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CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO MIDDLE
SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS IN CHOOSING FRIENDS

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Counseling

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Kirsten R. Honaker-Carter

August 2001

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
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David Carter Committee

Dr. David Carter Department of Counseling

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CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS IN CHOOSING FRIENDS

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University of Nebraska, 2001

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This study investigates the characteristics that are important to middle school students when they choose their friends. The subjects for this research study are seventh, eighth, and ninth graders with ages ranging from 11-15 years old.

The population surveyed was limited to 47 middle-school aged children whose parents responded to a flyer posted in one of two college universities. The study design was a 14-question value survey using a Likert scale. The questions relate to the importance of various characteristics in choosing friends. The survey also included demographic questions pertaining to the subject's gender, grade level, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family make-up

Cross-tabulation and descriptive statistics were used to explain the non-hypotheses data. The statistical method used to analyze the hypotheses data was the t-test. An attempt at verifying consistency of responses was made by rewording and asking the hypotheses questions twice in the survey.

The major finding of this study showed that males tend to choose friends based on their same gender more than females. This difference was found to be statistically significant by the t-test performed on the data.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Definition and Description of the Problem

Friendship “refers to a property of the relationship between two individuals” (Bukowski, Sippola, and Hoza, 1999, p. 443). Friendships are dyadic, intimate, and mutual relationships that differ from peer acceptance or popularity (Franco & Levitt, 1998). According to Moreno’s (1934) sociometric theory, friendship has two dimensions: how much one likes others and how much one is liked by others. Some friendships are characterized by support, companionship, mutual validation, and constructive conflict resolution (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Moreover, same-sex friendships are characterized by intimacy and closeness; whereas other-sex friendships are characterized by association (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, and Pepler, 1999).

Adolescence was selected for this study because it is a significant time for exploring the emergence of friendships (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Adolescence entails a distancing from parents and a growing preference toward peer friendships (Giordano, Cernkovich, and DeMaris, 1993). Buhrmester (1990) revealed that intimate friendships are more important to adolescents than to preadolescents (Lundy, Field, McBride, Field, and Largie, 1998). Therefore, adolescents may be considered an in-depth source of information pertaining to the formation of peer friendships and relations (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998).

Adolescent friendship relations are extremely important, as they are influential as the adolescent is negotiating autonomy from the family. As a result, a strong dependency may form in the new non-familial relationships (Giordano et al., 1993). Friendships provide the opportunity to learn and practice skills such as intimacy, support, nurturing, and self-disclosure (Feiring, 1999). Friendships are precursors for other relationships and actually serve as a basis for establishing relationships later in development (Rotenburg & Morgan, 1995).

Friendships are believed to be crucial in the development of a positive well being and self-esteem. Interactions with friends provide an opportunity for self-definition and help adolescents feel like competent and worthwhile individuals. Friendships also have a unique role in an adolescent's self-concept as they differ from family relationships in that friendships are voluntary (Franco & Levitt, 1998).

Bishop and Inderbitzen (1995) explained that higher self-esteem was reported from adolescents who had at least one mutual friend than adolescents without a mutual friendship. Franco & Levitt (1998) found that friendship quality contributes to an adolescent's self esteem. Maintaining a positive self-esteem is important in helping prevent problems such as antisocial behavior, depression and eating disorders (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Moreover, middle school students who are supported emotionally and socially by friends are more satisfied with school (Richman, Rosenfeld, and Bowen, 1998). Also, children with close peer friendships perform better academically, have lower rates of juvenile delinquency and adult psychopathology, and are less likely to drop out of school. In fact, the DSM-IV

indicates a lack of close peer relationships as a criterion for numerous childhood disorders (Lundy et al., 1998).

During adolescence the gap narrows between same-sex friendships and other-sex friendships (Feiring, 1999). Lundy et al., (1998) found that males and females become more involved with the opposite sex as they grow older. In adolescence, other-sex friendships may be functionally important for developing romantic relationships later (Feiring, 1999). Furthermore, other-sex friendships provide the adolescent with potential intimate partners and the motivation to use the social skills they have learned in their romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 1999). Adolescents with many other-sex friends tend to experience romantic relationships in terms of affiliative qualities earlier than adolescents who do not have many other sex-friends. Affiliative qualities of friendship include intimate self-disclosure and mutual emotional support (Feiring, 1999). Adolescents with other-sex friends view these qualities as important social skills in their romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 1999).

Research Objective

The research objective of this study is to investigate friendship formation of middle school aged students. The study was an attempt to understand what characteristics and qualities adolescents actually prefer when choosing friends. A distinction must be made between adolescent's friendship preferences and their actual friendships. Preferences are the qualities that are desired in peers for friendship; whereas, actual friendships are qualities the peers actually possess (Rotenburg &

Morgan, 1995). Interestingly, the number of peers an adolescent is drawn to may positively predict the number of friends acquired by the adolescent (Bukowski et al., 1999).

The population surveyed was limited middle-school aged children whose parent responded to a flyer posted in one of two college universities. The study design was a 14-question value survey using a Likert scale (McMillan, 1992). The questions relate to the importance of various characteristics in choosing friends. The survey also included demographic questions pertaining to the subject's gender, grade level, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family make-up. Parents who responded to the flyer received a packet (see Appendix) which included a letter explaining the study, a parental consent form, a youth assent form, the survey, and information about the rights of research participants. T-tests and cross-tabulation were the statistical methods used to analyze the data.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses (all pertaining to middle school aged students) were established for the purpose of this study:

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between males and females when choosing friends of their same gender.

Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends of their same race.

Hypothesis 3: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends who have their same moral values.

Hypothesis 4: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends based on parental approval.

Hypothesis 5: There is no relationship between seventh graders and ninth graders when choosing friends who have their same moral values.

Hypothesis 6: There is no relationship between children in one-parent families and children in two-parent families when choosing friends based on parental approval.

Definition of Terms

Adolescent - A person in the development period of transition from childhood to early adulthood, approximately starting at 11 years of age and ending at 18 years of age (Myers, 1993).

Middle School Aged Student - A person attending seventh, eighth, or ninth grade.

Social Support - A person who provides guidance, feedback, material aid, behavioral assistance, encouragement, and positive social interactions to another.

Same-Sex Friendships - Friendships with members of the same sex.

Other-Sex Friendships - Friendships with members of the opposite sex.

Caucasian Americans - Students who self identified as Caucasian American on the survey.

Non-Caucasian Americans - Students who self identified as African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American, Biracial, or Multiracial on the survey. Because there was such a disparity between Caucasian American respondents and all other respondents under ethnicity, the researcher combined African American,

Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American, Biracial, and Multiracial responses for evaluation.

Moral Values – Personal convictions about what is right and wrong.

Organization of the Report

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study. It described why friendship formation of adolescents is investigated. Chapter 2 provides a review of current literature on same-sex and other-sex friendships, adolescents' social support systems, peer relationships, and quality of adolescent friendships. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the design and methodology of the research study. Also, the research population and the data collection instrument are discussed in this chapter. In Chapter 4, the results and interpretation of the data collected are explained. Chapter 5 concludes the study by discussing the results of the hypotheses, limitations of the study, and areas of future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study investigates characteristics and qualities that are important to middle school students in forming friendships. To better understand this phenomenon, a general overview of adolescent friendships is presented. Research studies about same-sex and other-sex friendships are reviewed as well as studies on adolescents' social support systems and peer relationships. The importance of how middle school children form friendships is discussed and lastly, the relationship between race and friendship formation is presented.

