

“We Were Just Talking. . .”: Conversations in Early Adolescence

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This paper explores young adolescents' experience of talk, examining changes in boys' and girls' patterns of communication with family and friends. The data consist of immediate self-reports provided by 401 5th–9th grade students during the course of one week of their normal lives. Results indicate that while time spent talking to friends increased dramatically across this age period, especially for girls, talk with family members remained stable. Analysis of topics of conversation suggests that older children turned to friends for discussions of age-related concerns while continuing to discuss daily issues with family members. Talk with friends did not appear to replace talk with family members but rather represented a new facet of the social world, supplementing existing family relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate verbally is a critical component of social development. Talk is used to structure the interpersonal world and define the individual's position within it (e.g., Sigman, 1987). Talking has an educational function, allowing individuals to explore the realm of acceptable be-

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havior in their social group (e.g., Gottman and Mettetal, 1986). It also facilitates intimate relations, permitting individuals to share their experiences and thoughts with others (McGuire and Lorch, 1968). As children grow older, talking becomes increasingly important for transmitting information and structuring the social world. This paper explores the phenomenon of talk during late childhood and early adolescence, a time marked by both quantitative and qualitative changes in social relationships.

The early adolescent age period is often described as a time of emotional reorientation to the peer group and increasing detachment from the family (e.g., Bowerman and Kinch, 1959; Damon, 1983). It is also a time when gender role expectations become intensified (Hill and Lynch, 1983), leading to increasing gender differences in social relationships. These two themes have been the focus of studies of social interactions in adolescence. Manifestations of the changing dynamic between family and peers have been explored primarily by examining with whom children say they discuss different concerns. As children enter adolescence, intimate self-disclosure to adults decreases while disclosure to peers increases (Buhrmester and Furman, 1987; Norrell, 1984). Little is known, however, about the overall pattern of young adolescents' communications with different companions.

Studies of older adolescents find differences in both the amount of time spent talking, and what is discussed with family and friends. High school students talk with friends three times as often as with family members (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). Topics discussed with parents and friends in later adolescence differ; conversations with parents are described as serious and goal-oriented, while conversations with peers are both more light-hearted and more intimate (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). One aim of the present study is to describe younger adolescents' conversations with family and friends, and investigate age-related differences across this period.

The emergence of gender differences in early adolescence has been the focus of many studies (see Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974, and Seward and Seward, 1980, for reviews), and gender differences relating to the social world have been consistently described across the life span. For example, girls are more verbally fluent (Jacklin, 1979; Marsh, 1979) and interpersonally focused (Gilligan, 1982) than boys, and adult women are more affiliative than men (Seward and Seward, 1980). These cognitive and psychological differences appear to affect the experience of talk during early adolescence. Girls carry on intimate discussions at an earlier age than boys (Buhrmester and Furman, 1987), topics discussed by each sex differ (Norrell, 1984), and teenage girls spend more time talking than boys (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). It is expected that similar gender differences will be found in the present study; in addition, the effect of gender on changes in relationships with family members and peers will be explored.

Prior research has looked primarily at who youngsters talk to and what they discuss with different people. Another dimension to be considered is the subjective experience that accompanies and moderates interactions. How children feel when talking with different companions has implications for development; presumably they will maximize positive experiences by talking more to people they feel good with, thus increasing the potential socializing force of these companions. One study comparing high school students' moods while talking with family and friends found that average moods were significantly more positive when teenagers were with friends (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). The present study will explore the subjective experience accompanying younger teens' conversations and investigate how companions moderate the experience of talking.

Most previous research on young adolescents' social interactions has utilized questionnaire or interview methods. In contrast, the present study utilizes immediate self-reports of ongoing experience. This method bypasses many of the problems associated with retrospective, one-time self-report methods, providing a sample of episodes of daily life. It is ideal for describing a phenomenon such as talk, which tends to occur in unstructured settings and is difficult to observe and quantify. Utilizing these data, we will explore various features of young adolescents' conversations, including the amount of time spent talking, who is talked to, what is discussed, and the subjective experience accompanying conversations.

