

Friends' Responses to Children's Disclosure of an Achievement-Related Success: An Observational Study

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This study examined social support processes in the context of positive events. The conversations of fourth-grade through sixth-grade focal children and their friends ($N = 116$) were observed after focal children outperformed their friend on an achievement-related task. Changes in focal children's performance-related positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion were predicted from the features of these conversations. Focal children reported more positive affect when friends engaged in relatively high levels of help seeking and relatively low levels of off-task talk. Friends' responses were, in turn, predicted by friendship quality as rated by focal children and friends. Results are discussed in light of the changes in school adjustment and peer relationships that many children experience as they approach adolescence.

There is substantial evidence that children benefit from socially supportive friendships—and can suffer from a lack thereof (Vitaro, Boivin, & Bukowski, 2009; Wentzel, 2009). In explaining the importance of friendship participation, much of the extant literature has focused on the role that friends may play in helping children cope with *negative* affect and *negative* events. For example, the existing literature provides evidence that friendships can buffer children against the feelings of loneliness or depression that social rejection may bring (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998) and

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can offer children protection against peer-directed violence and harassment (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Moreover, there is evidence that children view their friends as a significant source of social support when coping with academic difficulties (Causey & Dubow, 1992) and that children can feel better about stressful social and academic events after discussing these events with friends (Altermatt, 2007; Altermatt & Broady, 2009; Denton & Zabatany, 1996). It seems likely, however, that friends may play another important role in children's psychosocial adjustment—by providing (or failing to provide) social support in the context of *positive* events, including achievement-related successes.

Support Process in the Context of Positive Events

A handful of recent studies highlight the importance of examining support processes in the context of positive events. Langston (1994) found that college students who “capitalized” on positive events by sharing news of the positive event with someone else reported greater positive affect than did students who did not share news of the positive event. Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) reported similar findings and, moreover, demonstrated that adults' perceptions of the responses of others after the disclosure of a positive event played an important role in determining the degree to which the sharing of positive events predicted positive outcomes (see also see Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Specifically, adults reported more positive affect and higher relationship quality after sharing positive events with others, but only when others responded in an active-constructive manner by recognizing and validating the good news (e.g., by expressing genuine pleasure or asking questions about the positive event). In contrast, when others responded passively or destructively (e.g., by reacting less than enthusiastically or by commenting on ways in which the positive event might be viewed negatively), adults reported less positive affect and lower relationship quality. Altermatt (2011) reported similar evidence for the importance of others' responses to positive event disclosures in a study of children's self-reported interactions with friends after everyday academic successes. Specifically, children reported more positive school attitudes and peer relationships over time when they perceived that their friends typically responded to the disclosure of an academic success by providing social support (e.g., by expressing joy about the success). In contrast, children reported more negative peer relationships over time when they perceived that friends were unlikely to provide social support (e.g., by expressing joy) or positive feedback (e.g., by offering congratulations). As noted by Gable et al. (2006), these findings are consistent with

Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Specifically, capitalization opportunities may allow individuals to *build* social resources: When individuals share positive events and partners respond supportively, both partners experience positive emotions, and the relationship is strengthened.

Although these studies are important in contributing to our understanding of social support processes in the context of positive events, the studies are limited to the extent that they fail to consider the context in which positive events are shared. In none of the aforementioned studies was it clear whether sharing occurred in the context of an event where relative performance comparisons were possible and, if so, whether the responder had experienced success or failure in that domain. As noted by Gable et al. (2004) and others (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Heller, Swindle, & Dusenbury, 1986; Rook, 1987), more work needs to be done to examine social support processes in specific contexts, especially in more competitive situations. For example, when faced with the reality of being outperformed, responders may not be able to muster the same type of enthusiastic support (e.g., "Wow! That's great! I'm so happy for you!") that they might in less competitive situations. At the same time, responders still have choices in how they react: They can choose to respond in ways that recognize and validate the success of their partner (e.g., by asking for assistance) or in ways that minimize its importance (e.g., by turning the conversation away from their partners' success). These choices are likely to influence how individuals who have revealed a success feel about the success as well as how they feel about the responder.

In the present study, we examined social support processes following children's disclosure of an achievement-related success. Specifically, children's interactions with friends were observed after children revealed success on a laboratory-based puzzle task to a friend who had performed poorly on a similar task. Examining support processes in this context is important in three respects. First, prior research provides clear evidence that achievement-related successes are an important part of children's everyday lives. Indeed, both children and their parents report more successes than failures on daily diary assessments of children's academic experiences (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2001; Repetti, 1996). Surprisingly, however, very little attention has been paid to the nature or consequences of children's interactions with friends after everyday academic successes. Second, prior research indicates that even very young children are cognizant of the potential downsides of discussing academic accomplishments with classmates, including being viewed as competitive or boastful (e.g., Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Juvonen & Murdock, 1993; Watling & Banerjee, 2007). As a result, some children

