

## 11 Friends' influence on school adjustment: A motivational analysis

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Best friends can have a powerful influence on children's attitudes toward school, behavior in class, and academic achievement. The influence of friends has long been a concern of educators and educational researchers. Several decades ago, James Coleman (1961) argued that most high-school students care more about being popular with peers than about doing well in school, in part because their peers emphasize academic success less than social success. Many recent writers have echoed this theme (e.g., Bishop, 1989).

By contrast, other writers have emphasized the positive effects of friendships on children's adjustment and development. Piaget (1932/1965) proposed that interactions with friends or other peers are crucial for the development of a mature morality. Sullivan (1953) suggested that intimate friendships among preadolescents contribute to high self-esteem and to social understanding (Buhrmester & Furman, 1986). More recently, many researchers have tested the hypothesis that support from friends enhances the social and academic adjustment of children and adolescents (e.g., Berndt & Keefe, 1995).

Both perspectives on friends' influence capture part of the truth, but both are incomplete and therefore misleading. Friends influence children and adolescents through two distinct pathways (Berndt, 1992). First, students at all grade levels are influenced by the attitudes, behavior, and other characteristics of their friends. This influence is not always negative. Students whose friends have positive characteristics, such as high grades, are likely to improve their own grades over time (Epstein, 1983). One goal of our chapter is to outline various motives that account for friends' influence by this pathway.

Second, students are influenced by the quality of their friendships. For example, friendships are higher in quality when they are more intimate (Sullivan, 1953). Friendships are lower in quality when the friends often

engage in conflicts or hostile rivalry with one another (Laursen, 1993). The quality of students' friendships affects their social and emotional adjustment. It can, in turn, affect their adjustment to school. The second goal of our chapter is to outline motives related to friendship quality. Identifying these motives should increase understanding of this second pathway of influence.

Before proceeding, we should say more precisely what we mean by motives and by school adjustment. Weiner (1992) proposed that the domain of motivation includes all questions about why organisms think and behave as they do. This broad definition includes motives that actors themselves report. For example, students sometimes say that their goal at school is trying to do what a teacher asks (Wentzel, 1991a). The definition also includes motives of which a person may not be aware. Unconscious motives are emphasized not only in psychoanalytic theories, but also in some learning theories and social-psychological theories (see Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Weiner, 1992). Both types of motives are considered in the chapter.

Like motivation, school adjustment is a broad construct. Our focus is on three facets of adjustment. First, students' adjustment to school is reflected by their attitudes toward their classes, their teachers, and other experiences at school. Well-adjusted students value what they are learning and are positively involved in classroom activities (Berndt & Miller, 1990; Wentzel, 1993). Second, students' adjustment is reflected by their classroom behavior. Well-adjusted students behave appropriately and are rarely disruptive (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Dubow, Tisak, Causey, Hryshko, & Reid, 1991). Third, students' adjustment is reflected by their academic achievement. Well-adjusted students learn what is taught in school, and so receive high grades and test scores.

Friends may affect all three facets of school adjustment through both influence pathways outlined earlier. The first pathway is the focus of the next section of the chapter. We emphasize that many motives contribute to the influence of friends' characteristics. The second pathway is the focus of the following section. We emphasize that friends have goals not only for themselves as individuals, but for themselves and their friends viewed as a unit. An outline of the two pathways of influence and their associated motives is given in Table 11.1.

Also discussed in the initial sections is how friends' influence through the two pathways might change with age. Unfortunately, little evidence on such changes is available, and the evidence is not always consistent. We summarize the conclusions that can be drawn, and then use our motivational analysis to suggest new perspectives on the issue.

Table 11 *Motives contributing to friends' influence through two pathways*

Pathway I: Influences of friends' characteristics		Pathway II: Effects of friendship quality
1. The need for approval	1. Relationship ("we") motives (related to positive features)	1. Relationship ("we") motives (related to positive features)
2. Identification with friends	2. Individualistic/competitive motives (related to negative features)	2. Individualistic/competitive motives (related to negative features)
3. The self-enhancement motive		
4. The need to be correct		

In a third section, we consider implications of the motivational analysis for educational practice. We focus specifically on strategies for dealing with friends who negatively influence one another. Our recommended strategies must be interpreted cautiously, because many questions about friends' influence remain open. In the final section, we suggest directions for future research on these questions.

### Motives related to the influence of friends' characteristics

Both popular and scholarly writers have suggested that pressure from peers contributes to drug use, delinquent behavior, and apathy toward school (Ansley & McCleary, 1992; Bishop, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). These writers rarely say which peers are the presumed source of this negative pressure, but other data suggest that close friends have more influence than do other peers (Downs, 1987). Nevertheless, many kinds of evidence show that this view of friends' influence is seriously distorted. We begin this section by examining evidence related to the notion of friends' pressure. Then we consider four motives that better explain why students' friends affect their adjustment to school. Finally, we review the few existing studies of developmental changes in this pathway of influence.

### *Inaccurate ideas about friends' pressure*

The notion that pressure from friends has strong and negative effects on children and adolescents is inaccurate in three major ways. First, this notion exaggerates the magnitude of friends' influence. A popular magazine recently published a survey that was completed by more than 100,000 adolescents (Ansley & McCleary, 1992). One question asked, "How much peer pressure are you under to do things that probably are wrong?" Although the reporters who summarized the results concluded that "peer pressure is a big problem," the adolescents' responses suggest

otherwise. Most adolescents (66%) said the amount of pressure they were under was "not much." Another 14% said they were under no pressure to do things that are wrong. Only 20% of the adolescents said they were under "a lot" of pressure.

More systematic research confirms that strong pressure from friends to engage in specific behaviors is rare. Naturalistic observations of adolescents' interactions with friends have shown that most decisions are reached by consensus rather than coercive pressure (Suttles, 1968). Usually, the friends discuss various options until they agree on what to do. Rarely is one adolescent pressured to conform to the rest of the group.

