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Friendships with Co-Participants in Organized Activities: Prevalence, Quality, Friends' Characteristics, and Associations with Adolescents' Adjustment

François Poulin, Anne-Sophie Denault

Abstract

The goal of this study was to provide an in-depth examination of friendships within organized activities. The prevalence of friendships with co-participants, their quality and characteristics, and their associations with adjustment were investigated. A sample of 281 (60% girls) 8th grade adolescents reported their friendships, activities, and adjustment. The results showed that 70% of youths have friends who co-participate with them. Friends' in individual sports are more academically-oriented whereas friends in team sports are more supportive but display higher levels of problem behavior. Finally, having friends in activities is associated with lower problem behavior and better academic functioning. © 2013 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Author's Note: This study was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Fonds Québécois pour la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture. Correspondence should be addressed to François Poulin, Département de Psychologie, UQAM, C.P. 8888, Succ. Centre-ville, H3C 3P8, Montréal, Canada. poulin.francois@uqam.ca.

Introduction

Many adolescents voluntarily choose to invest their leisure time in organized activities. These activities are usually offered in a group setting and provide opportunities for interacting with peers and friends. Given the importance of organized activity participation (Mahoney, Larson & Eccles, 2005) and friendships (Brown & Larson, 2009) in adolescence, understanding how they are linked with each other is crucial for many reasons. First, friends can influence an adolescent's decision to participate in an organized activity (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Huebner & Mancini, 2003) and once in the activity, the adolescent may stay or drop out because his/her friends are doing so (Fredricks et al., 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2010; Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007). Second, extensive research has shown that organized activity participation leads to many (mostly positive) outcomes (Feldman & Majestko, 2012) and friends' characteristics are often put forward as a mechanism (i.e., mediator) explaining these effects (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Simpkins, Eccles, & Becnel, 2008). Third, participation in activities could also facilitate the formation of new friendships and promotes positive growth in existing friendships (Schaefer, Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011).

Surprisingly, the research conducted in this field has *assumed* that friendships do exist in the context of organized activities but has never directly verified whether this is indeed the case (with a recent exception by Schaefer et al., 2011) and has never examined the features of these friendships. Moreover, the contribution of friendships within organized activities to adolescents' adjustment is also largely unknown. The present study intends to fill these gaps by addressing three questions: (a) to what extent do adolescents who are involved in organized activities have friends co-participating with them? (b) what is the quality of these relationships and what are the characteristics of these friends? and (c) are adolescents who have friends co-participating with them in their activities better adjusted? In addition, for each question, we examined whether the links between activities and friendships varied (a) across activity types (i.e., individual sports, team sports, artistic activities, and prosocial activities/clubs) and (b) based on the provider (school versus community).

Friendships within Organized Activities. Friendship during childhood or adolescence is a voluntary relationship co-established by two young people who wish to share experiences that are mutually satisfying and validating (Schneider, Weiner, & Murphy, 1994). Hartup and Stevens (1997; see also Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011) suggested that there are three important aspects of youths' friendships: having friends (and their number), the quality of the friendships, and who the friends are (e.g., their characteristics). Each of these aspects contributes to youths' adjustment. For instance, many studies have shown that being involved in a friendship is associated with youth psychosocial development (Vitaro, Boivin, &

Bukowski, 2009). The quality of a friendship is determined by the presence of positive features, such as help and support, compared to negative features, such as conflict (Berndt, 1996) and also uniquely contributes to youths' adjustment (Vitaro et al., 2009). Friends' characteristics include a wide range of behavioral features that could potentially have an impact on the child's own functioning. These characteristics could either be positive, such as friends' academic achievement, or more problematic, such as friends' antisocial behavior (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). Each of these three aspects should be taken into account when examining linkages between organized activities and friendships.

Given that an important function of friendships is companionship in activities based on shared interests (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011), friendships are likely to be common in the context of organized activities. For instance, friends could decide to participate together in an activity based on a common interest, or two youth could become friends as a result of their participation in such an activity. Whatever the scenario, prior research suggests that organized activities support friendships (Fredricks et al., 2002; Loder & Hirsch, 2003; Schaefer et al., 2011).