may avoid sharing successes (Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2008; Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, & Greulich, 1995). In failing to share their successes, these children may miss out on the positive academic consequences of doing so—including more positive school adjustment (Altermatt, 2011). These students may also forfeit validation and aid from friends, friendship qualities that have been associated with a number of indicators of well-being, including more positive school affect and attitudes (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). More research is needed, then, to better understand how to help children effectively capitalize on academic successes (Heyman et al., 2008). Finally, despite a growing literature indicating that friends can play an important role in children's ability to develop positive achievement-related beliefs and behaviors—including improved school involvement (e.g., Berndt & Keefe, 1995), more prosocial behaviors (e.g., Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004), and better academic performance (e.g., Altermatt & Pomerantz, 2003)—our understanding of the *processes* by which friends do so is limited (for reviews, see Altermatt & Kenney-Benson, 2006; Berndt, 1999; Brown, Bakken, Ameringer, & Mahon, 2008; Ladd, 2009; Ryan, 2000; Wentzel, 1999). Contributing to this lack of understanding is a dearth of research observing *actual* social interactions between friends with the goal of empirically linking specific interactions to changes in children's achievement-related behaviors and beliefs over time. Indeed, Berndt, Laychak, and Park (1990) conducted one of the few studies to examine the mechanisms of friends' influence in the achievement domain directly, using quasi-experimental, observational methods. The results of this study by Berndt et al. indicate that adolescents are more likely to make academic choices that reflect a high level of achievement motivation when friends' support these choices in their conversations.

The present study extends the work of Berndt et al. (1990) by directly observing children's conversations with friends immediately after children experience an achievement-related success in order to examine the nature of these interactions and their relation to changes in children's affective responses to the success. The specific goals of the present study were two-fold. First, we sought to predict changes in children's performance-related positive affect from friends' responses to children's success disclosures. Second, we sought to examine whether friends' responses to children's success disclosures might be predicted by friendship quality.

Predicting Changes in Focal Children's Positive Affect

Our first goal was to predict changes in focal children's performance-related positive affect following success on a laboratory-based puzzle task from the features of their conversations with friends. Based on the descriptions

of active-constructive and passive-destructive responses provided by Gable et al. (2004, 2006), we focused our attention on two types of statements made by friends: help-seeking statements and off-task statements. *Help-seeking statements* were statements in which a friend responded to success disclosures by requesting assistance (e.g., “How do you do the diamond?” “Why do you start there?” “Help me. I need some help”). These statements were deemed to be active and constructive to the degree that they provide “confirmation of the event’s importance” and “convey positive information” about the “responder’s own feelings toward the capitalizer” (here, as a source of assistance, see Gable et al., 2006, p. 905). As a result, we anticipated that children whose friends engaged in relatively high levels of help seeking would report increases in positive affect after discussing their success with a friend. *Off-task statements* were statements that were not related to the task (e.g., “I have the hiccups,” “I’m going to eat my glasses,” “This chair is itching my legs”). These statements were deemed to be passive and destructive insofar as they “turn the discussion away from the target” (see Gable et al., 2006, p. 908). As a result, we anticipated that children whose friends engaged in relatively high levels of off-task talk would report declines in positive affect after their conversations with friends.

An important subgoal was to determine whether the effects of friends’ responses on changes in focal children’s performance-related positive affect regarding their success would be moderated by the importance children assigned to the task. Our interest in children’s ratings of the importance of the task derives from the social comparison literature; specifically, Tesser’s self-evaluation maintenance model (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988) and a related model that focuses more directly on individuals’ responses to being the target of upward social comparisons (Exline & Lobel, 1999).

Both models predict that positive affect associated with outperforming a close other will be greatest when outperformance occurs in a domain that is important to the self. Outperformance in a domain considered to be less important to the self is expected to be less likely to yield positive affect (see Exline & Lobel, 1999; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Tesser, 1988). By extension, one might expect the responses of others to matter most in domains that are important to the self. Consistent with this prediction, Gable et al. (2006) found that women’s ratings of their partners’ responsiveness after discussing a positive event were predicted by observer’s ratings of the degree to which partners’ responses were active and constructive, but only when women rated the event as important. When women rated the positive event as relatively unimportant, partners’ responses were not related to women’s ratings of their partners’ responsiveness. In interpreting

these findings, Gable et al. (2006) suggest that women expect active and constructive responses when discussing an important positive event with a partner. When they don't receive these types of responses, they view the partner as unresponsive. This interpretation seems plausible and supports the notion that others' responses will have the greatest impact in the context of important events.

At the same time, an alternative hypothesis—that others' responses will have the greatest impact in the context of relatively unimportant events—also has some merit. Specifically, in the current study, one might predict (based on social comparison theories; Exline & Lobel, 1999; Tesser, 1988) that children who rate success on the task as relatively unimportant might be less likely to expect that their friends will respond to news of their success by asking for assistance or discussing the task at length. When friends *do* respond in these ways, however, children may reconsider the importance of the task and express this in increased joy about their own performance. We examined these competing hypotheses about the moderating role of importance on changes in focal children's ratings of their performance-rated positive affect in the current study.