Research on friends' pressure and school adjustment is limited. Coleman's (1961) evidence for negative effects of peers on academic achievement was indirect, and writers such as Bishop (1989) mentioned no empirical data at all. We obtained relevant data with two samples of junior-high-school students (Berndt, Miller, & Park, 1989). We asked students how much influence their friends had on the three aspects of school adjustment defined earlier: attitudes, behavior in class, and academic achievement. Most students said their friends did not affect these aspects of their school adjustment. Evidence presented later implies that the students underestimated their friends' influence on them, but the students' comments suggest that any influence of friends did not result from overt pressure.

A second inaccuracy in popular ideas about friends' pressure concerns the direction of its effects. For most students, these effects are more likely to be positive than negative. High-school students in several large samples reported that their friends discouraged drug and alcohol use, delinquent activities, and other types of antisocial behavior more than they encouraged them (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Keefe, 1994). The students also said their friends encouraged studying for school subjects more than they discouraged studying.

The third inaccuracy in popular ideas about friends' pressure concerns the motives that account for friends' influence. These ideas imply that students conform to their friends because they fear they will be punished if they don't. However, students can escape any punishment by ending those friendships and making new friends. Furthermore, neither children nor adolescents are as lacking in independence as is often suggested. When completing surveys, many adolescents report that they make their own decisions rather than relying on the advice of parents or friends (Sebald, 1986). In experimental studies, some children and adolescents show anti-conformity, rejecting their peers' judgments and making different ones (Hartup, 1983).

According to Piaget (1932/1965), friendships have features that limit both the use and the effectiveness of coercive pressure. Friends assume that their relationship is based on equality and mutual respect, so decisions must be made through negotiation rather than domination by one person. Adolescents in our previous study suggested this kind of mutual respect when explaining why their friends had no influence on their school adjustment (Berndt et al., 1989). For example, one boy said that his friend "doesn't try to change my opinions, and I don't try to change his."

This argument should not be carried too far. Although students' adjustment to school does not depend greatly on their response to friends' pressure, friends do influence attitudes, behavior, and achievement in school (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Epstein, 1983; Kandel, 1978). By drawing upon a long tradition of developmental and social-psychological research, we can identify the motivation that accounts for these effects of friends' characteristics.

**Four motives that underlie friends' influence.** For decades, questions about interpersonal influence have been explored by social psychologists interested in persuasion, attitude change, decision making in groups, and other phenomena (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Zanna, Olson, & Herman, 1987; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). These questions have also been explored by developmental psychologists interested in social learning, conformity to peers and parents, basic socialization processes, and other topics in social development (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Hartup, 1983; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Not surprisingly, a strong consensus about the motives responsible for interpersonal influence does not exist. The lack of consensus is due partly to researchers' use of different terms to refer to the same or overlapping constructs. In addition, multiple motives are linked to social influence, and many researchers have focused on only one. We argue that four motives should be considered when trying to understand how students are affected by their friends' adjustment to school (see Table 1). Some writers might propose motives other than the four that we present, but we assume other motives are less important than the following four or are largely synonymous with them (see, however, Erdley; Ford; Kupersmidt et al., Wentzel, this volume, for alternative perspectives on social goals).

The first motive that underlies the influence of friends' characteristics is students' need for social approval (Hoving, Hamm, & Galvin, 1969; Juvonen & Weiner, 1993) or their impression motivation (Chaiken et al., 1989). Students want to be liked by their friends, so they try to do things

that will meet the friends' expectations or make a positive impression on them. This motive is associated theoretically with the idea of social reinforcement. Praise and other kinds of positive comments from friends can function as rewards for specific behaviors by students and so increase the likelihood of those behaviors (Hartup, 1983). In the broadest sense, this motive relates to Skinner's principle of positive reinforcement, a principle common to all learning theories.

The category of positive reinforcement includes both material rewards and social reinforcers like praise. However, for understanding the influence of friends, praise and other social reinforcers are more important than are material rewards. Friends rarely give things to one another as rewards for specific behaviors. Therefore, the construct of social approval corresponds to the attributes of friends' interactions more precisely than does the broader construct of positive reinforcement.

In the domain of school adjustment, the importance of the needs for social approval was first emphasized by Crandall, Katkovsky, and Preston (1960). They argued that "the basic goal of achievement behavior is the attainment of approval and the avoidance of disapproval" (p. 791). They assumed that approval comes from both teachers and peers, but little of their research focused directly on this motive. In particular, they did not explore whether the need for approval is related to friends' influence on school adjustment.

Many studies in laboratory settings have shown the effects of peer reinforcement on children's behavior (Hartup, 1983). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that reinforcement from friends and other classmates also affects students' attitudes, behavior, and achievement in school. Whether friends typically encourage a positive or a negative adjustment to school is a controversial question. Consistent with the positive view is the evidence mentioned earlier that students say friends encourage them to study hard at school (Brown et al., 1986). Also consistent with this view is evidence that students higher in academic achievement are usually more popular with peers (Coie, 1990).

There is conflicting evidence, however. The eighth graders in one recent study (Juvonen & Murdock, 1993; see also Juvonen, this volume) said they thought a peer who got good grades would generally be more popular than a peer who got bad grades. However, the eighth graders thought a peer who got bad grades but who was very smart and tried very hard would be more popular than a peer with the same attributes who got good grades. To explain this finding, the researchers speculated that the eighth graders might have assumed the high-achieving student would "set

the curve" for the class and make them look worse. Alternatively, the eighth graders might have viewed the high achiever as accepting traditional expectations about the value of school achievement that they themselves rejected. Notice that these two explanations differ in that they suggest that students generally value, or are disdainful of, high academic achievement.

Other findings indicate that students' level of academic achievement affects their selection of friends. Friendship selection, in turn, affects the attitudes and behavior for which students receive friends' praise (Ball, 1981; Schwartz, 1981). High-achieving students are usually friends with classmates who encourage them to get good grades and not to misbehave in class. Low-achieving students are usually friends with classmates who express no interest in getting good grades and who often misbehave in class. Moreover, students shift over time toward their friends' attitudes and behavior. The shift can be attributed partly to the students' need for their friends' approval.