Same-Sex, Other-Sex Friendships

In general, early adolescents seem to prefer and identify most strongly with friends of the same sex (Bukowski et al., 1999). In fact, gender is definitely one of the key variables in shaping social networks (Giordano et al., 1993). This same-sex preference seems to be related to liking the same sex, not necessarily disliking the other sex (Feiring, 1999). Furthermore, the research of Sroufe et al. (1993) holds that preadolescents who are competent in the social realm have few other-sex friendships. Also, it is likely that close best friendships in early adolescents will be formulated with the same sex (Bukowski et al., 1999).

However, the preference for the same sex soon declines as the adolescents have an opportunity and are actually pressured socially to experience other-sex friendships (Feiring, 1999). Consequently, the adolescent's experiences and

development are then influenced by these relationships (Bukowski et al., 1999).

Eventually, contact with other-sex friends becomes the norm (Connolly et al., 1999).

Adolescents who are usually friendly toward their peers are apt to have an equal number of same- and other-sex friends. Moreover, middle school students who are involved in same-sex friendships are probably involved in other-sex friendships as well. This probability could be due to the feeling of well-being that adolescents have while engaged in many relationships with their peers or due to adolescents using other-sex friends as a substitute to their same-sex friends. Therefore, being popular or well-liked by same-sex peers positively predicts a higher number of other-sex friendships and vice versa. Interestingly, among middle school students lacking a friend of the same sex, having a friend from the other sex is associated with higher levels of perceived well-being for males and lower levels of well-being for females (Bukowski et al., 1999).

On the other hand, there is also a connection between low popularity and a partiality toward other-sex friends. Early adolescents who are unpopular with their same-sex peers turn to the other sex for friendship and belonging (Bukowski et al., 1999).

Adolescent boys tend to show less of a preference for same-sex friendships than girls. Furthermore, girls seem to foster less positive attitudes toward boys than boys foster for girls (Bukowski et al., 1999). However, Richards, Crowe, Larson, and Swarr (1998) found evidence that girls tend to think about the other sex more than

boys do and experience emotions (positive or negative) based on other-sex interactions.

Same-sex friendships seem to differ from other-sex friendships. For example, same-sex friendships are perceived to be more intimate than other-sex friendships (Connolly et al., 1999). Moreover, Lundy et al., (1998) found that high school females actually felt more comfortable during interactions with the same-sex and rated their same-sex friends more positively than did males. In fact, same-sex friendships are characterized by support and intimacy; whereas, other-sex friendships are characterized by shared activities (Feiring, 1999). Female adolescents have comfortable, playful interactions with their same-sex peers. Conversely, males seem to develop intimacy slower than females and may neglect to use emotions such as support, understanding, trust, and loyalty on a regular basis (Sharabany, Gershoni, and Hoffman, 1981).

Adolescents' Social Support Systems

Social support has been shown to positively influence the adolescent's ability to adapt (Richman et al., 1998). Family members, as well as peers, provide social support to adolescents and may even serve as attachment figures. This support contributes to adolescents' well being. In addition, secure attachments in early childhood may predict positive relations with peers in adolescence and adulthood. Also, learning how to develop positive relationships with friends may be cultured through relationships with family members (Franco & Levitt, 1998). These family members seem to serve as a model for peer relationships.

Moreover, supportive families provide adolescents with emotional security in their relationships with others and provide them with an opportunity for self-definition (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Unfortunately, some at-risk adolescents, adolescents from single-parent households, low socioeconomic families, and racial or ethnic minority groups, may be lacking this support (Richman et al., 1998). When adolescents have positive relationships with their friends, they see themselves as worthwhile and competent and feel valued as an individual. Relationships with peers may provide more benefits to the adolescent as family relationships can be perceived as obligatory (Franco & Levitt, 1998). In fact, peers may serve as a “correction factor” in relation to what has occurred in the parent-child relationship (Giordano, Cernkovich, Groat, Pugh, and Swinford, 1998). Coates (1985) found that peer support and family support is especially beneficial for African American adolescents’ self-esteem in their unfriendly and intolerable environment. Nonparental family members also serve as a social support, providing the adolescent with emotional security and communication skills (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Adult caregivers and neighbors are other social supports for middle school students (Richman et al., 1998).

Another important function of a social support system is to protect one’s self-esteem. Whether or not peers approve of their friends influences the adolescent’s self-regard. Girls seem to be more dependent than boys on this approval for their self-esteem (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Social support may even help adolescents become resilient and guard them against stress (Richman et al., 1998).

Friends provide the primary source of listening to middle school students; whereas, parents are the primary listeners for high school students. Middle school students who are supported through nonjudgmental listening have better grades and a higher sense of school self-efficacy than those who are not supported. Furthermore, when adolescents receive the emotional support and challenge they need, they are more satisfied with school than peers who do not receive this support (Richman et al., 1998).

Adolescents who receive reality confirmation reported more satisfaction with school and fostered more school self-efficacy than adolescents who do not receive reality confirmation. Reality confirmation can be defined as “the perception that another, who is similar to and who see things the same way the support recipient does, is helping to confirm the support recipient’s perspective of the world” (Richman et al., 1998, p.309). Also, middle school students who receive support through services or help provided by another person engage in more prosocial behavior than students who do not receive this support. In conclusion, social support can positively impact adolescents at risk of school failure when used as an intervention strategy (Richman et al., 1998).

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships take on an increasingly important role in adolescence, serving such functions as “providing companionship, emotional support, intimacy, and a means of expressing emotions and resolving conflicts” (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998). The relationships adolescents have with peers significantly influence their

social and emotional development. Moreover, peers play a vital role socializing the adolescent in interpersonal competence, which in turn, affects the youth's long term adjustment (Ladd, 1999). This is accomplished through the properties of friendship, which provide adolescents with the opportunity to build social skills to maintain relationships throughout life (Giordano et al., 1998). Also, peer relationships seem to be important in increasing middle school students' sense of identity and independence (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998). On the other hand, poor adolescent relationships can indicate deviance in adulthood (Ladd, 1999).

Children who have positive social skills (i.e. "behaviors that appeared to enhance peer acceptance, friendship, or other positive relational outcomes") had better overall relationships with their peers. Inversely, youths who tend to act aggressive and withdrawn are likely to be rejected by their peers or lose their friendships (Ladd, 1999). Likewise, adolescents who are anxious are less liked by their peers (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998). Furthermore, youths who experience high levels of social anxiety are inclined to have few friendships and have less support, companionship, acceptance and closeness in the relationships they do have and believe they are less romantically attractive than youths who do not experience high levels of social anxiety. These socially anxious adolescents perceive their acceptance as low and thus, miss important opportunities to socialize and therefore, may have impairments in social functioning. In fact, middle school students can be significantly stressed if they are excluded from peer interactions (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998).

Importance of Adolescence Friendship

Intimate friendships are characterized by the level of caring and mutual regard for one another, which is enhanced by frequent communication and reciprocal self-disclosure (Giordano et al., 1998). In adolescence, friendships are hypothesized to be of remarkable significance for the development of a positive sense of well being (Franco & Levitt, 1998). Friendships become especially important to adolescents as they are increasing independence and breaking ties from their family, namely their parents. Therefore, adolescents then need the approval, support and norms of their peer group. Friendships offer the mutuality and shared understanding that adolescents desire (Giordano et al., 1993).

Adolescents who are well liked have higher levels of self-efficacy and see themselves as competent. These adolescents view their friendships with peers as a meaningful resource of intimacy and companionship (Ladd, 1999). Friendships are also understood to contribute to positive self-esteem throughout adolescence and adulthood (Franco & Levitt, 1998). In addition, “higher attachment to friends in adolescence is positively related to level of perceived attachment to friends in adulthood” (Giordano et al., 1998).