Predicting Friends' Statements From Friendship Quality Ratings

Our second goal was to examine relations between friends' responses to focal children's success disclosures and both partners' perceptions of friendship quality. Prior theory and research indicate that the qualitative characteristics of children's friendships are important predictors of a variety of intrapersonal and academic outcomes (Berndt, 1996; Furman, 1996). Indeed, compared to children in low-quality friendships, children in high-quality friendships (e.g., those characterized by high levels of companionship, validation, or aid) report fewer internalizing symptoms (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993; Rudolph, Ladd, & Dinella, 2007), fewer social and externalizing problems (e.g., Waldrip, Malcolm, & Jensen-Campbell, 2008), and better school adjustment (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). Despite this evidence for the importance of friendship quality, only a handful of studies have examined links between friendship quality and the observed features of children's interactions with friends (e.g., Brendgen, Markiewicz, Doyle, & Bukowski, 2001; Schwartz-Mette & Rose, 2009). In the current study, we addressed this issue by examining whether friends' responses to focal children's disclosure of an achievement-related success might be predicted by the quality of the friendship—as reported by focal children, friends, or both partners. We anticipated that focal children would report being involved in higher-quality relationships when friends engaged in

relatively high levels of help seeking and low levels of off-task talk. This finding would be consistent with evidence from the adult capitalization literature indicating that active-constructive responses are related to ratings of relationship quality among dating and married couples (Gable et al., 2004, 2006). We also anticipated that friends' responses would be predicted by their own ratings of friendship quality. For example, friends' may be more likely to engage in off-task talk when they perceive their relationship to be of poor quality, perhaps because they are less willing than friends in better-quality relationships to put forth the effort to be supportive.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 116 students representing 58 same-sex friendship dyads (19 boys, 39 girls) in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The mean age of focal children was 10.41 years ($SD = 1.09$); the mean age of friends was 10.33 years ($SD = .89$; $r = .66$). Participants were recruited in a small city in the Midwest through letters sent home with students attending local elementary schools, fliers posted in public locations, and letters distributed to children attending YMCA summer camps. Friendship dyads were self-selected; that is, focal children were asked to volunteer for the study with a friend. Given the difficulties in recruiting children for a study involving both a telephone interview and a lab visit, we did not limit children's friendship choices (e.g., to their best friend). The majority of participants were Caucasian (73%). However, 14% of participants identified as African American, 4% as Latino/Hispanic, and 1% as Asian or Pacific Islander. The remaining 6% of participants marked their ethnicity as "other." Among dyads in which both partners identified their ethnicity, 78% reported the same ethnicity (e.g., both Caucasian). The average length of children's friendships was 3.38 years as reported by focal children ($SD = 2.25$ years; range, 6 months to 11 years) and 3.41 years as reported by friends ($SD = 2.25$ years; range, 2 months to 11 years; $r = .88$). Written informed parental consent and child assent were obtained for all focal children and friends.

Procedure

At the beginning of the laboratory session, children were escorted by two female researchers to a room equipped with a table, two chairs, and a video

camera. After engaging in a videotaped, ice-breaker discussion with one another, children were escorted to separate classrooms where they were asked to complete a puzzle task. Specifically, children were presented with nine wooden blocks with patterns on each side. They were asked to organize the blocks to replicate a pattern shown on a card. Children were allotted a total of 4 minutes to solve two sets of puzzles with four puzzles in each set. A randomly selected focal child from each dyad was selected to receive success feedback; he or she received four solvable puzzles in both sets. The focal child's friend always received failure feedback; he or she received three unsolvable puzzles and one solvable puzzle in the first set, and four unsolvable puzzles in the second set.

After completion of the puzzle task, the focal child and his or her friend were reunited and given the opportunity to discuss the task. Children were told that they could discuss the puzzle task in whatever way they wished: for example, they could talk about their performance, their feelings, or the strategies they used to work on the puzzles. Children were also told that they could choose not to discuss the task. Children were permitted to use the wooden blocks during their conversation. This session, with the consent and knowledge of the participants, was videotaped for later coding of children's conversations. The video camera was placed in plain view. After 7 minutes of discussion, children were again escorted to separate rooms where they completed another set of puzzles. All children were able to complete this set of puzzles and received success feedback. Children were thoroughly debriefed.

Questionnaires assessing focal children's affective reactions to their success were administered at two time points: immediately following success (*prediscussion*) and following discussion of the success with a friend (*postdiscussion*). Friends' affective reactions to their failure were also assessed. Given the focus of the current study on associations between friends' statements and changes in focal children's positive affect following success, the questionnaire responses of friends were not examined in the present study.¹ Focal children and friends also completed separate 45-minute phone interviews that took place approximately 2 weeks before the laboratory session. During these interviews, children's perceptions of the quality of their friendships were assessed.

1. Children's interactions with friends after an achievement-related failure were examined in another study using this same data set (Altermatt & Broady, 2009). The sample for the earlier study was larger ($N = 232$ children representing 116 friendship dyads), given that at least one member of the friendship dyad always received failure feedback, whereas one member received success feedback only half of the time. Given the focus of the earlier study on responses to failure, children who failed were identified as *focal children* and their friends were identified as *friends*.