A second motive that partly accounts for the influence of friends is the desire of students to think and behave like their friends. Students normally choose best friends who have characteristics or talents that the students admire (Hallinan, 1983). This admiration motivates students to act as their friends do.

Kelman (1961) described the process leading to emulation of an admired individual as identification. The concept of identification originated in Freudian theory, where it had multiple meanings (Mischel, 1970). Identification was used to refer to actual imitation of another's behavior, to the mechanisms leading to imitation, to a motive to be like another, and to a belief that one has the same attributes as the other. Later, social learning theorists argued that the core meanings of identification were the same as their principles of observational learning and imitation (Bandura, 1969). That is, people learn how and when to perform certain behaviors by observing other people.

Observational learning is different from Kelman's (1961) concept of identification, however. Social learning theorists assume that people imitate others' behavior mainly because they believe they will be rewarded for doing so (Bandura, 1977). By contrast, Kelman retained Freud's assumption that identification depends on a specific motive to be like the other person. It depends, therefore, on having a special relationship with the other person.

Kelman also argued that identification involves a continuing relationship between the person being influenced and the person who is the source

of influence. One byproduct of this continuing relationship is that the behavior of the person being influenced changes whenever the other person's behavior changes. For example, when students are strongly identified with particular friends, they will change their own interests and activities whenever those of their friends change. When the friends express dislike for a particular teacher, the students will also form negative attitudes toward that teacher. If the friends later begin to like that teacher for some reason, the students will also develop greater liking for the teacher. By contrast, the principle of observational learning does not imply that students will track the variations in their friends' behavior so closely, because it does not assume such enduring links between models and observers.

Several experimental studies of observational learning from peers have been done (Hartup, 1983). Few studies, however, have focused on aspects of school adjustment or examined the influence of friends in particular. The effects of peer models on students' achievement and self-efficacy have been demonstrated (e.g., Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987), but these studies did not use friends as models. In addition, friends' similarity in academic achievement and educational aspirations has often been attributed to modeling (e.g., Kandel & Andrews, 1987). However, the processes leading to friends' similarity have not been assessed directly.

Despite the absence of direct evidence, few researchers or educators would deny that students' identification with friends has some effect on their school adjustment. Students' desires to behave exactly like their friends may often be exaggerated, but students certainly pay attention to how their friends talk about school, behave in school, and achieve academically.

Moreover, the motive to identify with friends is theoretically significant because it falls within the category of intrinsic motivation. Students do as their friends do, not because their friends provide rewards for imitation, but because the friends have positive characteristics that the students want to have. Thus, this motive contrasts sharply with the notion that friends have influence because they punish students who try to resist their coercive pressure.

A third motive related to friends' influence is self-enhancement. Students partly judge their own competence by comparing their performance with that of their classmates. According to Veroff (1969), social comparison increases students' motivation to achieve and contributes to aggressive competition with classmates. Veroff proposed that students who are the winners in academic competition often receive approval from peers as well. This social approval further enhances their social comparison motivation.

Veroff's ideas are intriguing because they contrast sharply with the more recent speculations of Juvonen and Murdock (1993; see also Juvonen, this volume). Recall that these researchers assumed competition in academics is resented by classmates and reduces a student's popularity. These opposing viewpoints also exist when the question is focused on friends rather than all peers. As noted earlier, friendships are based on equality, which makes friends likely targets for social comparison (Berndt, 1986). Veroff's (1969) theory implies that these comparisons enhance students' efforts to achieve academically, to prove they are as good as, or better than, their friends. Juvonen and Weiner's (1993) ideas imply that these comparisons make students less eager to achieve academically, because their success might make their friends resentful.

Tesser's (1984) self-esteem maintenance model suggests a resolution to this controversy. He argues that students try to show their superiority to friends in areas most relevant to their self-esteem, while admitting their friends' superiority to them in less relevant areas. Thus, fifth and sixth graders who consider mathematics as very important also rate their performance in math more highly than that of their friends. Fifth and sixth graders who consider mathematics as relatively unimportant rate their friends' performance in math more highly than their own (Tesser, Campbell, and Smith, 1984).

However, students are not completely free to define domains of achievements as unimportant. For example, not all parents would accept their child's assertion that getting a "C" in math is unimportant. For this reason, students cannot always avoid direct comparisons with friends. In addition, they cannot always escape the academic competition that such comparisons provoke.

Ethnographic research suggests that friends' competition takes different forms, depending on a student's level of achievement. High-achieving students often compete with friends to get the best grades on tests (Ball, 1981; Schwartz, 1981). These students express the self-enhancement motive by trying to show their academic superiority to friends. Low-achieving students often compete with friends in misbehavior, trying to enhance their self-esteem by creating the greatest disruption in class or by challenging teachers' authority most directly (Ball, 1981; Schwartz, 1981). In short, the motive to distinguish oneself – as a scholar or as a scoundrel – can partly explain both students' own behavior and a route by which friends influence them.

The fourth motive that partly accounts for friends' influence is the need to be correct (Hoving et al., 1969), or validity-seeking (Chaiken et al.,

1989). This motive refers to a person's desire to hold correct beliefs and make reasonable decisions. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) suggested the distinction between this motive and the three previous ones when they contrasted processes of normative and informational influence.

Normative influence depends on a person's desire to conform to the positive expectations of others. Viewed narrowly, it is the same as the need for social approval. This category has been expanded to include all influence processes that involve a person's reactions to other people's opinions and behavior (Isenberg, 1986). This broad definition encompasses all three motives discussed earlier.

By contrast, informational influence depends on a person's acceptance of another person's arguments as evidence about reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). In other words, the person focuses on the accuracy of those arguments rather than their source. This category has been expanded in more recent research to include all influence processes that involve a person's comprehension and evaluation of relevant arguments (Isenberg, 1986).

Many types of studies show that the need to be correct provides a partial explanation of friends' influence on children and adolescents. Its importance is perhaps most obvious in research on peer collaboration during problem solving (Damon & Phelps, 1989). Students often show improved performance on cognitive problems after working on them with a peer. This improvement is not due entirely to observational learning, that is, poorer students learning from better students. Often, two students who are working together both gain a better understanding of cognitive problems after listening to one another's arguments (Tudge, 1992).