METHOD

The research for this study was carried out using the Experience Sampling Method (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1987). Participants carried an electronic pager and booklet of self-report forms for one week. Signals that activated the pagers following a predetermined random schedule were sent 7 times a day between 7:30 AM and 9:30 PM. Participants were instructed to fill out a self-report form whenever a signal was received, providing a possible total of 49 signals per person (see Larson, this issue, for a full discussion of the methodology).

Sample

Participants were randomly selected 5th-9th-grade students from two communities. The sample for the main analyses in this paper consists of 401 5th-9th graders who participated in the study during the school year and met the criteria for inclusion in the final sample (75% of all students invited to participate during the school year). There were 160 5th and 6th graders, 168 7th and 8th graders, and 73 9th graders, evenly divided by sex. Data

on the summer sample of 82 5th–8th-grade students will be presented for comparison purposes where appropriate. Analyses for this paper are based on 14,876 reports provided by school-year participants (an average of 37% per person), and 2,918 self-reports provided by summer participants (an average of 36 per person). (See Larson, this issue, and Larson and Richards, this issue, for further sample description.)

Measures

The self-report questionnaire included items dealing with various aspects of the participant's current situation. For this analysis, we focus on measures of activity, companionship, topic of conversation, and subjective experience.

Activity

Participants' activity was determined by open-ended responses to the question "What were you doing?" Responses were assigned 1 of 127 mutually exclusive codes that were collapsed into 22 overarching categories, including three socializing categories: talking in person, talking on the telephone, and other social (e.g., roughhousing, kissing). It should be noted that many activities involve talking as a structuring device (e.g., playing games, serving dinner) but when people are asked what they are doing, they name the activity, not the talking. The main analyses for this paper will focus on times when respondents indicated they were talking, either in person or on the phone. Interrater reliability for coding the 22 activity categories was maintained at over 94%.

Companionship

This was determined by responses to the question "Who were you with (or talking to on the phone)?" Participants used a checklist to indicate companions, who were assigned to one of five main categories: (1) one parent only, (2) one or more siblings, (3) family groups (both parents, parents and siblings, extended family), (4) friends (friends outside of class, family and friends together³), and (5) others (in class, strangers, alone).

³Self-reports when talking with both family and friends, which were extremely rare ($N = 69$; 0.46% of all beeps), were included in time with friends. Preliminary analyses showed that the distribution of topics of conversation, and the subjective experience during these discussions, most resembled times with friends (similar findings were reported by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984).

Topic of Conversation

When their activity was talking, participants were asked to respond to the open-ended probe "Topic of Conversation?" Responses were coded into 1 of 169 mutually exclusive categories that were collapsed into seven overarching categories: (1) academic/school (e.g., grades, schoolwork), (2) peers (e.g., opposite sex, parties); (3) family (e.g., family members, privileges), (4) sports (e.g., team sports, outdoor activities), (5) other leisure (e.g., games, TV), (6) maintenance (e.g., eating, chores), and (7) self (e.g., own appearance, future plans).

Interrater reliability for the seven categories was maintained at over 97%. Those times when the conversation was about the study (3.6% of all conversations), or when no topic of conversation was specified (16.3% of all conversations) were excluded from analyses of distribution of topics, but retained for analyses of amount of time and subjective experience in social activities.

Subjective Experience

The measure of affect was selected to reflect the overall emotional quality of the situation. Affect was computed from three 7-point semantic-differential scales on the dimensions "happy-unhappy," "friendly-angry," and "cheerful-irritable" ($\alpha = .75$; Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). In order to permit comparisons across individuals, raw scores on this scale were converted into z scores. Within each participant's set of self-reports, raw scores were converted by subtracting the individual's average score and dividing by the standard deviation, creating standardized scores with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. This creates a standard scale, with positive scores representing higher than average affect and negative scores representing lower than average affect (Hays, 1981).

Statistics

Two main types of statistical analyses were performed. In all comparisons of percentages of time, differences between groups were assessed based on the standard error of the difference between proportions (Loether and McTavish, 1974). This procedure tests whether two observed proportions are significantly different from each other. Comparisons of subjective experience were performed via analysis of variance. In these comparisons, self-reports were pooled to create mean affect scores, permitting comparisons of subjective experience across situations.