Measures

Help-seeking and off-task statements. Children's conversations were videotaped, transcribed, and, later, coded by three research assistants. In total, friends made 3,753 statements during these conversations. Based on prior work that has distinguished between active-constructive and passive-destructive responses to partners' disclosure of a positive event (see Gable et al., 2004, 2006), we focused our analyses on two statement types made by friends: help-seeking statements (e.g., "What was your strategy?" "How do you make it longer?" "Like this? And then like this?") and off-task statements (e.g., "I like cartoon songs." "I feel like an elephant." "Look. That's rat poison.")²

To control for individual differences in the total number of statements made, we calculated the percentage of each friend's total statements that were coded as helping-seeking or off-task. Percentages were then arcsine transformed to better approximate the normal distribution. We used these arcsine-transformed percentages rather than raw frequencies in all analyses.

Observers' reliability in coding children's discourse was checked by having all three research assistants code 20% of the transcripts. Reliability coefficients were estimated following Cohen's method (1960). The mean kappa for help-seeking statements was .81 (range, .77 to .87). The mean kappa for off-task statements was .95 (range, .93 to .96).

Performance-related positive affect. Focal children's performance-related positive affect was assessed with three items: "I feel good about the number of puzzles I solved," "I'm happy about the number of puzzles I solved," and "I'm satisfied with the number of puzzles I solved." Positive affect was assessed at two time points: prediscussion (i.e., immediately after the focal child succeeded in solving the puzzles, but before he or she discussed the puzzles with a friend), and postdiscussion (i.e., immediately after the focal child had the opportunity to discuss the success with a friend). Cronbach's alpha for positive affect was .87 at prediscussion and .92 at postdiscussion.

Importance. After completing the puzzles, but before discussing their performance with their friend, focal children rated the importance of performing well on the task. The measure of importance was a single item

2. In our initial analyses, we also examined statements that were more directly evaluative, including those in which the friend evaluated the focal child positively (e.g., "I *knew* you'd get them all right!") or negatively (e.g., "I didn't think you'd do better than me"). Although, respectively, these statements fit the definition of active-constructive and passive-destructive responses provided by Gable et al. (2004, 2006), they occurred so infrequently (i.e., representing less than .5% of friends' total discourse), we excluded them from further analyses.

(i.e., “It is important for me to do well on the next set of puzzles”) rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*really true*).

Friendship quality. Friendship quality was assessed with the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993) administered to both focal children and friends as part of separate, 45-minute telephone interviews conducted approximately 2 weeks before the laboratory session. The scale consists of 40 items comprising six subscales: companionship and recreation (e.g., “My friend and I do fun things together a lot”), validation and caring (e.g., “My friend and I make each other feel important and special”), help and guidance (e.g., “When I’m having trouble figuring out something, I usually ask my friend for help and advice”), intimate disclosure (e.g., “My friend and I are always telling each other about our problems”), conflict resolution (e.g., “My friend and I always get over our arguments really quickly”), and conflict and betrayal (e.g., “My friend and I get mad at each other a lot”). Children rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*really true*). Cronbach’s alphas for the six subscales ranged from .68 to .89 for focal children and from .69 to .84 for friends. In the current study, we used the subscale scores separately rather than creating a composite friendship quality score. This approach is consistent with the assumption that friendship quality is best approached by considering the degree to which the relationship is characterized by specific, important features (see Parker & Asher, 1993). Separate analyses were conducted for focal children’s ratings and friends’ ratings.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Children’s performance on the puzzle task was successfully manipulated. The mean number of puzzles solved by the focal child was 7.67 ($SD = .63$; range, 6–8). The mean number of puzzles solved by the friend was 0.46 ($SD = .50$; range, 0–1). In 54 (93%) of the 58 interactions, focal children explicitly revealed their success to their friend—typically within the first few exchanges of the 7-minute conversation—by making a positive statement about their performance (e.g., “I solved all of them” or “I got all eight”). In two cases, focal children never made this type of statement but did clearly reveal their performance in other ways; for example, by repeatedly suggesting that the puzzles were easy, that they were good at puzzles, and/or by offering help to their friend. In the remaining two cases, focal children never revealed their success. In both cases, focal children

appeared purposefully to evade questions about their performance. Because the purpose of this study was to examine friends' responses to children's disclosure of an achievement-related success, these two dyads were excluded from all analyses.³