Studies of peer collaboration can partly explain the influence of friends on one another's academic achievement (Epstein, 1983). This influence must depend partly on the friends' collaboration on class work or homework assignments. But informational influence goes beyond academic work itself. A need to be correct, or to hold valid opinions, also provides a partial explanation of friends' influence on attitudes about school.

In a recent study (Berndt, Laychak, & Park, 1990), junior high school students made decisions on hypothetical dilemmas that pitted doing school work against social activities or more free time. For example, on one dilemma students had to decide whether to go to a rock concert one evening or to stay home and study for an exam. After making decisions independently, students in one condition discussed the decisions with a close friend and tried to agree on them. In another condition, students discussed topics unrelated to school, such as where to go on a summer vacation.

After the discussions, the students again made decisions on the dilemmas independently. The independent decisions of friends who had discussed the dilemmas were more similar than those of friends who had not, showing that friends influenced one another's decisions. Students also shifted after the discussions toward the decisions that were accompanied by the most reasons during the discussions. These findings imply that during adolescence, friends' influence depends on information exchange and the motive to be correct, just as is true in adulthood (Chaiken et al., 1989; Isenberg, 1986).

### *Age changes in the influence of friends*

Does the influence of friends' characteristics change with age? To answer this question, a few researchers asked students to read about hypothetical situations in which friends supposedly encouraged them to engage in specific behaviors (Berndt, 1979; Brown et al., 1986; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Then students reported whether they would conform to the friends' suggestions. Most often, apparent conformity to friends increased between middle childhood and mid-adolescence, or around ninth grade. Conformity then decreased between mid-adolescence and late adolescence, or the end of high school. However, this developmental trend was not significant in all samples (Brown et al., 1986).

Other approaches to the estimation of friends' influence have also yielded mixed results. A few researchers have tried to assess the increase in friends' similarity that results from their influence on each other. In one study (Urberg, Cheng, & Shyu, 1991), friends seemed to influence eighth-graders' cigarette smoking more than that of eleventh graders. In another study (Epstein, 1983), friends' influence on school-related attitudes and on academic achievement seems to change little between fourth and twelfth grade.

Another way to explore the question of developmental changes would be to examine the strength of the various motives that underlie friends' influence. Unfortunately, this approach has not often been adopted. Researchers once assumed that students' need for social approval could be estimated from their conformity to peers on certain types of judgments. However, the available data on peer conformity are difficult to interpret (Hartup, 1983). Our second motive, to identify with friends or want to be like them, has rarely been examined directly. Furthermore, few researchers have examined age changes in the related process of observational learning from peers. Therefore, it is impossible to say whether this motive changes in strength as children grow older.

The self-enhancement motive may become more important during middle childhood. A few studies suggest that children's self-evaluations are more strongly affected by social comparisons with peers with increasing age (e.g., Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman, & Loeb, 1980). This age trend is consistent with evidence that self-esteem decreases during middle childhood, as children better appreciate how their performance in various domains compares with that of their peers (Marsh, 1989). Veroff (1969) suggested that this trend is partly reversed in early adolescence, as social comparison is integrated with autonomous motives for achievement. Unfortunately, little research has been done on this hypothesis.

Finally, some data suggest that group discussions are more rational, or based more on informational influence, as children move into adolescence (Berndt, McCartney, Caparulo, & Moore, 1983-1984; Smith, 1973). Adolescents give more reasons for their opinions than children; they also resolve conflicts during discussions more effectively.

More research on the age changes in motives linked to friends' influence would be valuable. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that friends can have a strong influence on certain aspects of school adjustment throughout the school years. Even in the elementary grades, students' behavior is affected by the disruptive behavior of their friends (Schwartz, 1981). Near the end of high school, students' educational aspirations are affected by their friends' aspirations (Davies & Kandel, 1981). More research is needed on how much friends affect each aspect of school adjustment during each phase of schooling.

### **Motives related to the effects of friendship quality**

To understand the effects of friendship quality on students' adjustment, the construct of friendship quality must first be defined. In this section, we provide a definition that links features of friendship to their associated motives. Then we review research that indicates the effects of friendships on school adjustment. Next, we consider the limited research on developmental changes in the effects of friendships.

#### *High-quality friendships: Features and motives*

Piaget (1932/1965) and Sullivan (1953) assumed that friendships are high in quality when they are intimate, egalitarian, and based on mutual respect. To supplement these definitions, other writers have suggested that high-quality friendships are high in prosocial behavior (sharing and helping), trust, loyalty, affection, companionship, and caring (Berndt & Perry,

1986; Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1993).

Few writers have explicitly discussed the motives associated with high-quality friendships. However, Sullivan's analysis of friendship included a few suggestions about these motives. He referred to a close friend as a *chum*, and suggested that children who have a chum say to themselves, "What should I do to contribute to the happiness or to support the prestige and feeling of worth-whileness of my chum?" (p. 245). That is, their motive is to make the friend happy and boost the friend's self-esteem.

As a complement to this apparently altruistic motive, Sullivan suggested that high-quality friendships fulfill a need for interpersonal intimacy. During intimate conversations, friends share their concerns and are assured that they are respected by peers whom they also respect. Sullivan implied, however, that high-quality friendships do not involve a combination of altruistic and self-interested motives. The goal of friends' interaction is collaboration, or "the pursuit of increasingly identical – that is, more and more nearly mutual – satisfactions" (p. 246).

When friends aim for mutually satisfying interactions, they reject the distinction between the goals of self and of friend. In this sense, the primary motive of persons involved in high-quality friendships is qualitatively different from the individualistic motives (e.g., the need for approval) considered earlier (see Table 11.1). In high-quality friendships, these individualistic motives are replaced by motives for both partners in the relationship. They focus not on what "I" want, but what "we" want (Hartup, 1992).

