



# Adolescent Friendship Quality: Analyzing the Gender Differences in Associations with Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms

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## Introduction

- Friendships play an important role in health and development (Bastin et al., 2017).
- Friendships have been found to differ between boys and girls from an early age. Girls tend to exhibit connection-oriented goals while boys value status-oriented goals, contributing to different values and friendship quality (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).
  - Additionally, these differences in friendship quality have been associated with differences in internalizing and externalizing behaviors in boys and girls.
  - For example, intimate disclosure, a component of friendship quality, is higher in girls than boys (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).
  - Previous studies have found that in the context of dyadic friendships, excessive intimate disclosure about problems (i.e., co-rumination) is linked to greater internalizing problems (You & Bellmore, 2011).
- Research on the connection between friendship quality and internalizing and externalizing symptoms in boys compared to girls is limited.
- This study aims to analyze how internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, and friendship quality vary on the basis of gender.
- From these analyses, we will focus on the following questions:
  - **Are there gender differences in levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms?**
  - **Is friendship quality related to internalizing and externalizing symptoms?**
  - **Does the association differ for boys and girls?**

## Hypotheses

- Boys will have higher levels of externalizing symptoms.
- Girls will have higher levels of internalizing symptoms and greater friendship quality.
- Friendship quality will be correlated with fewer externalizing symptoms.

## Methods

- Participants were 46 boys and 100 girls in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades.

### Procedure:

Participants completed survey questionnaires on computers.

**Friendship Quality Questionnaire** (FQQ; Rose, 2002) assessed the following:

- *Validation and caring* (e.g., My friend and I tell each other that we're good at things)
- *Conflict and resolution* (e.g., My friend and I always make up easily when we have a fight)
- *Affective closeness* (e.g., I feel happy when I'm with my friend)
- *Emotional closeness* (e.g., My friend accepts me, no matter what I do)
- *Help and guidance* (e.g., My friend and I always count on each other for ideas on how to get things done)
- *Companionship and recreation* (e.g., My friend and I do fun things together a lot)
- *Intimate exchange* (e.g., My friend and I talk about the things that make us sad)

**Youth Self-Report Form** (YSF; Achenbach, 1991) assessed the following:

- *Internalizing Symptoms* (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- *Externalizing Symptoms* (e.g., fighting, aggression)

## Results

**Table 1: Gender Differences in Internalizing & Externalizing Symptoms and Friendship Quality**

Variable	Boys M (SD)	Girls M (SD)	T-value
INT.	1.34 (0.24)	1.46 (0.31)	2.37*
EXT.	1.29 (0.21)	1.28 (0.19)	0.35
POS. FQ	3.97 (0.54)	4.40 (0.40)	5.29**
VAL.	4.08 (0.79)	4.40 (0.61)	2.70**
CON. RES.	4.14 (0.73)	4.40 (0.67)	2.10*
AFF.	3.99 (0.60)	4.50 (0.39)	6.04**
EMOT.	4.37 (0.58)	4.74 (0.36)	4.73**
HELP	3.94 (0.80)	4.30 (0.61)	2.98**
COMP.	3.83 (0.78)	4.12 (0.78)	2.15*
INTL.	3.28 (0.84)	4.21 (0.64)	7.40**

**Table 2: Full Sample Correlations**

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. INT.	---									
2. EXT.	.557**	---								
3. POS. FQ	0.036	-0.162	---							
4. VAL.	-0.021	-0.142	0.762**	---						
5. CON. RES.	-0.101	-0.225**	0.674**	0.448**	---					
6. AFF.	0.094	-0.082	0.718**	0.489**	0.324**	---				
7. EMOT.	0.061	-0.133	0.757**	0.418**	0.406**	0.598**	---			
8. HELP	-0.020	-0.172*	0.796**	-0.619**	0.427**	0.481**	0.561**	---		
9. COMP.	0.023	-0.092	0.716**	0.458**	0.379**	0.430**	0.514**	0.528**	---	
10. INTL.	0.152	-0.009	0.748**	0.488**	0.441**	0.544**	0.546**	0.482**	0.349**	---

**Table 3: Correlations between Internalizing & Externalizing Symptoms & Friendship Quality For Boys**

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. INT.	---									
2. EXT.	.423**	---								
3. POS. FQ	-0.023	-0.323*	---							
4. VAL.	-0.007	-0.300*	0.763**	---						
5. CON. RES.	-0.077	-0.393**	0.742**	0.565**	---					
6. AFF.	0.059	-0.091	0.697**	0.424**	0.332*	---				
7. EMOT.	-0.049	-0.261	0.658**	0.252	0.406**	0.608**	---			
8. HELP	0.007	-0.251	0.803**	0.582**	0.596**	0.466**	0.424**	---		
9. COMP.	-0.082	-0.279	0.667**	0.523**	0.352*	0.368*	0.307*	0.426**	---	
10. INTL.	0.002	-0.103	0.757**	0.455**	0.515**	0.493**	0.480**	0.522**	0.402**	---

**Table 4: Correlations between Internalizing & Externalizing Symptoms & Friendship Quality For Girls**

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. INT.	---									
2. EXT.	0.643**	---								
3. POS. FQ	-0.061	-0.058	---							
4. VAL.	-0.097	-0.036	.748**	---						
5. CON. RES.	-0.166	-0.131	0.629**	0.342**	---					
6. AFF.	-0.019	-0.068	0.621**	0.472**	0.248*	---				
7. EMOT.	0.010	-0.029	0.778**	0.491**	0.362**	0.424**	---			
8. HELP	-0.108	-0.118	0.775**	0.610**	0.282**	0.400**	0.625**	---		
9. COMP.	0.014	0.007	0.757**	0.391**	0.364**	0.435**	0.652**	0.564**	---	
10. INTL.	0.089	0.080	0.634**	0.444**	0.358**	0.328**	0.418**	0.358**	0.254*	---

Notes. INT = internalizing, EXT = externalizing, VAL= validation and caring, CON RES =conflict resolution, AFF = affective closeness, EMOT = emotional closeness, HELP = help and guidance, COMP = companionship and recreation, INTL=intimate exchange  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

## Discussion

- As hypothesized, girls reported greater friendship quality and internalizing symptoms than boys did.
- Contrary, to hypotheses, boys and girls did not differ in their externalizing symptoms. This could be in part due to a fairly normative, community sample that did not engage in high levels of externalizing behaviors.
- For both boys and girls, there was not an association between friendship quality and internalizing symptoms.
  - In the current sample, there may have been more adaptive levels of intimate exchange resulting in no links with internalizing symptoms.
  - If tested at excessive levels, there would likely be associations. For example, excessive disclosure about problems (i.e., co-rumination) has been linked to depression (Rose, 2002).
- Interestingly, friendship quality (in particular, validation and conflict resolution) were associated with fewer externalizing symptoms for boys only.
  - Boys may be able to practice emotional regulation within friendship pairs (Rose and Rudolph, 2006).
  - Further research on this finding may help provide support for the role of positive friendships in preventing anger among adolescent boys.
  - It may be important to promote positive boy friendships in adolescence.
- Additional research is needed to explain the lack of finding among girl friendship pairs. Looking more deeply at different friendship behaviors, such as co-rumination, may provide a clearer picture of friendship behaviors among adolescent girls.

## References

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