Descriptive Statistics

Means and standard deviations for all measures are presented in Table 1. On average, help seeking represented 2.28% of friends' total statements during the 7-minute conversations (range, 0%–18%). On average, off-task statements represented 29.74% of friends' total statements (range, 0%–78%). Help-seeking and off-task statements were significantly, but modestly, negatively correlated ($r = -.33, p < .05$). Focal children generally reported high levels of performance-related positive affect immediately after success ($M = 4.65, SD = .61$) and after discussing the task with a friend ($M = 4.57, SD = .68$). Indeed, for the sample as a whole, focal children's level of positive affect was moderately stable from prediscussion to postdiscussion ($r = .65, p < .001$). However, there were individual differences in the degree to which children's positive affect stayed stable or changed after discussing the task with a friend: 23% of the sample reported a decline in positive affect (range, $-.33$ to -1.67), 63% of the sample showed no change in positive affect, and 14% of the sample showed an increase in positive affect (range, $.33$ – 2.00). On average, focal children rated good performance on the puzzle task as moderately important ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.49$), although there was considerable variability in ratings (range, 1–5). On average, both focal children and friends reported that their friendships were characterized by moderate levels of each of the five positive friendship qualities ($M_s = 3.47$ – 4.16), but low levels of conflict ($M_s = 1.83$ and 1.90). Focal children's ratings of friendship quality and friends' ratings of friendship quality were significantly correlated for only three of the six subscales: companionship and recreation ($r = .50, p < .001$), validation and caring ($r = .36, p < .01$), and conflict and betrayal ($r = .60, p < .001$).

Predicting Changes in Focal Children's Positive Affect

Our first goal in the current study was to determine whether changes in focal children's performance-related positive affect from prediscussion to

3. The two children who were deleted from the analyses did not differ significantly from the sample as a whole in friendship quality, as reported by either focal children or friends, all $p_s < .05$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Friends' help-seeking statements (percent of total)	2.28	3.96
Friends' off-task statements (percent of total)	29.74	23.47
Focal children's prediscussion positive affect	4.65	.61
Focal children's postdiscussion positive affect	4.57	.68
Focal children's importance ratings	3.16	1.49
Focal children's friendship quality ratings		
Companionship and recreation	3.65	.87
Validation and caring	4.14	.66
Help and guidance	3.52	.81
Intimate disclosure	3.47	.90
Conflict resolution	3.99	.84
Conflict and betrayal	1.83	.76
Friends' friendship quality ratings		
Companionship and recreation	3.62	.87
Validation and caring	4.16	.64
Help and guidance	3.57	.73
Intimate disclosure	3.58	.91
Conflict resolution	3.88	.82
Conflict and betrayal	1.90	.69

postdiscussion could be predicted from friends' help-seeking or off-task statements. An important subgoal was to determine whether the relationship between friends' statements and changes in focal children's positive affect might be moderated by the importance focal children assigned to the task. To address these issues, we conducted two hierarchical regression analyses. In both analyses, the dependent variable was focal children's postdiscussion ratings of their positive affect. At Step 1, we entered focal children's prediscussion ratings of their positive affect. Controlling for focal children's prediscussion ratings is important to ensure that significant findings indicate that friends' statements predict changes in focal children's positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion. At Step 2, we entered either friends' help-seeking statements or off-task statements. At Step 3, we entered focal children's ratings of the importance of doing well on the puzzle task. Finally, at Step 4, we entered the interaction between help-seeking statements and importance or between off-task statements and importance.⁴ All continuous independent variables were mean-centered to

4. We also ran regression analyses that included the interaction between gender and each of the other predictor variables. No significant interactions emerged, all *ps* < .05.

reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 2.

Consistent with our hypotheses, regression analyses revealed that, for the sample as whole, children reported more positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion when friends engaged in relatively high levels of help seeking, $\beta = .21$, $t(53) = 2.13$, $p < .05$. In contrast, children reported less positive affect when friends engaged in relatively high levels of off-task talk, $\beta = -.22$, $t(53) = -2.24$, $p < .05$. However, these effects were moderated by the importance children assigned to the task. Specifically, there was a significant interaction between importance and help-seeking in predicting changes in positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion, $\beta = -.32$, $t(51) = -3.30$, $p < .01$. A similar interaction emerged between importance and off-task statements, $\beta = .21$, $t(51) = 2.07$, $p < .05$.

To examine these interactions further, we used procedures described by Aiken and West (1991) to examine the effects of help-seeking and off-task statements separately at different levels of importance. Specifically, for each conversational variable, simple slopes were estimated with importance at high (i.e., 1 standard deviation above the mean) and low (i.e., 1 standard deviation below the mean) levels. As shown in Figure 1, the analyses for help-seeking indicated that help-seeking predicted more positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion, but only when importance was low, $\beta = .50$, $t(52) = 3.97$, $p < .001$. Friends' help-seeking statements were unrelated to changes in positive affect when importance was high, $\beta = -.18$, $t(52) = -1.18$, *ns*. As shown in Figure 2, a similar pattern of results emerged for off-task statements. Here, off-task statements predicted declines in positive affect, but only when importance was low, $\beta = -.47$, $t(52) = -3.05$, $p < .01$. Friends' off-task statements were unrelated to changes in positive affect when importance was high, $\beta = -.05$, $t(52) = -.38$, *ns*.