Of course, actual friendships fall short of the complete mutuality described by Sullivan. Aristotle (Ostwald, 1962) said that some people want friends who increase their own pleasure. Other people want friends who are useful to them, who will do favors for them and help them make valuable contacts with other people. Aristotle believed that perfect friendships, which have the kind of intimacy and mutuality described by Sullivan, are extremely rare.

Nevertheless, Aristotle assumed that most close friendships have some features of a perfect friendship. Researchers who assess the positive features of students' friendships are exploring how well these friendships match the ideal in classical and modern writings. That is, they are examining the degree to which friends adopt relationship motives, thinking not of "me" and "you" but of "us."

Friendships also have negative features. Earlier, we mentioned the forces that lead to competition between friends (Tesser, 1984). Students

often compare their performance in academic and other activities to that of their friends. For example, friends often compare their grades on tests in school and take the results as an indicator of who is the smartest. Because their self-esteem is at stake, friends sometimes compete more intensely with one another in such situations than nonfriends do (Berndt, 1986; Berndt, Hawkins, & Hoyle, 1986).

Competition between friends may not only affect each friend's behavior, as discussed earlier. This competition may also affect the quality of their friendship. Recall that Piaget (1932/1965) assumed peer relationships are based on equality. Friends, especially, view themselves as equal in all important respects (Berndt, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). But when students are high in competitive motivation, they may reject this view and try to prove their superiority to friends. Then the quality of their friendships is likely to suffer.

Other types of conflicts between friends arise for various reasons (Laursen, 1993). The root of many conflicts may be students' emphasis on individualistic goals (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1990). Stated informally, some students would rather get what they want and lose a friend than vice versa. Measures of negative friendship features reflect the degree to which friends favor competitive and individualistic goals over the goal of mutually satisfying outcomes.

Negative interactions between friends are less common in friendships with many positive features, but the correlation is weak. Especially as children move into adolescence, their reports about the positive and negative features of their friendships become more independent (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Berndt & Perry, 1986). Therefore, the quality of a friendship should be judged from separate assessments of its positive and negative features. The effects of the two aspects of friendship quality on school adjustment should also be judged separately.

### *Effects of friendship quality on school adjustment*

Children and adolescents whose friendships have more positive features are higher in self-esteem and prosocial behavior, are more popular with peers, and less often suffer from emotional problems (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Hartup, 1992). They also have more positive attitudes toward school, are better behaved, and are higher in academic achievement than other students (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Dubow et al., 1991; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988). In addition, students whose friendships have more negative features report less classroom involvement and more disruptive be-



havior. By contrast, the number of best friends that students report usually is only weakly correlated with their social and school adjustment (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). In research with adults, measures of number of friendships are usually less strongly related to indicators of psychological health than are measures of the support those relationships provide (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). In sum, relationship quality matters more than quantity.

Correlations between friendship features and school adjustment do not prove that friendship quality affects school adjustment. Students' adjustment to school could instead affect the quality of the friendships they can form. To distinguish between these alternatives, a few researchers have examined the relations of friendship quality to the changes over time in students' adjustment. In one recent study (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Adan, & Evans, 1992), a measure of support from friends was not related to the changes over two years in adolescents' grades. In a second study (Dubow et al., 1991), friends' support was not related to the changes over two years in younger students' behavioral and academic adjustment.

The two studies might have yielded null results because the interval between assessments was too long. Best friendships among children and adolescents usually last for several months, but not for years (Hallinan, 1978/1979). With an interval of two years, researchers may have been trying to assess effects of friendships that ended months before.

Another possible explanation for the null results is that the measures of friends' support were too general. In one study (Dubow et al., 1991), the items referred to support from classmates as well as friends. In the other study (DuBois et al., 1992), the items referred to friends but not specifically to best friends. Both measures included items about positive features but not negative ones.

Recently, we completed a longitudinal study that was less subject to these problems (Berndt & Keefe, in press). In the fall of a school year, junior-high-school students described the positive and negative features of their three best friendships. The students also reported their involvement in classroom activities and their disruptive behavior at school. Teachers rated the students on their involvement and disruptive behavior, and reported their report-card grades. These assessments were repeated in the following spring, about six months later. The data were analyzed in a hierarchical regression analysis that took into account the continuity in school adjustment. Therefore, the results can be interpreted as evidence regarding the effects of friendship quality on school adjustment.

Students' reports on the positive features of their very best (or closest) friendship were related to the changes during their year in their self-re-

Table 11.2. *Predicting students' adjustment from the features of their friendships*

	Very best friend			Multiple friends		
	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	Beta
Time 2 involvement (self-reported)						
Step 1: Time 1 involvement	.384	.384	.62***	.385	.385	.62***
Step 2: Time 1 Friendship Features						
Positive features	.393	.009	.09*	.390	.005	.08
Negative features	.388	.004	-.06	.389	.004	-.06
Time 2 disruption (self-reported)						
Step 1: Time 1 disruption	.389	.389	.62***	.389	.389	.62***
Step 2: Time 1 Friendship Features						
Positive features	.391	.002	-.04	.389	.000	-.01
Negative features	.407	.018	.13**	.410	.021	.15**

For each Time 2 measure of adjustment, the values listed in Step 2 are from two separate analyses, one including only the variable for positive features and the other including only the variable for negative features. For all analyses,  $N_s = 293 - 296$ .  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

ported involvement (Table 11.2). These data imply that having a very best friendship with many positive features increased students' involvement. A plausible explanation for this finding is that a close friendship high in quality strengthens motives to seek mutually satisfying interactions with the best friend and other people. Students with such friendships may be more willing to join classmates in academic activities and more eager to participate in class discussions. To test this hypothesis, researchers might assess the school-related motives of students with friendships varying in quality. The motives and goals identified by Wentzel (1989, 1991b) and other researchers (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985) would be good candidates for this assessment.