Beyond the presence of friends in organized activities, the *quality* of friendships within these activities may present specific features. Given that helping or supporting each other is at the core of many organized activities, there may be more opportunity for these kinds of positive experiences in organized activities compared to other less structured activities that friends do together. Moreover, having friends in an organized activity adds another context in which youths and their friends can interact in a supervised and structured setting, share their interests and "passion," and work toward a common goal. These friendships might be deepened by all the experiences the friends share in this specific context of development and thus attain a higher level of quality. If this is the case, the quality of youths' friendships with activity co-participants should be higher than the quality of their relationships with friends who do not co-participate with them in these activities.

Regarding friends' characteristics, research has shown that youths who participate in organized activities have friends who are more academically oriented and less deviant than youths who do not participate in such activities (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, 2006; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Simpkins et al., 2008). However, in these studies, youths' overall friendship networks were examined without specifying whether or not the friends were co-participating with them in these activities. A more accurate test of the link between activity participation and friends' characteristics would be to separate friends who co-participate from friends who do not co-participate, and compare the characteristics of these two types of friends.

Organized Activities, Friendships, and Youths' Adjustment. Two decades of research has shown that participation in organized activities is

associated with healthy psychosocial adjustment, notably in terms of better academic achievement and lower levels of problem behavior and depressive symptoms (Feldman & Matjasko, 2012). Is it possible that these beneficial effects are more pronounced for youths who co-participate with friends in these organized activities? There are many reasons why this might be the case. First, having friends in an activity might facilitate the youth's social integration in the activity peer group. Such a positive social experience might increase his or her engagement in the activity (Rose-Krasnor, 2009) and in turn improve the benefits of participation. Second, simply experiencing friendships in the organized activity context may promote the youth's adaptation. Having friends in a variety of contexts, besides school or the neighborhood, reflects richness and depth in one's network that may in itself contribute to better psychosocial functioning (Kerr, Stattin, & Kiesner, 2007). Third, organized activities might also connect youths with friends who have more prosocial characteristics and who are more academically-oriented (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006). Through an influence process, these friendships with prosocial peers might in turn have a positive impact on youths' adjustment and well-being (Barry & Wentzel, 2006).

Types of Activities and Providers. Organized activities are not homogenous. They can vary widely in terms of content, skills, and peer culture (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006), and they are provided and supervised by different institutions, most notably the school and the community. These two features, that is, the *type* of activity and the *provider*, should be taken into account when studying friendships within organized activities. Each will be discussed.

Although most activities involve a peer group, the level of group cohesion and closeness among activity co-participants may vary according to the type of activity. Some activities, such as team sports or prosocial activities, may thus be more conducive to friendships than others. While individual and team sports are usually considered in the literature as one single type of activity, we believe they should be distinguished. Individual and team sports both take place in the presence of other youths, but may involve distinct friendship dynamics. In individual sports, youths set personal goals and may even be in competition with other group members to achieve them. In contrast, in team sports, youths have to work together and collaborate to reach the same group objectives. More cohesion and stronger ties between group members are more likely to develop in team sports than in individual sports, as team spirit is needed for the team to work. Given the more homogenous and cohesive nature of activity groups in team sports, group members in this context might be more embedded in youths' larger friendship networks (Denault & Poulin, 2007). In this study, four types of organized activities are considered: (1) individual sports, (2) team sports, (3) artistic activities, and (4) prosocial activities/clubs.

The link between organized activities and friendships could also vary according to the institution that organizes and supports the activity. Much of the research on organized activities is conducted in the United States, where the majority of activities are school-based. However, in other areas, including Quebec where the present study was conducted, organized activities do not exclusively take place in the school setting. Instead, many of them are provided by community organizations such as community youth centers, sports centers, or art centers. School friends represent only part of a youth's friendship network (Chan & Poulin, 2007; Kiesner, Poulin & Eraldo, 2003; Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). Growing evidence suggests that in-school and out-of-school friends have a distinct significance in youths' social development (Kerr et al., 2007). For example, Witkow and Fuligni (2010) showed that in-school friendships were more closely associated with adolescents' academic achievement than out-of-school friendships. In sum, a more complete portrayal of the linkages between friendships and activities should also include activities offered outside of the school context and involve direct assessments of friendships within organized activities that include youths' overall friendship networks.