Friendships serve many different purposes. Friends increase one another’s self-esteem, provide information to each other, support each other emotionally, offer advice to one another, and assist each other. Moreover, friendships contribute to a sense of identity and having a place in the world. “For many adolescents relations

with friends are critical interpersonal bridges that move them toward psychological growth and social maturity” (Giordano et al., 1998).

By allowing oneself to become vulnerable through self-disclosure to a peer, adolescent friends can share with each other their inner most thoughts and feelings and thus acquire true sensitivity to others as well as an understanding of others and the self. This emotional closeness has crucial importance for future personal friendships and intimate relationships and is vital in developing a sense of attachment to others and individuating the self (Giordano et al., 1998).

Race and Friendship

In general, adolescent friendships are typically intraracial. This may be because blacks and other minority youths experience friendships in significantly different ways than white adolescents. The cultural variant perspective “holds that while some observed differences may be traced to socioeconomic considerations, aspects of the life experiences of particular racial or ethnic subgroups may vary significantly—values may differ, behaviors may have different meanings, and relationships can have a different style and content” (Giordano et al., 1993, p.279). Silverstein and Krate (1975) hypothesized that blacks youths are more peer-oriented and more likely to be influenced by their peers than white youths. Giordano et al., (1993) suggested that some blacks suffer “family deficits” which are then compensated for with peer groups (Giordano et al., 1993, p.279). Moreover, a need for peer validation can be related to supposed lower levels of family cohesion found in one-parent families. Therefore, adolescents tend to satisfy their need for

attachment and belongingness that is not being met at home through their friendships. This phenomenon is called the compensation hypothesis (Giordano et al., 1993).

However, a separate contradictory study by deCindro, Floyd, Wilcox, and McSeveney (1983) found that black adolescents are more parent-oriented than their white counterparts as reported in a parent versus peer orientation scale. This may be caused by the hostile environment which minority youth live in; therefore, they may cling to their families as a sanctuary or a foundation (Giordano et al., 1993).

Because of strong family ties and less intense friends, black adolescents have more tolerance for heterogeneity and differences among friends. Black adolescents seem to have less of a need for mutuality or similarity as a basis for friendship choice than white adolescents. Thus, black adolescents may experience less conformity than white adolescents and report lower levels of peer pressure and need for approval from peers. Moreover, conformity peaked almost three years earlier for blacks than whites in one study (Giordano et al., 1993). For example, in a study conducted by Billy and Udry (1985), blacks, unlike whites, did not select peers who had similar sexual behavior patterns as friends more than peers who had different sexual behavior patterns. For instance, white heterosexual adolescents may choose only heterosexual friends; whereas, black heterosexual adolescents may choose heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual friends. The more adaptive friendship style used by black adolescents possibly reflects social flexibility that is tolerant in difficult economic and social circumstances (Giordano et al., 1993).

The difference between black and white adolescent friendships is definite. In Giordano et al., (1993) it was found that black and white youths responded significantly different to questions about parental control and supervision, family intimacy, mutuality as a basis of peer attraction, the need for peer approval, importance of peer group affiliation, friendship intimacy, and peer pressure. Black adolescents score significantly higher than white youths on the family measures (parental control and family intimacy) and significantly lower than white adolescents on the peer measures. Blacks also described their friendships as less intimate than whites. Since black adolescents seem more parent-oriented and have closer ties with their family, they do not require the intimacy with peers that white adolescents need (Giordano et al., 1993).

Chapter 3

Research Design

The research topic was initiated by a desire to understand the qualities and characteristics that are important to adolescents when they choose their friends. Friendships influence social development in numerous ways: they increase self-esteem and self-worth, contribute to self-definition, and provide a model for intimate relationships including marriage (Rotenburg & Morgan, 1995). Many friendships are developed during adolescence when youths are increasing their autonomy and independence from the family (Giordano et al., 1993).

Since friendships are such an asset to our development and because the number of peers an adolescent is drawn to may positively predict the number of friends the adolescent acquires (Rotenburg & Morgan, 1995), it is important to understand what characteristics and qualities adolescents actually prefer in choosing friends. The research study provides insight into the importance of certain friendship qualities to middle school-aged students. Furthermore, the study attempts to gain an understanding of friendship formation in middle school students.

Population and Sampling Method

A pilot study was conducted in the winter before the actual survey was completed. Middle schoolers on a soccer team were asked to write down characteristics that described their friends (positive or negative). The researcher incorporated some of the answers in the wording of the research survey.

The survey was conducted in a mid-western city. Flyers were posted at two local college universities, University of Nebraska at Omaha and College of Saint Mary, containing information for students who were parents of middle school or junior high school students. Flyers were posted in hallways, lounges, libraries, elevators, classroom hallways, and student centers. Parents who responded to the flyers were instructed to pick up a packet in a designated location. Around 60 packets were placed in a split box in the designated location that was marked “New” or “Completed.” Interested parents picked up a “new” packet (see Appendix) which included a letter explaining the study, a parental consent form, a youth assent form, the survey, and information about the rights of research participants to take home to their middle school-aged child. Parents were then instructed to return their completed packet to the designated location.

The population consisted of 47 students in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. Unfortunately, it was unknown whether the ninth grade participants attended middle/junior high school or high school. The students’ ages ranged from 11-15 years old. By obtaining particular demographic information and answers from Likert scale questions, correlations and conclusions were drawn concerning various characteristics important to different kinds of students (i.e. boys, girls, Caucasians, non-Caucasians, etc.).

The survey was conducted in early spring. Participants were required to have a signed parental consent form and a completed youth assent form when returning the survey, and they were given a copy of each to keep. Since the packet was completed

in the home, parents could explain the survey thoroughly to their middle school children and encourage them to ask questions. Parents were also permitted to view their child's survey before returning it to the university.

Data Collection Method

The data collection method consisted of a researcher constructed survey administered to middle school/junior high school students whose parents responded to a flyer hung in one of two college universities. The questions provide information regarding the significance of various characteristics in choosing friends. By assigning numerical values to the Likert scale questions, the opinions and preferences concerning qualities important in choosing friends may be quantified.

Data Collection Instrument

The collection instrument used is a 14-question value survey on friendship characteristics using a Likert scale (see Appendix). An attempt to verify consistency of responses was made by rewording and asking the hypotheses questions twice in the survey. The survey also includes demographic questions pertaining to the subject's gender, grade level, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family make-up.

Areas of Research

In the literature review, information was presented on same-sex and other-sex friendships, adolescents' social support systems, peer relationships, quality of adolescent friendships, and racial aspects of friendship. The area of research of this study is the characteristics middle school students actually prefer when choosing friends. The research also studies differences in preferences between males and

females, Caucasians and non-Caucasians, seventh graders and ninth graders, and one-parent and two-parent families. Four of the survey questions directly pertain to the four hypotheses (see Table 3.1). These questions were interspersed throughout the

Table 3.1 Hypotheses Questions and Related Literature

Questions Pertaining to Hypotheses	Related Literature
Q1—gender (H1)	Bukowski et al., 1999 Connolly et al., 1999 Feiring, 1999
Q5—race (H2)	Giordano et al., 1993
Q3—parent’s approval (H4, H6)	Franco & Levitt, 1998 Giordano et al., 1993
Q7—moral values (H3, H5)	Richman et al., 1998 Giordano et al., 1998 Giordano et al., 1993

survey. The opinions and answers of the respondents provide quantifiable results that allow assumptions to be made concerning middle school students and friendship formation.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis process consists of quantifying the preferences and opinions of important characteristics in adolescent friendship formation. By assigning values to the Likert scale questions and evaluating the demographic data, the researcher can present descriptive statistics. The analysis of cross tabulations and t-tests provides conclusions about different types of adolescents and the qualities that they prefer in friends.