Students' reports on the negative features of both their very best friendships and the average of their three best friendships were related to the changes during the year in their self-reported disruption. These data imply that having friendships high in conflicts and rivalry increased students' disruptive behavior. Negative interactions with friends apparently spilled over to affect students' behavior toward other classmates and teachers. Sullivan (1953) suggested that some children compete so often with peers that competitive motivation becomes a prominent part of their personality. Apparently, students in more competitive friendships acquire a habit of competing with others in many activities. These students probably look for chances to "put down" other classmates; they probably respond force-



fully to actions by others that seemed aimed at putting them down. Similarly, students who have many conflicts with friends may try harder to defend their perceived rights than to adapt to others. These students may not seek mutually satisfying resolutions to conflicts because their friends had rarely done so with them.

The influence of friendship quality on school adjustment should not be exaggerated. Table 11.2 shows that the measures of friendship features accounted for only a small (but significant) amount of the variance in students' involvement and disruption. Moreover, like previous researchers, we did not find a significant effect of friendship quality on students' grades. Even so, evidence that friendship quality is a predictor of changes in some aspects of school adjustment is both theoretically and practically significant.

### *Age changes in the effects of friendship quality*

As one aspect of positive friendship quality, intimacy first becomes an important feature of friendships in early adolescence (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Hartup, 1992). The intimacy of friendships increases further during adolescence, as time spent with friends increases (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). Moreover, as adolescents approach adulthood, their friendships develop more positive features and become more like the ideal friendships of classical literature (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Less information is available on the negative features of friendships. On structured tasks, adolescents sometimes compete less intensely with friends than do elementary-school children (Berndt et al., 1986). Conflicts with friends change little in frequency during the elementary and middle-school years, but they may decrease during the senior-high years (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Laursen & Collins, 1994).

Changes in friendship features might be accompanied by changes in the effects of friendship. As adolescents develop friendships higher in quality, and friends start to interact more often, variations in friendship quality could have a greater influence on their behavior and development. Thus far, only one study has tested this hypothesis.

Buhrmester (1990) asked early adolescents (10- to 13-year-olds) and middle adolescents (14- to 16-year-olds) about the intimacy of one of their closest friendships. The adolescents also reported on their sociability, hostility, and other aspects of their socioemotional adjustment. The correlations of intimacy with socioemotional adjustment were stronger in middle adolescence than in early adolescence. Although other interpretations are

possible, these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that friendship quality has stronger effects on students' psychological adjustment as they grow older. Furthermore, both empirical research and everyday observations show that friendships become more important to students as they move through adolescence. Thus it is reasonable to assume that friendship quality also becomes more important for students' adjustment.

### *Implications of friends' influence for educational practice*

Many teachers face the practical issue of whether to intervene in the friendships of students who are a bad influence on each other. Should the friends be moved to different parts of the classroom? If their new locations do not end their misbehavior, should one of them be transferred to another class? For a full answer to these questions, we need again to consider both pathways of friends' influence.

### *Changing the influence of friends' characteristics*

Friends certainly can have a negative influence on one another (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Epstein, 1983; Kandel, 1978). For example, friends can discourage students' involvement in class activities. These negative influences can be reduced by separating students from their friends. Ball (1981) observed classrooms for early adolescents before and after academic tracking was eliminated from a school. When tracking was the norm, low-achieving students typically attended classes and formed friendships with other low-achieving students. In these classes, students and their friends usually had negative attitudes toward school. The classes were so disruptive that teachers found them extremely unpleasant.

After tracking was eliminated, many disruptive and low-achieving students found themselves in classrooms with other students average or high in achievement. The other students typically had positive attitudes toward school, and they did not go along with the low achievers' disruptive behavior. Moreover, the disruptive students did not have enough friends in the new classrooms to form cohesive groups.

Ball's observations suggest that weakening friendships among disruptive students by eliminating tracking can reduce negative influences of friends on students' behavior. Because his study was not an experiment, however, other explanations for the results are possible. For example, the changes in students' behavior might be attributed to other positive effects of eliminating tracking (see Oakes, 1985), rather than a decrease in the negative effects of disruptive friends. The alternative explanations are not

especially relevant to our chapter, but the general issue of teachers' interference with students' friendships is relevant.

What happens to disruptive students when teachers' intervention weakens their friendships? These students may find it hard to make new friends, because students who misbehave in class are usually unpopular with peers (Coie, 1990; Wentzel, 1991a). If the students have difficulty making new friends, they may also have difficulty satisfying their need for social approval. Without friends to give them praise and encouragement, these students are likely to drop out of school, officially or unofficially (Parker & Asher, 1987).

Instead of trying to break up friendships among students who are poorly adjusted to school, teachers might try to correct students' misperceptions about their friends' attitudes and behavior. Research on alcohol and drug abuse has shown that adolescents often assume their friends have more positive attitudes toward the use of alcohol and other drugs than they actually do (Cook, Anson, & Walchli, 1993). Substance-abuse interventions are effective partly because they reduce these misperceptions. In other words, they give adolescents accurate information about how their friends think and act. By doing so, they reduce adolescents' motivation to seek social approval or self-enhancement by using drugs themselves.

Similar misperceptions may exist in the realm of school adjustment. Students may believe that their friends like school less and approve of misbehavior more than is actually true. If teachers asked all students to report their attitudes toward school, both they and their students might discover that pro-school attitudes are widely shared. Doing such a survey and giving students the results could reduce students' misperceptions that their friends admire classmates who are poorly adjusted to school. Reducing these misperceptions could, in turn, enhance the positive effects of friends on school adjustment.

### *Changing friendship features*

When faced with friends who are a bad influence on one another, teachers might also consider the quality of these friendships. As noted earlier, students who are poorly adjusted to school often have friendships that are low in quality (Berndt & Keefe, in press; Dubow et al., 1991). Instead of trying to end these friendships or, conversely, taking a completely hands-off attitude toward them, teachers might try to improve them and so improve students' adjustment to school.

To improve students' friendships, teachers could use cooperative-learning techniques for academic instruction (Cohen, 1994; Furman & Gavin,

1989). Placing students in small groups and asking them to work together on academic tasks has been viewed mainly as a means of raising students' achievement (Slavin, 1983). But cooperative-learning programs also enhance prosocial behavior and tolerance of other people while reducing competition between classmates (Furman & Gavin, 1989).