The Present Study. Three research questions were addressed in this study. The first was to examine whether the adolescents had friends co-participating with them in their organized activities and whether this varied as a function of activity type (individual sports, team sports, artistic activities, prosocial activities/clubs) and activity provider (school versus community). The second focused specifically on friendships with activity co-participants, including the quality of these friendships (e.g., support, conflict) and friends' characteristics (e.g., problem behavior and academic achievement) and whether the features of these friendships varied according to activity type and provider. The third question was to examine whether having friends in an activity was associated with better adjustment (as compared to being involved but not having friends in the activity or not being involved in any activity) and whether this varied according to activity type and provider. Three different domains of adolescent adjustment were considered: problem behavior, depressive symptoms, and academic functioning. Given the paucity of research on friendships and organized activities, this study was largely exploratory and used a cross-sectional design. The data reported here were collected in Grade 8 because both activity participation and friendship networks (in terms of size and influence) tend to peak around this age (Denault & Poulin, 2009).

Method

The present study is part of a larger research project on adolescent social development that began in April 2001 when the youth were in Grade 6.

Participants. Participants ($N = 390$) were drawn from 8 elementary schools in 4 separate school districts representing different socioeconomic

backgrounds in a city of 350,000 residents in the province of Quebec, Canada. The data reported in this article were collected in Grade 8. Of the 390 youth in the initial sample, 281 (60% girls; mean age = 14.40 years) were still participating in Grade 8, scattered across 30 high schools. Sixty-five percent of their families had an income of over \$50,000 (CAN) before taxes, and 81% of mothers and 96% of fathers had at least a part-time job. Mothers and fathers had similar levels of education ($M = 13.08$ years, $SD = 2.68$ and $M = 13.20$ years, $SD = 3.20$, respectively). Ninety-six percent of the youth were born in Canada, and 69% were from two-parent families. The sample was ethnically homogenous. Most of the youth were White and French-speaking (approx. 3% Black; 1% Asian; 3% Latino, and 3% Arabic).

Procedure and Measures. Organized activity participation data were collected using structured phone interviews. Friendship networks and adjustment data were collected using self-report questionnaires completed in the classroom. Youths received a \$20 gift certificate for their participation in the study.

Organized Activities. Participation in organized activities was measured by asking the youths to identify all the school-based and community-based activities they were involved in from September to June. To verify whether the activities listed met the definition of an organized activity, the following criteria were applied: (a) regular frequency of participation (at least once a month; over 80% of the activities were practiced once a week), (b) presence of an adult activity leader, (c) rule-guided engagement and (d) presence of a peer group. Only the activities that met these criteria were considered. The most common individual sports were badminton and martial arts; the most common team sports were soccer and ice hockey; the most common artistic activities were dance and playing a musical instrument; and the most common prosocial activities/clubs were volunteering and scouts.

Friendship. First, participants were asked to write down the first and last name of up to 10 friends who were either from school, the neighborhood or another context. The number of friends was limited to 10 in order to be consistent with procedures used by other adolescent friendship network researchers (e.g., Degirmencioglu, Urberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1998; Kuttler, La Greca, & Prinstein, 1999; Ryan, 2001; Urberg, Degirmencioglu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995).

Second, participants were asked to answer a series of questions for each friend. The items used in the present study were (a) the level of help (i.e., support) received from this friend, (b) the level of conflict with this friend, (c) friends' problem behavior, and (d) friends' academic achievement.

Third, participants were asked to indicate for each nominated friend whether he/she participated with them in their organized activities (yes/no). All the activities identified during the phone interview were already

written on the questionnaire in order to make sure that the participants were answering specifically for each activity. A small number of participants (less than 3%) indicated that a friend participated with them in more than one type of activity. These friendships were not included in the analyses because there were too few of them to create a specific category. Participants who were not participating in any activity were asked to skip this section.