Summary

Friendships are an important part of every person's life. Adolescence is the time when many friendships are formed. An adolescent's gender, race, grade, or family make-up may impact their preferences for certain characteristics in friendship formation. The data collection instrument used in this study offers insight into these characteristics and how diverse adolescents view them. It is important to understand what causes adolescents to choose their friends because peers are the most significant influence in an adolescent's life (Giordano et al., 1993). Friendships also serve as a model for future relationships (Rotenburg & Morgan, 1995) and effect social and emotional future development (Ladd, 1999).

Chapter 4

Research Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to conduct an investigation of characteristics and qualities that are important to middle school-aged children when choosing their friends. To complete this study, 47 middle school-aged students were individually administered a value survey with specific directions for completion.

Presentation of Results and Demographic Data

Relevant information from the survey was summarized using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and cross tabulation. T-tests were also conducted to determine the statistical differences of the six hypotheses and their respective questions.

To analyze and present the data from the survey, the researcher established a guideline approach to the findings. For the purpose of this study, the “very important” responses and the “important” responses were combined together for evaluation. Also the “very unimportant” responses and the “unimportant” responses were combined together for evaluation. Moreover, the findings have been reported as important, unimportant or neutral (“doesn’t matter”).

Table 4.1 highlights the results of the self-reported demographic data that was collected from the survey. Participants were asked to self-report their parents’ income level as low, middle, high, or unsure. This question was simply used to get a

profile of the research population. The income information was not used to analyze their hypotheses as its legitimacy was unknown.

There were a total of 47 respondents, 18 from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and 29 from College of Saint Mary. The participants were mostly made up of middle-income (66%), Caucasian (83%) middle school-aged students of two-parent families (85%). Because of the small number of African American (9%), Asian American (2%), Hispanic (0%), Native American (2%), Biracial (0%), and Multiracial (2%) respondents, the researcher combined their responses into a group entitled “non-Caucasian” which make up 16% of the total number of responses.

Table 4.1

Demographics		N=47	
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	27	57%	
Female	20	43%	
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
African American	4	9%	
Asian American	1	2%	
Caucasian American	39	83%	
Hispanic American	0	0%	
Native American	1	2%	
Biracial	0	0%	
Multiracial	2	4%	
<i>Income Level</i>			
Low Income	4	9%	
Middle Income	31	66%	
High Income	8	17%	
Unsure	4	9%	
<i>Education Level</i>			
7 th Grade	22	47%	
8 th Grade	9	19%	
9 th Grade	16	34%	
<i>Family Status</i>			
One Parent Family	5	11%	
Two Parent Family	40	85%	
Other	2	4%	

Cross Tabulation of Non-Hypotheses Questions

Question 2 referred to the importance of popularity in choosing friends (see Table 4.2). Sixty-five percent of females responded that popularity was unimportant to them; whereas, only 38% of males rated it as unimportant. Seventh graders answered this question with a mean of 3.409 and a standard deviation of .908. Eighth grade respondents had a mean of 3.222 and a standard deviation of 1.093. Ninth graders found popularity the least important with a mean of 4.125 and a standard deviation of .806.

Table 4.2

Question #2 - That he/she is popular.	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Male	0%	11%	52%	19%	19%	3.444	0.770	27
Female	0%	10%	25%	35%	30%	3.850	0.988	20
7th Grade	0%	14%	45%	27%	14%	3.409	0.908	22
8th Grade	0%	22%	56%	0%	22%	3.222	1.093	9
9th Grade	0%	0%	25%	38%	38%	4.125	0.806	16
Caucasian American	0%	10%	41%	26%	23%	3.615	0.963	39
Non-Caucasian American	0%	13%	38%	25%	25%	3.625	1.061	8
One Parent Family	0%	40%	60%	0%	0%	2.600	0.548	5
Two Parent Family	0%	8%	38%	28%	28%	3.742	0.720	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Caucasians and non-Caucasians answered question 2 similarly with means of 3.615 and 3.625 respectively. Interestingly, one-parent families and two-parent

families responded differently to the importance of popularity. Forty percent of one-parent family respondents rated popularity as important; while merely 8% of two-parent family respondents rated it as important.

Question 4 asked if trustworthiness is important in choosing friends (see Table 4.3). One hundred percent of females responded that trustworthiness is important; whereas, only 89% of males rated it as important. The importance of trustworthiness seemed to grow with age. Seventh graders had a mean of 1.591 for question 3, eighth grade participants' mean was 1.444, and ninth graders had a mean of 1.438.

Table 4.3

Question #4 - That he/she is trustworthy.	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Male	56%	33%	7%	4%	0%	1.593	0.510	27
Female	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	1.400	0.503	20
7th Grade	55%	36%	5%	5%	0%	1.591	0.796	22
8th Grade	67%	22%	11%	0%	0%	1.444	0.726	9
9th Grade	56%	44%	0%	0%	0%	1.438	0.512	16
Caucasian American	54%	44%	3%	0%	0%	1.487	0.556	39
Non-Caucasian American	75%	0%	13%	13%	0%	1.625	1.188	8
One Parent Family	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.000	0.000	5
Two Parent Family	55%	40%	5%	0%	0%	1.484	0.399	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Ninety-eight percent of Caucasians expressed that trustworthiness is important and 75% of non-Caucasians thought it was important. One-parent and two-parent

family respondents agreed that trustworthiness is important when choosing friends.

The means were 1.0 and 1.484 respectively for question 4.

Question 6 asked if it was important for a person to be handsome/pretty when choosing friends (see Table 4.4). Forty-four percent of males and 55% of females thought that appearance was unimportant. Again, there was a progression of the mean with the different grades. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade respondents had means of 3.318, 3.667, and 3.688 respectively.

Table 4.4

Question #6 - That he/she is handsome/pretty.	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Male	7%	15%	33%	22%	22%	3.370	1.080	27
Female	0%	15%	30%	25%	30%	3.700	1.081	20
7th Grade	0%	23%	41%	18%	18%	3.318	1.041	22
8th Grade	11%	11%	11%	33%	33%	3.667	1.414	9
9th Grade	6%	6%	31%	25%	31%	3.688	1.195	16
Caucasian American	5%	15%	38%	18%	23%	3.385	1.161	39
Non-Caucasian American	0%	13%	0%	50%	38%	4.125	0.991	8
One Parent Family	20%	40%	0%	40%	0%	2.600	1.342	5
Two Parent Family	3%	13%	38%	18%	30%	3.516	0.805	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Caucasians and non-Caucasians answered question 6 differently. Less than half of Caucasians (41%) rated appearance as unimportant; whereas, a large majority of non-Caucasians (88%) responded that appearance was unimportant. Appearance

was more important to one-parent family respondents than to two-parent respondents with means of 2.600 and 3.516 respectively.

Question 8 referred to the importance of intelligence when choosing friends (See Table 4.5). Females reported that intelligence was more important to them than to males. On question 8, female middle school students answered with a mean of 3.050 and a standard deviation of 1.146. Males, on the other hand, compiled a mean of 3.296 and a standard deviation of .807. Intelligence was not as important to eighth graders as it was to seventh and ninth graders. Zero percent of the eighth graders surveyed stated that intelligence was important. However, 19% of seventh graders and half of ninth graders reported intelligence important when selecting friends.