Predicting Friends' Statements From Friendship Quality Ratings

Our second goal was to determine whether focal children's and/or friends' reports of friendship quality obtained approximately 2 weeks prior to children's laboratory visit might be predictive of friends' responses to focal children's success disclosures. To address this issue, we conducted four multiple regression analyses predicting friends' help-seeking statements or off-task statements from friendship quality ratings. Separate analyses were conducted for focal children's ratings and friends' ratings. To examine the independent effects of each aspect of friendship quality (e.g., companionship and recreation vs. conflict), scores for each of the six friendship quality

Table 2. Predicting Changes in Focal Children's Positive Affect From Prediscussion to Postdiscussion From Friends' Statements and Focal Children's Importance Ratings

Predictor	Focal children's postdiscussion positive affect					
	Friends' help-seeking statements			Friends' off-task statements		
	β	<i>t</i>	ΔR^2	β	<i>t</i>	ΔR^2
Step 1						
Focal children's prediscussion positive affect	.65	6.32***	.43	.65	6.32***	.43
Step 2						
Friends' help-seeking or off-task statements	.21	2.13*	.04	-.22	-2.24*	.03
Step 3						
Focal children's importance ratings	.06	.55	.00	.03	.31	.00
Step 4						
Interaction of statements and importance	-.32	-3.30**	.10	.21	2.07*	.04

Note. Total R^2 for model predicting focal children's postdiscussion positive affect from friends' help-seeking statements = .57. Total R^2 for model predicting focal children's postdiscussion positive affect from friends' off-task statements = .52.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

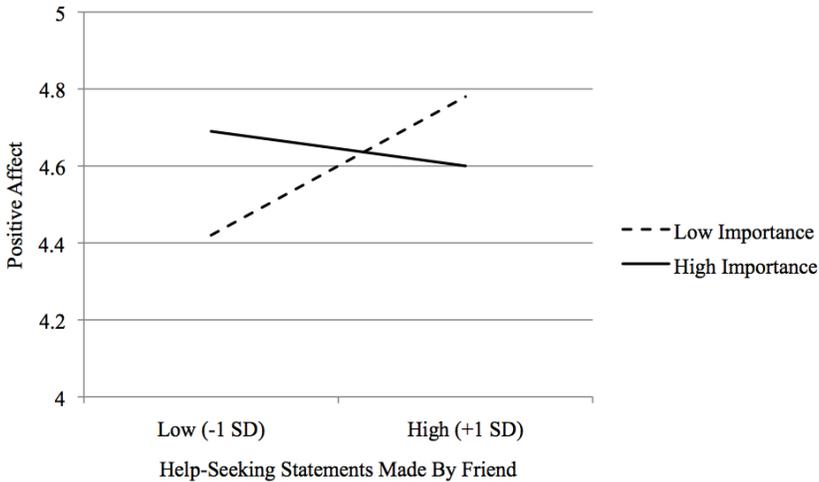


Figure 1. Predicting children's postdiscussion positive affect from friends' help-seeking statements and children's ratings of the importance of doing well on the puzzle task.

subscales were entered simultaneously. Friendship length was included as a covariate.⁵

As shown in Table 3, focal children were more likely to rate their friendships as high in companionship and recreation when friends engaged in relatively high levels of help-seeking statements, $\beta = .35$, $t(48) = 2.05$, $p < .05$, and relatively low levels of off-task talk, $\beta = -.43$, $t(48) = -2.54$, $p < .01$. In contrast, when friends perceived the friendship to be relatively high in conflict, they were more likely to engage in relatively high levels of off-task talk, $\beta = .37$, $t(48) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. No other significant effects emerged, all $ps > .05$.

Discussion

Prior research provides evidence that friends play an important role in helping children cope with negative events, including everyday achievement-related failures (e.g., Altermatt & Broady, 2009; Bagwell et al., 1998; Denton & Zarbatany, 1996; Hodges et al., 1999). The current study extends this

5. We also ran regression analyses that included the interaction between gender and each of the other predictor variables. No significant interactions emerged, all $ps < .05$.

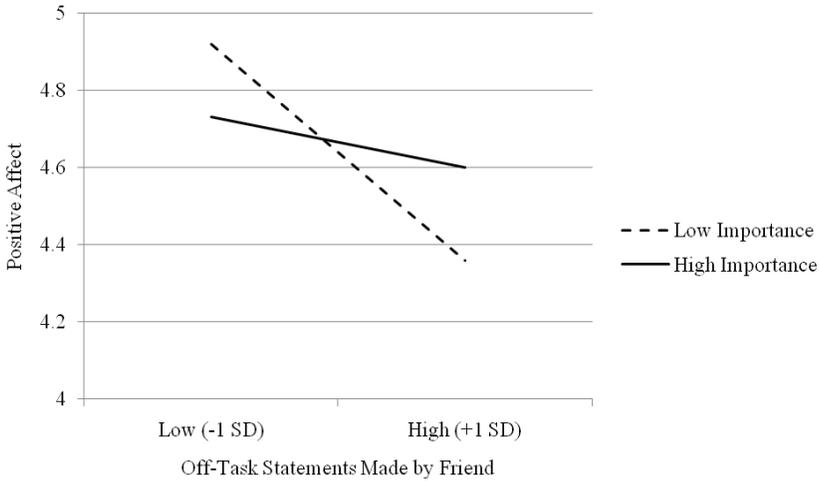


Figure 2. Predicting children's postdiscussion positive affect from friends' off-task statements and children's ratings of the importance of doing well on the puzzle task.

research by demonstrating that friends also play an important role in helping children capitalize on everyday achievement-related successes. After disclosing that they had performed well on a puzzle task to a friend who had performed poorly on that same task, children reported more positive affect (i.e., they reported greater satisfaction after the discussion than immediately after the success) when friends engaged in relatively high levels of help-seeking and made relatively few off-task statements. Importantly, these effects were moderated by focal children's ratings of the importance of performing well on the puzzle task such that relatively high levels of help-seeking and relatively low levels of off-task talk predicted more positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion among children who rated performance on the puzzle task as relatively unimportant, but did not predict changes in positive affect among children who rated performance on the puzzle task as relatively important.