Several variables were created from this friendship network inventory. First, the total number of friends who were participating in at least one of the adolescent's activities and the total number of friends who were *not* participating in any of the adolescent's activities were computed. Second, the number of participating friends was also computed separately for (a) each type of activity and (b) school-based versus community-based activities. Third, for each youth, four variables were computed separately for participating and non-participating friends: (1) mean level of support, (2) mean level of conflict, (3) mean level of friends' problem behavior, and (4) mean level of friends' academic achievement. Among participating friends, these mean scores were also computed separately for (a) each type of activity and (b) school-based versus community-based activities.

Problem Behavior. Problem behavior was assessed using a teacher rating scale comprised of 8 items including Dodge and Coie's (1987) 6-item proactive/reactive aggression scale (e.g., "when teased, strikes back," "threatens and bullies others") as well as 2 other indicators of problem behavior (e.g., "fights with other students"). Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*). A mean was calculated across the 8 items. The mean level of problem behavior for this sample was relatively low ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.68$; $\alpha = .95$).

Depressive Symptoms. Depressive symptoms were assessed using the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1980). In this 27-item questionnaire, each item includes 3 choices coded from 0 to 2 in the direction of increasing severity (e.g., (a) "I am tired sometimes," (b) "I am tired often," (c) "I am tired all the time"). The time frame is *over the past two weeks*. The CDI has been shown to be reliable and valid in large representative samples of youths (Kovacs, 1980). In this study, the item tapping suicidal ideation was removed from the questionnaire, resulting in 26 items. A sum-score across all items was calculated for each participant (ranged from 0 to 52). The mean level of depressive symptoms for this sample was relatively low ($M = 9.21$, $SD = 6.55$; $\alpha = .86$).

Academic Functioning. Two indicators were used. First, academic achievement was based on final *grades* in mathematics and French, taken from the students' official school records, rated as percentages. A mean score was computed ($M = 71.58$, $SD = 10.54$; $r = .64$). Second, *self-perceptions of academic competence* were measured using the subscale from the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) (Harter, 1988). This scale is composed of five items (e.g., "Some kids are pretty slow in finishing their

school work but, Other kids can do their school work quickly”). First, youth have to decide which statement best describes them and then indicate whether the statement is “really true for me” or “sort of true for me.” A mean score was computed ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.65$; $\alpha = .80$).

Results

Analyses were conducted in four parts. First, descriptive information on rates of participation in organized activities was computed. Second, in order to document the prevalence of friendships with co-participants, the proportion of youth who had at least one friend co-participating with them and the average number of friends for those who had at least one friend were computed. Third, in order to investigate friendship quality and friends’ characteristics, a series of within-subject ANOVAs were performed. The within-subject comparisons involved the two levels of each dependent variable described in the method section: (a) non-participating friends and (b) co-participating friends. Only youth who had both types of friends were included in this analysis. Fourth, in order to examine the impact of friendships with co-participants on the adolescents’ adjustment, a series of between-subject ANOVAs were performed for each indicator of adjustment. Three groups were compared: (a) youth who were not involved in any activity, (b) youth who were involved in at least one activity but without any co-participating friends, and (c) youth who were involved in at least one activity with one (or more) co-participating friends. For each of these research questions, analyses were first conducted (or descriptive information was computed) for all types of activities combined and then separately for each activity type and activity provider.

Descriptive Information on Rates of Participation in Organized Activities. Among the 281 youth in this study, 215 (77%) reported participating in at least one organized activity. Participation rates were similar for individual sports (43%), team sports (40%) and artistic activities (43%), but lower for prosocial activities and clubs (19%). A larger number of youths participated in community-based activities (86%) than in school-based activities (40%). Note that several youth were simultaneously participating in more than one type of activity or participating in activities both at school and in the community. This limits the possibility of statistically comparing the four activity types.

Prevalence of Friendships with Co-Participants. The first question was to examine whether adolescents had friends co-participating with them in their activities and whether this varied as a function of activity type and provider. Among youth participating in organized activities, 70% had friends who co-participated with them, at an average of close to four friends ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 2.34$). Friendships were most common in team sports (67%, $M = 3.53$, $SD = 2.69$) and prosocial activities/clubs (65%,

$M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.82$) and least common in individual sports (42%, $M = 2.51$, $SD = 2.24$) and artistic activities (54%, $M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.88$).