Cooperative-learning programs are not foolproof. Teachers need to prepare students carefully and monitor interactions among the students in a group. Otherwise, students with low status in the classroom may continue to be treated negatively in their small group (Cohen, 1994). Yet with appropriate monitoring, the use of cooperative learning may not only improve classroom climate but also contribute to the formation of high-quality friendships (Hansell & Slavin, 1981).

Programs for training social skills might also affect friendship quality (Coie & Koeppl, 1990; Mize & Ladd, 1990). Students can be trained to ask polite questions, to make suggestions, and to offer support to their classmates. In addition, students can be trained to avoid unnecessary conflicts with peers and to resolve conflicts effectively when they arise. One strategy for training emphasizes anger control, or avoiding impulsive action when upset by a classmate's behavior. Another strategy emphasizes social problem solving, or thinking about ways to resolve conflicts without using aggression (Lochman, 1985). Because conflicts with friends spill over to affect students' behavior toward other people (Berndt & Keefe, in press), training in conflict resolution could reduce behavior problems in the classroom.

One limitation in most social-skills training programs is a lack of emphasis on students' motivation. The programs teach students how to behave in social situations, but not why they should behave that way. Some students, however, may enjoy competing more than compromising, or be more motivated to get things they want than to develop positive relationships with peers (Putallaz & Sheppard, 1990). These students need to be persuaded that improving their friendships is worth the effort.

Trying to increase students' motivation to develop high-quality friendships could be seen as risky. As students' interest in having good friendships increases, their interest in strictly academic aspects of school might be expected to decrease. Low-achieving students typically endorse the goals of making friends and having fun at school more than do students with high grades (Wentzel, 1989). At first glance, intervening to improve students' friendships might be thought to enhance this contrast. The intervention might encourage poorly adjusted students to work even less on their school work than on their social life.

This concern reflects a misunderstanding of the proposed intervention.

It is designed not to increase the time students spend with friends but to improve the quality of their friendships. Low-achieving students already interact frequently with friends (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). The problem is that their friendships are often low in positive features and high in negative features. Giving these students the motivation to be more supportive to friends and to have more harmonious interactions with friends is not likely to reduce their school adjustment. On the contrary, the change in motivation should enhance students' social and academic competence.

### Unanswered questions and future directions

Currently, evidence on the motives underlying friends' influence is largely indirect. Few researchers have tried to assess the motives that account for the influence of friends' characteristics. Even fewer have tried to examine the motives that explain how and why friendship quality affects school adjustment.

This state of affairs is problematic. Without direct assessments of motives, it is difficult to propose convincing alternatives to the idea that students usually conform to friends' pressure because of fear of punishment. Without direct assessments of motives, it is difficult to explain why friendship quality affects some aspects of school adjustment more than others.

Two methods of assessing motives might be used in future research. The first is an experimental approach. For many years, social psychologists have used experimental manipulations to probe the motives underlying people's behavior. For example, many experiments have been done to see whether group discussions affect people's decisions because people are motivated to seek social approval or because they want to make correct decisions (Isenberg, 1986). Interest in these two types of motives remains strong within social psychology (e.g., Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). Adapting the experimental manipulations used in this research to study friends' influence on students' adjustment to school could be very productive.

The second method of assessing students' motives is to ask them directly. As mentioned earlier, this method has been used to examine motives or goals associated with classroom behavior and academic achievement (Nicholls et al., 1985; Wentzel, 1989, 1991a, b). One limitation of the method is that students may not be aware of the motives that govern their behavior. Some students may also be unwilling to report their motives to a researcher. Nevertheless, these limitations should not be overes-

timated. Previous studies have shown that valuable information can be obtained with direct questions about motivation. Extensions of the research to explore the motives underlying friends' influence should also be rewarding.

Another direction for future research would be a thorough analysis and investigation of relationship motives. Sullivan's (1953) proposals about friends' collaboration in pursuit of mutually satisfying outcomes were novel in 1953, and they are still unusual. Few theories of motivation take account of people's social relationships; even fewer include motives that apply to partners in a relationship as a unit (see Weiner, 1992). Theories of motivation generally deal with only two classes of motives, individualistic (or self-centered) and altruistic (or other-centered).

The individualistic motives that affect friendship quality have sometimes been examined systematically. Students have been asked to do tasks with a partner and then to say whether they tried to compete with the partner, to get many rewards for themselves, or to pursue other goals (see Berndt et al., 1986). Other researchers have constructed tasks that allow the assessment of students' motives from their actual behavior rather than from their self-reports (e.g., Knight, Dubro, & Chao, 1985). Extensions of this work to probe the motives of students with friendships high in negative features would be worthwhile.

Motives associated with positive features of friendship, with a concern for what "we" need instead of what "I" need, have so far not been examined directly. We have argued that these relationship motives are stronger when friendships are more intimate, egalitarian, and have other positive features. This argument should be evaluated more carefully.

One direction for research would be to explore the parallel between relationship motives and collectivist values. Many researchers have assumed that Western cultures emphasize individualistic values like personal freedom, whereas collectivist cultures emphasize responsibility to the other members of an ingroup such as the family (Triandis, 1989; 1990). People in collectivist cultures are assumed not to distinguish between their personal goals and the goals of their small group. They are assumed to view the success of everyone in their ingroup as their greatest goal. In this sense, they are like close friends who seek not their own satisfaction but mutually satisfying outcomes.

To document the contrast between individualistic and collectivist cultures, researchers have often used or adapted Rokeach's (1973) survey of values. Researchers have also devised items for assessing attitudes consistent with these two orientations (see Triandis, 1990). This research could

provide not only some specific ideas but also a general approach to the study of relationship motives. This approach could be doubly rewarding because variations in friendships and cultural variations could be explored simultaneously (cf. Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990).