Table 4.5

Question #8 - That he/she is smart.	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Male	0%	19%	52%	11%	19%	3.296	0.807	27
Female	10%	25%	20%	40%	5%	3.050	1.146	20
7th Grade	5%	14%	50%	9%	23%	3.318	1.129	22
8th Grade	0%	0%	44%	44%	11%	3.667	0.707	9
9th Grade	6%	44%	19%	31%	0%	2.750	1.000	16
Caucasian American	3%	21%	41%	28%	8%	3.179	0.942	39
Non-Caucasian American	13%	25%	25%	0%	38%	3.250	1.581	8
One Parent Family	0%	20%	40%	0%	40%	3.600	1.342	5
Two Parent Family	5%	23%	38%	25%	10%	3.194	0.771	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Non-Caucasians also expressed that intelligence was valuable to them when choosing friends. Thirty-eight percent of non-Caucasians as opposed to 24% of Caucasians reported that intelligence is important in friendships. Middle school students from a one-parent family answered question 8 with a mean of 3.600; whereas, students from a two-parent family had a mean of 3.194.

Question 11 asked if friends being the same age or in the same grade is important (see Table 4.6). Forty-one percent of males and 60% of females agreed that age is actually not important when choosing friends. Eighteen percent of seventh graders and one-third of eighth graders informed that age is important. Interestingly, none of the ninth graders surveyed believed age is significant when selecting friends.

Table 4.6

Question #11 - That he/she is same grade/age as you.	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Male	0%	19%	41%	19%	22%	3.444	0.907	27
Female	0%	10%	30%	25%	35%	3.850	1.040	20
7th Grade	0%	18%	32%	23%	27%	3.591	1.098	22
8th Grade	0%	33%	22%	11%	33%	3.444	1.333	9
9th Grade	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%	3.750	0.856	16
Caucasian American	0%	18%	41%	23%	18%	3.410	0.993	39
Non-Caucasian American	0%	0%	13%	13%	75%	4.625	0.744	8
One Parent Family	0%	20%	20%	20%	40%	3.800	1.304	5
Two Parent Family	0%	15%	40%	18%	28%	3.742	0.684	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Caucasians and non-Caucasians answered question 11 dissimilarly. With a mean of 3.410, Caucasians answered more toward the middle of the road (doesn't matter) on the age issue. However, non-Caucasians responded that age is unimportant in friendships with a mean of 4.625. Sixty percent of one-parent family respondents also considered age to be unimportant in friendship selection as compared to 46% of their two-parent family respondent counterparts.

Question 13 surveyed the importance of support in the friendship choices of middle school students (see Table 4.7). Eighty-nine percent of males, as opposed to all of the females surveyed, reported that support from friends is essential. Ninety-five percent of seventh graders and 100% of ninth graders informed that support is important, while only 78% of eighth graders agreed.

Table 4.7

<i>Question #13 - That he/she is supportive.</i>	<i>VI=1</i>	<i>I=2</i>	<i>DM=3</i>	<i>U=4</i>	<i>VU=5</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. Dev.</i>	<i>N</i>
Male	48%	41%	11%	0%	0%	1.630	0.506	27
Female	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%	1.250	0.444	20
7th Grade	50%	45%	5%	0%	0%	1.545	0.596	22
8th Grade	56%	22%	22%	0%	0%	1.667	0.866	9
9th Grade	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%	1.250	0.447	16
Caucasian American	62%	33%	5%	0%	0%	1.436	0.598	39
Non-Caucasian American	50%	38%	13%	0%	0%	1.625	0.744	8
One Parent Family	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	1.400	0.548	5
Two Parent Family	63%	30%	8%	0%	0%	1.419	0.350	40

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant, Mean=Average Response, St. Dev.=Standard Deviation, N=Number of respondents to each question)

Caucasians and non-Caucasians concurred that support is significant in the selection of friends with means of 1.436 and 1.625 respectively. All of the one-parent family respondents and 93% of two-parent family respondents believed support to be vital in friendship choice.

T-Tests of Hypotheses Questions

T-Tests were conducted on the six hypotheses. The following hypotheses (all pertaining to middle school aged students) were established for the purpose of this study:

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between males and females when choosing friends of their same gender.

Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends of their same race.

Hypothesis 3: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends who have their same moral values.

Hypothesis 4: There is no relationship between Caucasian Americans and non-Caucasian Americans when choosing friends based on parental approval.

Hypothesis 5: There is no relationship between seventh graders and ninth graders when choosing friends who have their same moral values.

Hypothesis 6: There is no relationship between children in one-parent families and children in two-parent families when choosing friends based on parental approval.

The purpose of the t-test was to determine if the difference between the means of two populations was statistically significant (Zikmund, 1994). The t-value of 2.180 for Hypothesis 1 (Question 1) was statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 4.8). Moreover, male participants chose friends of their same gender statistically significantly more than females.

Table 4.8

<i>Hypothesis 1 - Question #1</i>	<i>Female Mean</i>	<i>Female St. Dev.</i>	<i>Female N</i>	<i>Male Mean</i>	<i>Male St. Dev.</i>	<i>Male N</i>	<i>Mean Diff.</i>	<i>T-Test</i>
That he/she is the same gender as you.	4.300	0.865	20	3.630	1.155	27	0.670	*2.180

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.0)

The t-test for Hypothesis 2 (Question 3) revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between Caucasians and non-Caucasians when choosing friends of the same race (see Table 4.9). Neither Caucasians nor non-Caucasians thought race was important when choosing friends, with no significant difference between the two populations.

Table 4.9

<i>Hypothesis 2 - Question #5</i>	<i>Non-Caucas. Mean</i>	<i>Non-Caucas. St. Dev.</i>	<i>Non-Caucas. N</i>	<i>Caucas. Mean</i>	<i>Caucas. St. Dev.</i>	<i>Caucas. N</i>	<i>Mean Diff.</i>	<i>T-Test</i>
That he/she is the same race as you.	4.875	0.354	8	4.487	0.854	39	0.388	1.253

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.0)

According to the t-test for Hypothesis 3 (Question 7), there was no significant difference statistically between Caucasians and non-Caucasians when selecting friends who have the same moral values (see Table 4.10). The t-value was 1.237, which is not above the critical value of 2.0 at the .05 level.

Table 4.10

Hypothesis 3 - Question #7	Non-Caucas. Mean	Non-Caucas. St. Dev.	Non-Caucas. N	Caucas. Mean	Caucas. St. Dev.	Caucas. N	Mean Diff.	T-Test
That he/she has the same moral values as you.	2.625	1.408	8	2.128	0.951	39	0.497	1.237

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.0)

The t-test for Hypothesis 4 (Question 3) calculated a t-value of 0.656 for non-Caucasians and Caucasians choosing friends whom their parents approve of (see Table 4.11). Therefore, there was not a statistically significant difference between non-Caucasians and Caucasians on question 3.

Table 4.11

Hypothesis 4 - Question #3	Caucas. Mean	Caucas. St. Dev.	Caucas. N	Non-Caucas. Mean	Non-Caucas. St. Dev.	Non-Caucas. N	Mean Diff.	T-Test
That your parents approve of him/her.	3.077	1.231	39	2.750	1.124	8	0.327	0.656

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.0)

The goal of Hypothesis 5 was to determine if there is a relationship between ninth graders and seventh graders when choosing friends of their same moral values (Question 7). The t-test revealed that there is not a statistically significant difference between ninth graders and seventh graders when selecting friends with similar moral values (see Table 4.12). The t-value of 0.950 does not exceed the critical value of 2.021 at the .05 level.

