

Adolescents' Emotional and Physiological Reactivity to Positive and Negative Friendship Interactions

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Friendship interactions have important implications for adjustment during adolescence (Furman & Rose, 2015). Adolescents' negatively-focused problem talk with friends is linked to increases in depressive symptoms (e.g., Schwartz-Mette & Rose, 2012) whereas talking to friends about positive life events has been linked to lower depressive symptoms (Smith, 2015). Less is known, however, about adolescents' reactivity to friendship interactions. The current study examines adolescents' emotional and physiological reactivity to both positive and negative valence interactions with friends. Participants were 8th-10th graders who participated with a same-gender friend. For the negative valence task, the friends discussed a personal problem together for sixteen minutes. For the positive valence task, the friends planned a party together for seven minutes.

To assess emotional reactivity, adolescents reported on positive and negative emotions using the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988). PANAS surveys were administered before and after each task to assess changes in the participants' emotional states. Participants indicated how much they currently felt positive emotions (e.g., happiness) and negative emotions (e.g., hostile) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so).

To assess physiological reactivity, respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA) was measured using heart rate sensors and a respiration belt. A resting baseline was collected by asking participants to sit quietly and clear their minds for three minutes before each task. RSA was measured continuously during each interaction task. The physiological data was edited and reduced into 30-second segments using MindWare. For analyses, average RSA scores were computed for each baseline (pre-task) assessment and were averaged across both the valence tasks.

Paired t-tests were used to assess changes in adolescents positive and negative emotions as well as RSA activity from before to after each task.