A similar proportion of youth were friends with at least one co-participant in school-based (63%, $M = 3.25$, $SD = 2.44$) and community-based activities (63%, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 2.12$).

The Quality of Friendships with Co-Participants and the Characteristics of the Friends. The second question was to examine whether the quality of the friendships with co-participants and these friends' characteristics differed from non-participating friends. Only one significant effect was found for support, $F(1,137) = 5.12$, $p < .05$, that is, relationships with co-participating friends were more supportive ($M = 4.12$; $SD = 0.85$) compared to those with non-participating friends ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 0.96$). No significant effect was found for conflict or for friends' problem behavior or academic achievement.

Next, the same analysis was performed again, but this time separately for each type of activity. For individual sports, youths' co-participating friends had better academic achievement than their non-participating friends, $F(1,32) = 7.46$, $p < .01$ ($M = 4.16$; $SD = 0.66$ versus $M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.66$). For team sports, two significant effects were observed. Youths' co-participating friends were more supportive compared to their non-participating friends, $F(1,57) = 10.99$, $p < .01$ ($M = 4.07$; $SD = 0.78$ versus $M = 3.70$; $SD = 0.77$), but also displayed higher levels of problem behavior $F(1,57) = 5.03$, $p < .01$ ($M = 2.39$; $SD = 1.20$ versus $M = 2.15$; $SD = 0.89$). No effects were found for artistic activities or prosocial activities/clubs. Finally, the same analysis was conducted separately for school-based and community-based activities. No effects were found for school-based activities.

Friendships with Co-Participants and Youths' Adjustment. The third question was to examine whether having friends in an activity was associated with better adjustment (as compared to being involved but not having friends in the activity or not being involved in any activity). Significant effects were found for problem behavior, $F(2,263) = 2.98$, $p < .05$, grades, $F(2,273) = 3.42$, $p < .05$, and self-perception of academic competence, $F(2,278) = 3.16$, $p < .05$. The post-hoc analyses indicated that compared to youth who were not involved in any activity, youth with co-participating friends had lower levels of problem behavior ($M = 1.39$; $SD = 0.69$ versus $M = 1.67$; $SD = 0.87$), better grades ($M = 73.10$; $SD = 10.51$ versus $M = 69.34$; $SD = 10.68$), and a higher self-perception of academic competence ($M = 3.03$; $SD = 0.58$ versus $M = 2.79$; $SD = 0.75$).

In order to verify whether these effects specifically characterized some types of activities, similar analyses were performed separately for each type of activity. For prosocial activities/clubs, significant effects were observed for problem behavior, $F(2,101) = 3.99$, $p < .05$, grades, $F(2,111) = 9.44$, $p < .001$, and self-perception of academic competence, $F(2,103) = 4.92$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc tests revealed that youths who were involved in

prosocial activities/clubs with co-participating friends had lower levels of problem behavior ($M = 1.20$; $SD = 0.67$ versus $M = 1.67$; $SD = 0.87$), better grades ($M = 78.92$; $SD = 8.37$ versus $M = 69.61$; $SD = 10.27$) and a higher self-perception of academic competence ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 0.61$ versus $M = 2.79$; $SD = 0.75$) than youth who were not involved in any activity. Moreover, youth who were involved in prosocial activities/clubs with co-participating friends had a higher self-perception of academic competence than youths who were involved in these activities but without co-participating friends ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 0.61$ versus $M = 2.81$; $SD = 0.49$).

A final series of ANOVAs were conducted to test whether the effects varied according to the context in which the activities were offered. For example, for school-based activities, the following three groups were compared: (a) youth who were not involved in any activity, (b) youth who were involved in school-based activities but without any co-participating friends, and (c) youth who were involved in school-based activities with one (or more) co-participating friends. No effects were found for school-based activities. For community-based activities, significant effects were found for grades, $F(2,254) = 5.28$, $p < .01$, and self-perception of academic competence, $F(2,247) = 4.20$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses indicated that youth with co-participating friends had higher grades than the two other groups ($M = 74.07$; $SD = 10.83$ versus $M = 69.69$; $SD = 10.23$ and $M = 69.61$; $SD = 10.27$) and a higher self-perception of academic competence than youth who were not involved in any activity ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 0.55$ versus $M = 2.79$; $SD = 0.75$).