Table 4.12

Hypothesis 5 - Question #7	7th Grade Mean	7th Grade St. Dev.	7th Grade N	9th Grade Mean	9th Grade St. Dev.	9th Grade N	Mean Diff.	T-Test
That he/she has the same moral values as you.	2.409	1.098	22	2.063	1.124	16	0.346	0.950

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.021)

Hypothesis 6 (Question 3) pertained to the importance of parental approval when middle school students of one-parent families and two-parent families choose friends. The t-test showed that the difference between youths of one-parent families and two-parent families is not statistically significant for question 3 (see Table 4.13). Moreover, middle school students of one-parent families do not seek approval from their parents more than middle school students of two-parent families when selecting friends.

Table 4.13

<i>Hypothesis 6 - Question #3</i>	<i>One Parent Mean</i>	<i>One Parent St. Dev.</i>	<i>One Parent N</i>	<i>Two Parent Mean</i>	<i>Two Parent St. Dev.</i>	<i>Two Parent N</i>	<i>Mean Diff.</i>	<i>T-Test</i>
That your parents approve of him/her.	3.600	1.673	5	2.950	0.800	40	0.650	1.494

(* = Statistically significant at .05 level, critical value = 2.0)

Consistency Questions

An attempt to verify consistency of responses was made by rewording and asking the hypotheses questions twice in the survey. Furthermore, each of the four questions that the six hypotheses were based on had a “shadow” question, which is simply the same question stated in a different manner (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14 illustrates each hypothesis question and its respective shadow question by showing all the percentages of the five possible responses, the mean, and the standard deviation. For questions 1 and 9, the difference of the means is a mere .012. Questions 3 and 10 had means of 3.021 and 2.915 respectively. The difference between their means is .106.

Table 4.14

Questions	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.
1. That he/she is the same gender as you.	2%	9%	32%	15%	43%	3.872	1.135
9. That he/she is the same sex as you (male, female).	2%	9%	23%	19%	47%	4.000	1.123
Questions	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.
3. That your parents approve of him/her.	9%	34%	23%	15%	19%	3.021	1.277
10. That your parents like him/her.	4%	38%	28%	21%	9%	2.915	1.060
Questions	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.
5. That he/she is the same race as you.	0%	0%	19%	6%	74%	4.553	0.802
12. That he/she shares your ethnic background.	0%	2%	21%	21%	55%	4.298	0.883
Questions	VI=1	I=2	DM=3	U=4	VU=5	Mean	St. Dev.
7. That he/she has the same moral values as you.	28%	36%	28%	4%	4%	2.213	1.041
14. That he/she has the same beliefs as you (ideas, values, opinions).	9%	47%	30%	11%	2%	2.489	0.882

(VI=Very Important, I=Important, DM=Doesn't Matter, U=Unimportant, VU=Very Unimportant)

Questions 5 and 12 had the largest mean difference of .255. However, on both questions the mean response was “unimportant,” with the highest percentage of responses falling under “very unimportant.” The mean difference for questions 7 and 14 is only .159. Overall, the survey participants seemed to answer consistently.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the data collected from the research survey. Non-hypotheses questions were discussed using cross-tabulation and descriptive statistics. T-tests were performed on the six hypotheses and their related questions, and the results were reported. Finally, consistency was examined and discussed on the four questions used in the hypotheses. The findings of the research could be used as a

foundation for subsequent studies on characteristics that are important to middle school aged students when choosing friends. Chapter 5 further discusses the research findings and provides conclusions and limitations of the study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research study attempted to understand the qualities that are meaningful to middle school aged children when forming friendships. It is important to focus on the findings of this research and its contribution to adolescent friendship formation. Results of the survey are summarized and linked to past research to gain a better understanding of the friendship characteristics that are important to middle school students. The data collected on the six hypotheses is discussed, followed by limitations of the study, and areas of future research.

This study is an important contribution to the literature on middle school students and friendship for several reasons. First, this investigation is one of the few studies on friendship formation. Most of the previous research examines the difference between same-sex friendships and other-sex friendships, adolescents' social support systems, the purpose of friendships, peer relationships, and the benefits of friendship. Second, middle school participants of this study had the opportunity to feel that their opinions are valued and are making a positive impact on society. It also potentially provided them with insight on how to choose the appropriate friends for them by understanding the characteristics that they value in their friendships.

Third, since peers and friends are the most important influence in an adolescent's life as they are distancing from parents (Giordano et al., 1993), it is meaningful to know what causes adolescents to choose the friends they choose. Their friendships will provide them with a model for future relationships (Rotenburg &

Morgan, 1995) as well as many benefits to them socially and emotionally. Moreover, if parents and teachers know what characteristics are important to their children/students, they can facilitate and nurture friendships that are beneficial to the student.

Hypothesis 1: Gender and Friendship Formation

Using the demographic data collected in the value survey, the researcher elicited the middle school student's gender information. Males and females were represented almost equally in the study as 57% of the respondents were males and 43% were females. Question 1 pertained to Hypothesis 1 in asking the participant how important it is to choose friends who are their same gender. It was predicted that no relationship exists between males and females when choosing friends of their same gender. However, this prediction was not upheld. Males statistically significantly reported choosing friends based on their same gender more than females.

This finding does not support the previous research studies on gender and friendship by Bukowski and colleagues (1999) which inform that girls prefer same-sex friendships more than boys. However, it may support the theory that female adolescents tend to think about male adolescents more than male adolescents think about females (Richards et al., 1998). This curiosity may make it easier for girls to develop friendships with the opposite sex.

Hypothesis 2: Race and Friendship Formation

In the survey, students were asked to self-report their ethnicity. They were given the following seven categories to choose from: African American, Asian

American, Caucasian American, Hispanic American, Native American, Biracial, and Multiracial. Unfortunately, the number of non-Caucasians respondents was extremely low, a total of 17% in all, so African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Biracial, and Multiracial participants were combined together into one category. Question 5 related to Hypothesis 2 in asking the middle schooler how important race is when choosing friends.

The researcher predicted that there is no relationship between Caucasians and non-Caucasians when choosing friends of their same race. The findings supported this prediction. Though adolescent friendships may typically be intraracial (Giordano et al., 1993), according to the results of this research, it is not due to selecting friends on the basis of race alone.

Hypothesis 3: Race and Friendships Based on Similar Moral Values

Giordano and colleagues (1993) found that black adolescents have more open-mindedness for heterogeneity and differences in friendships. Moreover, black adolescents seem to need mutuality or similarity as a basis for friendship choice less than white adolescents. The researcher predicted in Hypothesis 3 that there is no relationship between Caucasians and non-Caucasians when choosing friends with their same moral values. Moreover, the results upheld this prediction, but did not support the previous research. This could be due, though, to the combining of the non-Caucasians into one category instead of testing the African American population exclusively.

Hypothesis 4: Race and the Importance of Parental Approval in Friendships

The researcher predicted that there is no relationship between Caucasians and non-Caucasians when selecting friends based on parental approval. This hypothesis was based on Question 3, which took previous research by deCindro et al. (1983) into consideration. deCindro and colleagues found that black adolescents are more parent-oriented than their white counterparts. Giordano et al., (1993) suggested that this may be due the hostile environment in which minority adolescents live and therefore, cling to their families for support.

The t-test for Hypothesis 4 showed that there is not a statistically significant difference between non-Caucasians and Caucasians in seeking their parents' approval when choosing friends. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was confirmed, but the previous research of deCindro was not sustained.