Finally, throughout this chapter we have emphasized the distinction between the two pathways of friends' influence. This distinction may be absolute. That is, the influence of friends' characteristics may be entirely independent of the effects of friendship features. Consider, for example, students who have high-quality friendships with peers who have negative attitudes toward school. Our argument to this point is that these students will be positively affected by the quality of their friendships and negatively affected by their friends' attitudes toward school. The net effect will depend on the strength of the two separate effects.

An alternative hypothesis is that the quality of students' friendships modifies the influence of friends' characteristics. When students trust and admire their friends, the friends' characteristics should have an especially powerful influence on the students' adjustment (Hallinan, 1983). Cauce and Srebnik (1989) applied this general hypothesis to the case of school adjustment. They argued that students' adjustment to school may worsen greatly if they have highly supportive friendships with peers who are poorly adjusted to school.

Cauce and Srebnik (1989) cited only correlational data in support of their hypothesis. Findings consistent with the hypothesis were also obtained in one experimental study (Berndt et al., 1990). As mentioned earlier, this study included pairs of friends who discussed dilemmas concerning school work. The similarity of friends' decisions increased after the discussions, showing that they influenced one another's decisions. Friends' similarity increased most when their interactions were judged by observers as most cooperative and least aggressive. Friends' similarity increased least when they reported that their friendships were high in conflicts and rivalry. These results imply that friends were more influenced by their discussions when their friendships were high in positive features and low in negative features.

This experiment cannot be taken as conclusive because the findings are inconsistent with those from other studies. Hundreds of studies have suggested that supportive social relationships almost invariably have positive effects on psychological adjustment and even on physical health (Sarason et al. 1990). Moreover, data from our longitudinal study (Berndt & Keefe, in press) did not support the hypothesis that high friendship quality can magnify the negative influence of poorly adjusted friends. We

looked for interactions between the effects of friends' characteristics and of friendship features. That is, we checked to see whether the effects of friends' characteristics varied with the quality of students' friendships, but we found no interactions of this type.

The available data are too limited to answer questions about the relations between the two influence pathways. More attention to the contrasting hypotheses is needed, because they are linked to critical assumptions in important theories of social influence. The contrasting hypotheses also have important practical implications. Their systematic comparison should be a central focus of future research.

## Conclusions

One message of the chapter is that friends' influence on students' adjustment to school is a more complex phenomenon than most popular and scholarly writers have implied. Interactions with friends affect students' attitudes toward school, behavior in class, and academic achievement through two distinct pathways. The effects of influence via each pathway may be either to increase or to decrease students' adjustment to school. Most importantly, influence via each pathway depends on multiple motives.

The influence of friends' characteristics has been emphasized by popular writers who express concern about the negative effects of friends' pressure on students' behavior. Our review of empirical research has shown that coercive pressure is rarely applied in friendship groups. Students are affected by their friends' characteristics, but fear of punishment for non-conformity to friends' pressure is not the primary motive underlying this influence. More important are students' need for social approval, their identification with friends, a motive for self-enhancement, and the need to be correct or make reasonable decisions. Evidence for these four motives is indirect, but their importance cannot be questioned.

The second pathway of influence, through the quality of students' friendships, is linked to theories of social and personality development. The quality of a friendship is indicated by its intimacy, by the friends' prosocial behavior toward each other, and by the frequency of other types of positive interactions. Negative interactions also occur between friends, and friendship quality is lower when conflicts and rivalry are frequent and intense. Ideally, interactions between friends are governed by a motive to seek mutually satisfying outcomes. That is, friends think about what "we" want, not what "I" want. In real life, friends often have motives to get their

own way or to compete with each other. Students develop more positive attitudes toward school when their friendships are higher in quality. Students become more disruptive at school when their friendships are lower in quality. The connections of these effects to differences in motives have not been documented precisely, and more research on these connections is needed.

Information about the two influence pathways and their associated motives has clear implications for educational practice. One set of issues concerns friends who negatively influence one another's adjustment to school. Breaking up these friendships, for example, by transferring the students to different classes, can reduce this problem, but this solution is not ideal. A better alternative is making all students more aware of their classmates' attitudes toward school and beliefs about acceptable behavior. In addition, teachers can try to improve the quality of students' friendships by using cooperative learning or social skills training.

Our recommendations for teachers are offered tentatively, because their basis in research is limited. Our motivational analysis derives more from theories of social influence than from specific studies. Systematic exploration of the motives underlying friends' influence is needed. Research on possible links between the two influence pathways is also needed. Future research should not only answer basic questions about how friends influence one another during childhood and adolescence. This research should also clarify how this influence can be channeled to enhance students' adjustment to school.

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## 12 Peer networks and students' classroom engagement during childhood and adolescence

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If one asks parents and teachers about important influences on children's motivation and adjustment to school, answers will likely suggest four sets of factors: the teacher and the general school environment, the psychological make-up of the individual child himself or herself, the family environment, and the child's relationships with his or her peers in school. In fact, research on school motivation and adjustment has examined all four influences. However, if one looks at current discussions of motivation and school adjustment (e.g., Ames & Ames, 1984, 1985), most research seems to concentrate on the first two factors, namely, the school and the child; some efforts target the family, and only comparatively few include children's peers.

Characteristics of schools, classrooms, teachers, and students have been prime targets of motivational studies (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In general, it is educational researchers who have focused on school and classroom contexts (for reviews, see Ames & Ames, 1985; Brophy, 1983; 1986), such as the role of teacher behaviors, teaching styles, or evaluation strategies (Boggiano & Katz, 1991; Brophy, 1985, 1986; Graham & Barker, 1990; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Keller, 1983; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; 1990; Moely et al., 1992), and the overall classroom environment and organization (Ames, 1984; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1985).

Psychological research has focused more on children themselves (for reviews see Ames & Ames, 1984; Dweck & Elliott, 1983; Stipek, 1993), specifically on their understanding and explanations of their own role in the school environment. Key constructs are children's attributions (Weiner, 1979, 1985, 1986), their beliefs about themselves and the extent to which they feel in control (Chapman, Skinner, & Baltes, 1990; Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993; Skinner, Wellborn & Connell, 1990; Weisz & Cameron, 1985), and their self-efficacy in the school environment