Discussion

The assumption that it is common for youth to have friends who co-participate with them in organized activities has never been carefully empirically tested (with a recent exception by Schaefer et al., 2011). The current study provided an in-depth examination of friendships within organized activities. We extended prior research by showing that (a) a majority of youth have a substantial number of friends co-participating in activities with them, (b) these friendships have some distinct features in terms of support and the friends' level of problem behavior and academic achievement, (c) having friends in organized activities is associated with better behavioral and educational adjustment, and (d) all these findings vary according to the type of activity (individual sports, team sports, artistic activities, prosocial activities/clubs) and the context in which they take place (school vs. community). Below, we describe the study's findings in greater detail and discuss their developmental significance.

Friendships Within Organized Activities. Overall, our study confirmed that friendships do exist within organized activities and are relatively common. Over 70% of participants reported having friends in their activities and, on average, had close to four friends co-participating with

them. Friendship networks are thus closely embedded in youths' activities. This, however, does not apply equally to all types of activities. Our findings showed that friendships seemed to be more frequent in team sports and prosocial activities/clubs (e.g., volunteering and scouts) compared to individual sports and artistic activities. The team focus of these activities might contribute to this positive social atmosphere. It is also possible that these types of activities attract individuals who are more socially inclined and more likely to form friendships with their peers. As for artistic activities, perhaps a distinction should be made in future studies (using a larger sample) between activities that are purely individual, such as painting, photography, poetry or playing a musical instrument, as opposed to activities that are more collective, such as drama, band, or choir. We suspect that friendships might be more common in the latter. Our findings diverge from those of Schaefer and colleagues (2011) who found that friendships were less likely to occur in sports compared to other types of activity. One explanation might be that these authors merged individual sports and team sports into one single activity type, thus removing a distinction that is key when studying friendship processes. Finally, in our sample, participation was more frequent in community-based activities compared to school-based activities. In the city where the study was conducted, a broader range of activities were offered in the communities than at the schools. This illustrates the importance of extending organized activity research to out-of-school settings. However, the prevalence of friendships in these two activity contexts was relatively similar.

Do Friendships with Co-Participants Have More Positive Features? The idea that organized activities may promote positive friendship features was initially not supported. Indeed, our first analysis revealed that friendships with co-participants and friendships with non-participants shared similar features. However, differences emerged when different types of activities were analyzed separately, specifically for individual and team sports. Youth reported that friends who co-participated with them in individual sports were more academically oriented than friends who did not participate with them in individual sports. One explanation might be that youth who are involved in individual sports are more focused on individual performance and competition, including school performance. Youth also reported that they received more support from friends who co-participated with them in team sports but that these friends exhibited a higher level of problem behavior compared to friends who did not participate with them in team sports. On the one hand, since team sports are more focused on group spirit and comradeship, support among friends is more likely. On the other hand, sports have also been associated with increases in problem behaviors such as alcohol use (Crosnoe, 2002; Denault, Poulin, & Pederesen, 2009; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). The current findings suggest that this increase may be explained (at least

partly) by friendships in team sports. These friendships might in turn foster a more deviant subculture among youths (Denault & Poulin, 2012).

Activities, Friendships, and Adjustment. This study also tested the hypothesis that among youth who are involved in organized activities, those who have friends co-participating with them might be better adjusted. Our findings revealed that youth with co-participating friends had lower levels of problem behavior, better grades and a higher self-perception of academic competence, compared to youth who were not involved in any activity. Importantly, there was no difference in the any of the outcomes for youth who participated but had no friends in the activity and youth who were not involved in any activity.

