

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 519

CG 024 573

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 TITLE Popularity and Friendship: An Investigation of Their  
 Effects on Self-Esteem.  
 PUB DATE [Mar 92]  
 NOTE 11p.  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Friendship; \*Grade 9; Secondary Education; Secondary  
 School Students; \*Self Concept; \*Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

An emphasis on the functional role of self-presentation or self-concept has received an increasing amount of attention in the last 10 years. As a result of recent studies which have suggested the importance of self-esteem as a factor which influences motivation, this study examined the relationship between peer relations and self-esteem. Specifically, this study investigated the effects of both peer acceptance and friendship on self-esteem in an adolescent population. Ninth-grade students (N=542) were classified by sociometric group and presence or absence of reciprocal friendships. Results indicated no significant difference in self-esteem scores across sociometric groups. However, subjects with at least one reciprocal friend had higher self-esteem scores than subjects without a reciprocal friend. Furthermore, there did not appear to be a cumulative effect of number of friendships on self-esteem scores. Results of this study provide some evidence that friendship is more important than peer acceptance to self-esteem levels in adolescents. Results also indicate that self-esteem, as a measure of the self-concept, is an important variable to investigate due to its crucial role as a predictor of motivation. (ABL)

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Popularity and Friendship: An Investigation  
of Their Effects on Self-Esteem

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## Abstract

As a result of recent studies which have suggested the importance of self-esteem as a factor which influences motivation, the present study examined the relationship between peer relations and self-esteem. Specifically, this study investigated the effects of both peer acceptance and friendship on self-esteem in an adolescent population. 542 ninth grade students were classified by sociometric group and presence or absence of reciprocal friendships. Results indicate no significant difference in self-esteem scores across sociometric groups. However, subjects with at least one reciprocal friend had higher self-esteem scores than subjects without a reciprocal friend. Furthermore, there did not appear to be a cumulative effect of number of friendships on self-esteem scores. The importance of friendship to the development of the self-concept is discussed, as is the need to study the antecedents of the self-concept which affect future motivation for behavior.

## Introduction

An emphasis on the functional role of self-representation or self-concept has received an increasing amount of attention in the last ten years (Harter, 1986; Weiner, 1985). An individual's self-concept is thought to influence future motivation for behavior. It is necessary, therefore, to identify factors that are responsible for individual differences in the self-concept (Harter, 1990). This study attempts to investigate the effects of peer relationships upon the self-concept.

It is widely recognized that both peer acceptance and friendship play major roles in the development of self-worth and the self-concept (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Researchers have provided substantial evidence that children who are rejected by their peer group are lonelier and have lower self-worth than are children who are not rejected by their peers (Asher & Parker, 1989; Markus & Nurius, 1984). There is additional evidence, however, which suggests that children who lack close, intimate friendships, regardless of how "popular" they are in the eyes of their peers, are likely to experience lower self-esteem, greater loneliness, and greater social anxiety (Wheeler & Ladd, 1982; Harter, 1982). This is especially true for adolescents, who appear to rely on friends as important sources of social support and coping assistance (Buhrmester, 1990). Although several studies have found a positive relationship between the quality of friendship and self-esteem in adolescence (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Cauce, 1986; Mannarino, 1978),

Bukowski and Hoza (1989) maintain that the majority of the empirical literature on peer relationships has been focused on the concept of popularity as opposed to the construct of friendship. This emphasis is unfortunate due to its failure to investigate the contribution of both constructs to the development of self-worth and the self-concept (Furman & Robbins, 1985). This study attempted to investigate the effects of both peer acceptance and friendship within one adolescent population on self-esteem, with self-esteem serving as one measure of self-concept.

#### Method and Measures

542 ninth grade students from a mid-sized, Midwestern city participated in this study. As part of a larger investigation, each student completed two questionnaires.

(1) The Sociometric and Friendship Questionnaire (SFQ): The SFQ was used to determine sociometric status and the presence or absence of reciprocal friendships. Students were asked to select three same-gender classmates who they liked most and three they liked least. Based on these nominations, subjects were classified as popular, average, rejected, neglected and controversial using the Coie, Dodge and Coppotelli (1982) system. Students were also asked to list the names of all their friends in their grade and to rate how much they liked each on a 5-point Likert scale, with a "1" indicating that they "like them a little bit" and a 5 indicating that they "like them a lot". Reciprocal friendships were defined as reciprocal nominations with mutual ratings of 4 or 5 between two students.

(2) The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI): The SEI is a 58-item questionnaire designed to assess self-esteem in children. Each questionnaire presents subjects with generally favorable or unfavorable statements about the self, which they indicate as "like me" or "unlike me." A total self-esteem score and five subscale scores (home, school, general, social, and lie) are obtained for each subject.

### Results

The number of students in specific classifications can be found in Table 1. To determine whether one's sociometric status is differentially related to self-esteem, a one-way ANOVA was completed. Results yielded no significant difference in total self-esteem scores across sociometric groups (see Table 2). A second one-way ANOVA was completed with presence or absence of at least one reciprocal friend as the independent variable and yielded a main effect for friendship. Subjects with at least one reciprocal friend had significantly higher self-esteem scores than did subjects without any reciprocal friends (see Table 2).

Several additional analyses were performed to investigate the cumulative effect of the number of friendships on total self-esteem scores. Specifically, reciprocal friendship was redefined as zero or one friend versus more than one friend. Results of an ANOVA indicated that subjects with just one reciprocal friend did not have significantly different self-esteem scores (mean= 66.19) than subjects with more than one reciprocal friend (mean=69.28,  $F=1.44$ ,

$p=.23$ ). In addition, the correlation between self-esteem scores and the number of reciprocal friends was only .17 , suggesting that one's self-esteem does not increase as the number of reciprocal friendships increases.

### Conclusions

Results of the present study provide some evidence that friendship is more important than peer acceptance to self-esteem levels in adolescents.

Results also indicate that self-esteem, as a measure of the self-concept, is an important variable to investigate due to its crucial role as a predictor of motivation, as described by Harter (1990). Furthermore, given that one's self-concept changes developmentally, it is important to identify the factors that may be responsible for these developmental changes (Harter, 1990). Results also suggest that friendship, as opposed to popularity, appears to have an impact on self-esteem and should be incorporated into future studies which investigate the antecedents of self-esteem and consequent effects on motivation.

TABLE 1

Subject Classification


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	<u>Friendship</u>		
	<u>No Friends</u>	<u>At least one friend</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Sociometric Status</u>			
Popular	2	46	<del>48</del>
Rejected	11	22	33
Average	20	185	205
Neglected	12	33	45
Controversial	1	65	66
Unclassified	<u>15</u>	<u>130</u>	<u>145</u>
<u>Total</u>	61	481	N = 542

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TABLE 2

Total Self-Esteem Score

Variables	Mean	STD	F	p
Sociometric Status			1.05	.38
Popular (n=48)	70.85	17.59		
Rejected (n=33)	64.36	17.22		
Average (n=205)	67.62	17.10		
Neglected (n=45)	67.82	17.04		
Controversial (n=66)	70.45	16.93		
Friendship			20.31	.00
No friends (n=61)	59.51	16.02		
At least one friend (n=481)	69.70	16.72		

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