how they became similar. More is known about how often old friendships end than why they do so. Process-oriented research seems likely to contribute greatly to an understanding of the effects of friendships on development during early adolescence and other periods of life.

Reference Notes
1. Wheeler, V. Personal communication, February 8, 1982

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