Hypothesis 5: Age and the Importance of Similar Moral Values

The survey in this study was administered to seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. Their respective percentage of respondents was 47%, 19%, and 34%. The researcher thought there was a large enough age difference between seventh and ninth graders to compare them on one of the survey questions.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that there is no relationship between seventh and ninth graders when choosing friends with their same moral values. Past research examines the distancing from parents and a growing preference toward peer friendships which occurs during adolescence (Giordano et al., 1993). The assumption is the older the adolescent, the more distanced they are from their parents and thus, they need friends

with similar moral values. However, the research of this study did not validate this assumption. Hypothesis 5 was supported, though. There was not a statistically significant difference between seventh and ninth graders in choosing friends based on their same moral values.

Hypothesis 6: Family Background and Parental Approval of Friendship

Hypothesis 6 predicted that there is no relationship between middle school students of one-parent families and of two-parent families when choosing friends based on their parents' approval. Moreover, the results of the research showed no significant difference between one-parent and two-parent family middle school students when seeking parental approval of friends.

It was actually more important to adolescents of two-parent families than to adolescents of one-parent families to select friends based on their parents' approval. This may support previous research showing that one-parent families experience lower levels of family cohesion than two-parent families and thus create a greater need for peer, as opposed to parent, validation. Moreover, adolescents from one-parent families seek attachment and belongingness from peer relationships to compensate for their unmet needs at home (Giordano et al., 1993).

Limitations

The following are some of the limitations of this research study. First, the respondents of the study seemed to be mostly middle-income (66%), Caucasian (83%) middle school-aged students of two-parent families (85%). This was unfortunate as four of the six hypotheses compared either Caucasians and non-

Caucasians or one-parent and two-parent family middle school students. The data also seemed less effective as the researcher had to combine all the minority groups into one group of “non-Caucasians.”

A second limitation of the study was the small sample size. Unfortunately, schools in the metropolitan Omaha area were unwilling to allow the survey to be completed by their students. Therefore, the surveys were placed in two local college universities and were completed by middle school students whose parents responded to one of the many flyers hung in the school. Moreover, the respondents may over-represent children of parents who are participating in higher education and under-represent minority students.

Third, parents of the middle school respondents were allowed to view their child’s survey after completion. This could be a limitation as the participants may have rated the importance of their parents’ approval of friends higher than what they would have rated it if their parents were not allowed to view their survey.

Finally, the survey used in this study was designed by the researcher and reliability and validity information was not available. Although there were consistency questions integrated into the survey, there is no assurance that the instrument truly measured the characteristics that are important to middle school students when choosing friends. The survey only included a small number of qualities that may be of importance to middle schoolers in friendship selection.

Conclusion and Areas of Future Research

Overall, the major finding of this study is that males tend to choose friends based on their same gender more than females. This difference was found to be statistically significant by the t-test performed on the data. This finding contradicts previous research by Bukowski et al., (1999) and Lundy et al., (1998).

Another interesting finding of this study is that race was actually the least important characteristic to middle school students when choosing friends. The survey Question 5 pertaining to the importance of race when selecting friends, actually had the highest mean of all fourteen questions at 4.553. On the other hand, the most significant quality presented in the survey to middle school students was supportiveness. It was extremely important to middle schoolers that their friends are supportive of them, standing by them in bad times. The mean for Question 13 was 1.468.

This study revealed a limitation in friendship formation for adolescents. Currently, no reliable instrument exists to measure the characteristics and qualities that are important to middle school-aged students when forming friendships. Numerous authors have investigated aspects of friendships such as same-sex and other-sex friendships, benefits of friendships, and peer relationships, yet none have developed an appropriate instrument to measure exactly what attracts one friend to another. Perhaps an instrument could be developed that allows adolescents to self-report the most important qualities they look for in friends. Moreover, an understanding of why these qualities are important could be investigated.

This study was conducted in the spring. It would be interesting to administer this same study in the early fall and again in the spring and compare the responses. Since student anxiety levels may be higher at the beginning of the year, adolescents may be less liked by their peers and thus more accepting of differences in their friendships. Information from the comparisons of responses could build on the previous research of LaGreca & Lopez (1998).

This study also pointed out that there were not significant differences between Caucasians and non-Caucasians and the characteristics that are meaningful to them in friendship formation. However, previous research has shown that adolescent friendships are usually intraracial (Giordano et al., 1993). A possible study could examine where the discrepancy in race and friendship occurs. If adolescents of different racial backgrounds agree on the qualities that are important in friendships and they do not choose friends based on race, then why are adolescent friendships intraracial? A study based on this question may produce some extremely interesting results.

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Appendix
Survey Packet

March 30, 2001

Kirsten Honaker-Carter
Department of Counseling
Room 421 KH
UNO - Via Courier

IRB # 061-01-EP

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: Characteristics and Qualities Important to Middle School Students in Choosing Friends

SECONDARY INVESTIGATORS:

DATE OF FULL BOARD REVIEW _____ DATE OF EXPEDITED REVIEW 02-01-01

DATE OF FINAL APPROVAL 03-30-01 VALID UNTIL 02-01-02

EXPEDITED CATEGORY OF REVIEW: 45CFR46.110; 21CFR56.110, Category 7

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the above-titled protocol and informed consent document(s), including any revised material submitted in response to the IRB's review. The Board has expressed its opinion that you are in compliance with HHS Regulations (45 CFR 46) and applicable FDA Regulations (21 CFR 50.56) and you have provided adequate safeguards for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects to be involved in this study. The IRB has, therefore, granted unconditional approval of your research project. This letter constitutes official notification of the final approval and release of your project by the IRB, and you are authorized to implement this study as of the above date of final approval.

Please be advised that only the IRB approved and stamped consent/assent form can be used to make copies to enroll subjects. Also, at the time of consent all subjects/representatives must be given a copy of the rights of research participants. The IRB wishes to remind you that the PI or Co-PI, is responsible for ensuring that ethically and legally effective informed consent has been obtained from all research subjects.

Finally, under the provisions of this institution's Multiple Project Assurance (MPA #1509), the PI/Co-PI is directly responsible for submitting to the IRB any proposed change in the research or the consent document(s). In addition, any unanticipated adverse events involving risk to the subject or others must be promptly reported to the IRB. This project is subject to periodic review and surveillance by the IRB and, as part of their surveillance, the IRB may request periodic reports of progress and results. For projects which continue beyond one year, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to initiate a request to the IRB for continuing review and update of the research project.

Sincerely,



Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/kje

IRB#: 061-01-EP

**CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES IMPORTANT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS IN CHOOSING THEIR FRIENDS**

March 2001

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in Counseling at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. In order to complete my master's degree I must complete a research study. I have chosen to research the qualities that are important to middle school students when choosing friends.

This packet includes two parental consent forms, two youth assent forms, one survey, and a paper on your rights as a research participant. The extra consent/assent forms and the paper on your rights are your copies. Please read the forms carefully. **Please make sure the Parental Consent and Youth Assent Forms you return to me are signed, dated, and initialed on each page.**

This study involves a 14-question survey. The questions relate to the importance of various characteristics in choosing friends. A sample question is "How important is the following to you when choosing your friends? That he/she is trustworthy (keeps your secrets)." The student then rates the importance on a 1 to 5 scale ranging from very important to very unimportant. The survey will also include demographic information.

The potential risk of the research is minimal. There is a slight chance that your child may experience mild discomfort if they analyze how important certain characteristics are to them in choosing friends. The benefit of the research is that it provides your child with an opportunity to express his/her opinion. Your child should feel that his/her answers are valued and are making an impact on society. Children may also gain insight on how to choose the appropriate friends for them by understanding the qualities that they value in their friendships.