The results of the current study are consistent with those from the handful of studies that have examined social support processes in the context of positive events (Altermatt, 2011; Gable et al., 2004, 2006; Langston, 1994) insofar as the results indicate that the types of social interactions children have with friends after achievement-related successes can be an important predictor of their feelings about their accomplishments. These findings are important in light of evidence that children

Table 3. Predicting Friends' Help-Seeking and Off-Task Statements From Focal Children's Friendship Quality Ratings and Friends' Friendship Quality Ratings

Predictor	Friends' statements			
	Help-seeking statements		Off-task statements	
	β	<i>t</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Focal children's friendship quality ratings				
Companionship and recreation	.35	2.05*	-.43	-2.54**
Validation and caring	.00	.01	-.07	-.31
Help and guidance	-.13	-.51	.13	.51
Intimate disclosure	-.30	-1.08	.19	.69
Conflict resolution	.10	.50	.10	.53
Conflict and betrayal	-.15	-.88	.22	1.31
Friends' friendship quality ratings				
Companionship and recreation	.18	1.15	-.17	-1.06
Validation and caring	.07	.28	.35	1.31
Help and guidance	.39	1.53	-.14	-.55
Intimate disclosure	-.47	1.89	.05	.19
Conflict resolution	-.04	-.27	.08	.46
Conflict and betrayal	-.24	-1.52	.37	2.25*

Note. Total R^2 for each model ranged from .13 to .17.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

experience *more* successes than failures as part of their everyday school experiences (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2001; Repetti, 1996) and that positive affect in achievement contexts can be an important predictor of achievement motivation and task performance (e.g., Armitage, 2008; Erez & Isen, 2002; Yasutake & Bryan, 1995).

This study also extends the extant literature in important ways. This is the first study, to our knowledge, to observe children's capitalization attempts in a situation in which children clearly outperformed a friend. Examining children's social interactions in these contexts is important, given evidence that opportunities for social comparison are prevalent in children's everyday school experiences (Frey & Ruble, 1985) and that the social-comparative statements made in achievement settings can be predictive of changes in children's perceptions of academic competence (Altermatt, Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, & Greulich, 2002). As anticipated, friends rarely engaged in the types of enthusiastic support that are often described in the adult capitalization literature (e.g., "Wow! That's great!!").

Indeed, initial analyses revealed that statements in which friends evaluated focal children positively (e.g., “I *knew* you’d get them all!”) made up, on average, less than .5% of friends’ total statements. However, friends did demonstrate more subtle forms of active-constructive responses, including recognizing and validating the success of their partner by asking for assistance (e.g., “How did you make the diamond?”). Consistent with the adult capitalization literature, help-seeking responses predicted gains in positive affect—at least among children who expressed skepticism about the importance of the task—while off-task statements predicted declines in positive affect from prediscussion to postdiscussion.

A second way in which the current study contributes to the extant literature is by providing evidence that friends’ responses to children’s disclosure of an achievement-related success are predictive of changes in children’s positive affect regarding that success only among children who rated success on the task as relatively unimportant. Future research will be necessary to replicate this finding (especially outside the laboratory setting), but one possible explanation is that supportive responses were unexpected among children who deemed the task unimportant and, thus, encouraged children to reevaluate their affective responses to the success. This interpretation is supported by the finding that children who rated success on the task as relatively unimportant also reported less positive affect about their success on the prediscussion survey compared to children who rated success as relatively important ($r = .27, p < .05$). To the extent that this finding can be replicated, it has potentially important implications for how we think about friends’ influence, especially as children approach the middle-school years. There is ample evidence that many children experience negative changes in their academic motivation during early adolescence, including declines in school liking and interest. Peer relationships—especially the close, stable relationships that characterize friendships—also become more important to children at this time (for a review, see Eccles et al., 1993). Given these phenomena and our finding that friends’ responses to children’s disclosures of achievement-related successes can have important implications for children’s responses to these successes, it seems that schools should work to encourage children’s involvement in the types of close, supportive relationships that may help children to feel good about their academic success at a time when engagement with school may begin to decline. Unfortunately, in many schools, children’s peer relationships can suffer. As children switch classrooms from one class period to the next, children’s social networks are likely to become disrupted. In addition, children are more likely to

experience practices like whole-class instruction and between-classroom ability grouping that increase feelings of competition and may contribute to students' perceptions that school is not a warm, welcoming place (e.g., Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Eccles et al., 1993; Juvonen, 2007; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). The results of the current study suggest yet another reason why careful attention to school climates and structures is important as children approach the middle-school years.