Distinct findings also emerged when school-based and community-based activities were analyzed separately. Youth who participated in community-based activities and reported at least one friend who co-participated with them in these activities had better grades and more positive self-perceptions of academic competence compared to youth who did not participate. No differences were found for school-based activities. At first, these findings might be surprising given that previous research reported that in-school friendships were more closely associated with adolescents' academic achievement than out-of-school friendships (Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). One explanation might be the positive quality of friendships that youth form in the community-based context. Our findings show that friendships within this context tend to be more supportive and that the friends tend to be more academically oriented. These features in turn might have a positive impact on the adolescent's own functioning. A second explanation is related to the specificity of having friends in an activity that takes place in the community. In school-based activities, even if adolescents do not have friends co-participating with them in their activity, they are likely to have acquaintances, classmates, or grademates in the activity. Having peers that they are familiar with involved with them in their activity might facilitate their social integration in the activity group, make them more comfortable in that context and optimize the benefits of the activity. The fact of having friends or not having friends in this context thus seems less critical. In contrast, when adolescents are enrolled in an activity supported by a community organization outside of the school, they are less likely to mix with peers that they know or interact with outside the activity (especially in larger communities). Thus, having a friend in a community-based activity appears more crucial for a more pleasant and successful integration in the activity group. More research is needed to test these different scenarios.

Limitations and Future Directions. Findings from this study must be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the existence of friendships was not established through reciprocal nominations, which are the gold standard for identifying friendships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Studies on friendships in which reciprocity is

controlled are generally constrained to classroom or grade-level friendships. In the present study, because our interest was to extend the focus to adolescents' out-of-school activities and friendships, we decided to use self-reported friendship nominations, as other researchers have (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Feiring, 1999). Second, because participants were asked to report on multiple friendships (up to 10), we had to limit the assessment of the four indicators of friendship features to one item each, whereas most friendship questionnaires use multiple items (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Parker & Asher, 1993). Moreover, it must be kept in mind that youths' reports of their friends' characteristics are often overestimated (Prinstein & Wang, 2005). The present findings should be replicated using friends' report of their own behavior. Third, this study used a fairly homogeneous sample of adolescents from a single geographic area. The current findings should also be replicated with more ethnically and economically diverse samples in order to determine whether the development—and meaning—of friendship in organized activities is similar across cultures and settings or varies in important ways. Fourth, the findings reported here are based on cross-sectional analyses that do not take into account possible self-selection biases among activity participants (Larson, 2000). For instance, youth with better behavioral and educational adjustment may tend to self-select themselves in organized activities. Longitudinal studies should be used to disentangle this issue.

Despite these limitations, this study offers an in-depth examination of friendships within organized activities and could serve as a springboard for further research on linkages between friendships and activities. For instance, the direction of the relationship between friendships and organized activity participation was not addressed in this study. Two scenarios are possible. First, a friendship might exist between friends before they participate in the activity. In this scenario, friends might influence each other with regard to their decision to participate and whether or not to maintain their participation over time. Alternately, the friendships may be formed after the participation in the activity is initiated. Organized activity participation could then be seen as facilitating the formation of friendships. Longitudinal data on friendships within organized activities are needed to test these two scenarios. Moreover, one important question in this literature is whether friends' characteristics (or friendship quality) could be a mechanism accounting for organized activity participation and developmental outcomes. Evidence of mediation was found in previous studies (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Gardner et al., 2009; Simpkins et al., 2008), but these studies should be replicated with a specific focus on friendships within the activities. Finally, different types of activities were analyzed separately here. However, many studies now suggest that breadth of participation (being involved in different types of activities) is an important dimension of activity participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010). The possibility that adolescents participate in multiple types of activities

with the same friend(s) and the characteristics of these friendships should thus be examined. There were too few instances in the current study to do this. Larger samples are needed.

In conclusion, this study showed that friendships do indeed exist within organized activities. The features of these friendships differ depending on the types of activities youth are involved in. This underlines the importance of distinguishing among types of activities and notably supports the relevance of separating individual and team sports. When activities are offered both at school and in the community, the features of these friendships also differ according to the context of participation. Differences in friendship features and impact on adjustment stood out predominantly in community-based activities.

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FRANÇOIS POULIN is a professor in the psychology department (département de psychologie) at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

ANNE-SOPHIE DENAULT is a professor in the department of educational foundations and practices (département des fondements et pratiques en éducation) at the Université Laval in Canada.