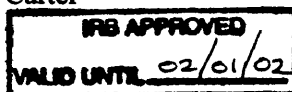
Your confidentiality will be protected as I, my thesis supervisor, and the Institutional Review Board will have the only access to the data. Also, students' names will not be written on the survey.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (402)339-6592 ext. 104. I appreciate your time and cooperation in the study. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Kirsten R. Honaker-Carter

Blue Papers = you keep
white papers = return to me in envelope



IRB#: 061-01-EP

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PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES IMPORTANT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHOOSING THEIR FRIENDS.

INVITATION

You are invited to permit your child to participate in this research study. The information in this consent form is provided to help you decide whether to allow your child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the investigator.

WHY IS YOUR CHILD ELIGIBLE?

Your child is eligible because he/she is currently in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. The middle school age was selected for the friendship formation survey because many friendships are formed in middle school and friendships become especially important during adolescence.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study to investigate characteristics and qualities that are important to middle school students in choosing their friends.

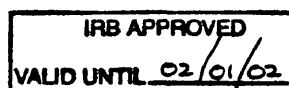
WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE?

Students with a completed parental consent form and signed assent form will be allowed to take a 14-question value survey. The questions relate to the importance of various characteristics in choosing friends. A sample question is "How important is the following to you when choosing your friends? That he/she is trustworthy (keeps your secrets)." The student then rates the importance on a 1 to 5 point scale ranging from very important to very unimportant. The survey will also include demographic questions pertaining to the subject's gender, grade level, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family make-up. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS YOU CHILD COULD EXPERIENCE?

The potential risks associated with the research are minimal. There is a slight chance that a student may experience mild discomfort if they analyze how important characteristics such as

_____ **Parent Initials**



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gender and race are important to them in choosing friends. They may feel guilty if they choose friends based on gender and/or race alone.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO YOUR CHILD?

One of the benefits of the research is that it provides middle school students with the opportunity to express their opinions. Participants will feel that their answers are valued and that they are making a positive impact on society. Another benefit to the students is that answering the survey questions may provide them with insight on how to choose the appropriate friends for them by understanding the characteristics that they value in their friendships.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO SOCIETY?

The potential benefit to society resulting from this research is an understanding of the characteristics and qualities that are important to adolescents in choosing the friends. This will, in return, provide knowledge of what is truly important to an adolescent during their middle school years. Then teachers and parents may be able to facilitate and nurture friendships that are beneficial to their students/children.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING

The alternative to participating in this study is not to participate. If students do not have a parental consent form or do not consent to completing the survey, they will not be penalized in any way.

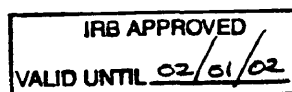
WHAT ARE YOUR FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS?

You and your child have no financial obligation regarding the research study. All expenses of the study will be paid by the investigator. Also, there is no financial compensation for participation in this study.

HOW WILL YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

The only persons who will have access to your child's completed survey are the investigator, the investigator's thesis supervisor and the Institutional Review Board. The research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Confidentiality will also be maintained as subjects' names will not be written on the survey.

_____ **Parent Initials**



IRB#: 061-01-EP

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WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Your child has rights as a research subject. These rights are explained in the pamphlet *The Rights of Research Participants* that you have been given. If you have any questions concerning your child's rights you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at (402) 559-6463.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE?

You can decide not to allow your child not to participate in this study, or can withdraw your child from this study. UNO/College of St. Mary are not conducting or sponsoring the research study; therefore, your decision will not effect your schooling in any way. Your decision will not effect your relationship with the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefit to which you are entitled.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH. YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD ALL OF THE INFORMATION PRESENTED AND DECIDED TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO MEANS THAT ALL YOUR QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED TO YOUR SATISFACTION. IF YOU THINK OF ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS DURING THIS STUDY, YOU SHOULD CONTACT THE INVESTIGATOR. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

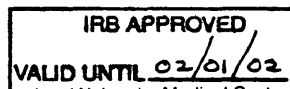
SIGNATURE OF PARENT

DATE

AUTHORIZED STUDY PERSONNEL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Kirsten Honaker-Carter Office: (402)339-6592 ext. 104



IRB#: 061-01-EP

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YOUTH ASSENT FORM

CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES IMPORTANT TO MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHOOSING THEIR FRIENDS.

INVITATION

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether to be in the study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

I would like you to talk this over with your parents before you make a decision whether or not to be in this study. I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study.

WHY ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

You are eligible to be in this study because you are a middle school or junior high school student.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to find out what characteristics and qualities are important to middle school students when they choose their friends.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

You will be given a short survey that you will need to complete. The first few questions are about who you are. For example, what gender you are or what race you are. The fourteen questions following this are questions about your opinions and values. You will have to rank different characteristics that are important to you in friendships. The survey will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS YOU COULD HAVE?

There is a slight chance you might experience discomfort about this study when you are asked about the reasons that you chose the friends you chose.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO YOU?

One of the benefits of the research study is that it provides you with the opportunity to express your opinions. Your answers are important and will make an impact on society. Another benefit

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is that when you answer the questions, you may clarify what characteristics are important to you when you choose your friends. If you understand your values in friendships, you might then choose friends who have the characteristics you are looking for.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO OTHERS?

Research from this study may help adults and researchers understand middle school students better and learn about characteristics middle school students value in friendships.

WHAT IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO PARTICIPATE?

You can choose not to participate in the study. You will not lose any credits at your school or be docked any points. Your status in class or school will not be affected in any way.

WHAT ARE YOUR PARENTS' FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS?

You and your parents are not responsible for any of the costs involved in this research study. Also, you and your parents will not receive any money for participating in this study.

HOW WILL YOUR PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

Your name and participation in this study will be kept confidential.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you are free to stop answering the survey at any time. Your decision will not change your relationship with your school or affect your grades.

DOCUMENTATION OF ASSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD ALL OF THE INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS ASSENT FORM FOR YOU AND YOUR PARENTS.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR



Demographic Information

Please check or fill in the appropriate information for each question.

Gender
 Male
 Female
Ethnicity (if I had to label myself)
 African American Asian American
 Caucasian American Hispanic American
 Native American
 Biracial (list races) _____
Income Level
 Low income
 Middle income
 High income
 Unsure

 Multiracial (list races) _____

Grade Level
 7th
 8th
 9th
Household
 One-parent family
 Two-parent family
 Other (describe) _____

How important are the following to you when choosing your friends? Some of the questions may be similar. Circle the number that applies:

1—Very Important 2—Important 3—Doesn't Matter 4—Unimportant 5—Very Unimportant

- 1 2 3 4 5 1. That he/she is the same gender as you.
- 1 2 3 4 5 2. That he/she is popular.
- 1 2 3 4 5 3. That your parents approve of him/her.
- 1 2 3 4 5 4. That he/she is trustworthy (keeps your secrets).
- 1 2 3 4 5 5. That he/she is the same race as you.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6. That he/she is handsome/pretty.
- 1 2 3 4 5 7. That he/she has the same moral values as you.
- 1 2 3 4 5 8. That he/she is smart.
- 1 2 3 4 5 9. That he/she is the same sex as you (male, female).
- 1 2 3 4 5 10. That your parents like him/her.
- 1 2 3 4 5 11. That he/she is the same grade/age as you.
- 1 2 3 4 5 12. That he/she shares your ethnic background.
- 1 2 3 4 5 13. That he/she is supportive (stands by you in bad times).
- 1 2 3 4 5 14. That he/she has the same beliefs as you (ideas, values, opinions).

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY!!!