Finally, the current study contributes to the extant literature by beginning to uncover how friends' responses to children's disclosures of achievement-related successes are related to friendship quality. In analyses using focal children's ratings, high levels of companionship and recreation positively predicted friends' help-seeking statements and negatively predicted friends' off-task statements. To the degree that the interactions we captured in the lab reflect friends' typical responses to focal children's success disclosures, this finding can be interpreted as indicating that when children have friends who show support in such contexts (by asking for assistance and staying on task), children are more likely to report that they enjoy spending time with their friends. This finding is consistent with both theory and research indicating that positive emotions play a key role in interpersonal well-being (Feeney, 2004; Fredrickson, 2001) and, more specifically, with empirical evidence from the adult capitalization literature indicating that when individuals feel understood, validated, and cared for during the discussion of a positive event, they report greater satisfaction with and commitment to the relationship (see Gable et al., 2004, 2006). In analyses using friends' ratings, conflict was a significant predictor of friends' off-task statements. This finding can be interpreted as indicating that when friends perceive the friendship as being characterized by higher levels of conflict, they are more likely to shift the conversation away from the task at hand, perhaps as a way of avoiding additional conflict or perhaps because they lack the incentive to be especially supportive in a situation with potentially negative implications for their own self-evaluations. This finding is consistent with a small literature indicating that friendship quality is an important predictor of the types of interactions children have with their friends (Brendgen et al., 2001; Schwartz-Mette & Rose, 2009). While these findings are an important first step in understanding relations between friendship quality and friends' interactions after positive events, it should be noted that much more work is needed, especially given that friendship quality variables predicted only a small percent of variance in friends' responses to children's event disclosures (R^2 ranged from .13 to .17).

Limitations and Directions for Future Inquiry

Future research will certainly be needed to replicate and further explore the findings reported here. In this research, several limitations of the present study should be addressed. First, although laboratory-based, observational research has been integral in enhancing our understanding of friendship processes (Berndt et al., 1990; Brown et al., 2008; Ladd, 2005, 2009), the limitations of this approach must also be acknowledged. For example, although we encouraged our participants to discuss the task in whatever way they wished (and, in fact, advised participants that they could choose *not* to discuss the task if they so desired), the laboratory setting may have compelled some children to participate in a discussion that would be unlikely to occur spontaneously. Future research might attempt to capture children's postsuccess conversations in more naturalistic settings. Given evidence that children's achievement-related discourse can be difficult to capture in the naturalistic setting of the classroom (Altermatt et al., 2002; Sage & Kindermann, 1999), this research might use daily diary measures to examine these interactions or take advantage of new technologies to avoid some of the pitfalls traditionally associated with naturalistic observations (see Guryan, Jacob, Klopfer, & Groff, 2008).

Second, although the current study extends prior work by examining relations between friends' responses to children's disclosure of an achievement-related success and changes in children's affective responses to that success, we did not examine the degree to which friends' responses predict other academic or social outcomes or the degree to which these associations change developmentally. One interesting area for future research will be to link children's everyday interactions with friends after success to developmental changes in their school attitudes and peer relationships. For example, future research might examine whether supportive responses to success disclosures decline over time and whether these declines are predictive of developmental declines in children's valuing of school (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, & Roeser, 2008) or declines in children's self-reported attraction to students who are academically competent (see Bukowski, Sipola, & Newcomb, 2000).

Finally, we focused our attention in the current study on children's interactions with friends. Clearly, children interact with a variety of peers in the classroom setting—only some of whom may be friends. Future research will be important in documenting how the nature or consequences of children's capitalization attempts vary across different interaction partners (e.g., friends vs. acquaintances vs. admired peers) as well as the features of these

relationships (e.g., Is the friendship reciprocated? Does it represent a best friendship?). Although considerable attention has been paid to children's interactions with close friends, some authors have argued that peer influence effects might be most powerful in the very early stages of friendship formation (when children are most concerned about gaining the approval of others) or even when children are not yet friends but have opportunities to observe and interact with highly admired peers (see Brown et al., 2008). Research that integrates sociometric nominations or social network analysis with research on children's discourse in achievement contexts may be helpful here.

Conclusions

The current study contributes to a very small, but growing, literature examining processes of social support in the context of positive events. Our results are important insofar as they indicate that the types of social interactions children have with friends after achievement-related successes can be an important predictor of their feelings about their accomplishments. These interactions may be especially important as children approach early adolescence when peer relationships become more important (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Larson & Richards, 1991) and school adjustment may begin to decline (Eccles et al., 1993). At the same time, this study suggests a number of directions for future inquiry, including uncovering developmental trends in the nature of children's interactions with friends after everyday school successes, examining these interactions in naturalistic settings, uncovering the ways in which classrooms and schools might be modified to help children benefit most from sharing school successes with friends and other peers, and understanding the processes by which these interactions are influenced by and predict changes in friendship quality. This type of research will contribute to a growing literature examining the processes by which children's interactions with friends might contribute to changes in their academic adjustment and peer relationships over time.

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