RESULTS

In order to describe the experience of talk during early adolescence, we first explore the external dimension (how much time was spent talking, who children talked to, and what was discussed) and then the internal dimension (how youngsters felt when talking). The results are structured to illuminate youngsters' changing experiences with family and friends, and to highlight gender differences.

Social Time in Daily Life

The first set of analyses addressed the question of how much time is spent socializing during early adolescence. The 14,876 self-reports were pooled and the percentage of times participants reported being engaged in social activities during the school year computed (Table I). Overall, participants were socializing about one-tenth of all the times they were signaled. Girls reported socializing more often than boys; this gender difference was significant at all ages for time spent talking both in person and on the phone.

The frequency of social activities reported by girls increased across the three age groups. This was accounted for by age differences in talking, both in person and on the telephone. For boys, age differences existed between the youngest and middle age group in total time in social activities, again accounted for by differences in time spent talking. The gap between the amount of time girls and boys spent in social activities widened with age; by the 9th grade, girls reported being engaged in social activities twice as frequently as boys.

A comparison of social activities during the summer and school year revealed significant seasonal effects. Social activities were more common in the summer months (girls: 18% vs. 13% of all self-reports; boys: 14% vs. 8%; $p < .001$ for both comparisons). During the summer, children were more frequently in the company of family members (girls: 48% vs. 31% of all self-reports; boys: 53% vs. 33%; $p < .001$ for both comparisons) and friends outside of school (girls: 49% vs. 30% of all self-reports; boys: 43% vs. 25%; $p < .001$ for both comparisons). An examination of community effects revealed no significant differences between the two communities in how frequently children reported socializing during the school year.

Social activities are clearly a major part of daily life for these young adolescents, and talking is the most common social activity. The remainder of this paper deals with young adolescents' experience when talking.

Table I. Percent of Time Spent in Social Activities^a

Grade	Girls				Boys				Total
	5 and 6	7 and 8	9	Total	5 and 6	7 and 8	9	Total	
Total number of self-reports	3038	3294	1448	7780	3000	2947	1149	7096	
Talk in person	7.2	10.4 ^b	12.8 ^{b,c}	9.6	5.8 ^d	7.3 ^{b,d}	6.6 ^d	6.6 ^d	
Talk on phone	.6	1.9 ^b	3.1 ^{b,c}	1.6	.3 ^d	.8 ^{b,d}	.8 ^{c,d}	.6 ^d	
Other socializing	1.2	1.6	1.9	1.5	1.0	.9 ^d	1.5	1.0 ^d	
Total social	9.0	13.9 ^b	17.8 ^{b,c}	12.7	7.1 ^d	9.0 ^{b,d}	8.9 ^d	8.2 ^d	

^aTable shows the percentage of times participants reported being engaged in social activities.

^bSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the next youngest age group, based on the standard error of the difference between proportions.

^cSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the 5th and 6th grades.

^dSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the girls.

Companions when Talking

Our first question focused on young adolescents' companions when talking. Preliminary analyses revealed that about 90% of all telephone conversations were with friends, with girls reporting significantly more phone conversations than boys (14% vs. 8% of all conversations; $p < .001$). Older girls reported more telephone conversations than younger ones (5th and 6th graders: 9%; 9th graders: 20% of all conversations; $p < .001$), but no significant age differences emerged for boys. Girls, then, made use of the telephone at an earlier age and more frequently than boys, and with age girls' use of the telephone increased. Given the small number of telephone conversations overall, the data for talking in person and on the phone were pooled for subsequent analyses.

The percentages of time participants reported they were talking, either in person or on the phone, with different companions were computed. Preliminary analyses showed that girls were talking with parents .8%, siblings .3%, and family groups 1.5% of the time, while boys talked with parents .4%, siblings .3%, and family groups 1% of the time. As a group, girls talked significantly more than boys to both parents and family groups ($p < .01$). Since conversations with family members were rare compared to those with friends, the data for all three family categories (parents, siblings, and family groups) were collapsed for further comparisons.

Age differences in the proportion of time girls and boys talked to family members, friends, and others were examined (Fig. 1). Contrary to predictions about the changing roles of peers and family in adolescence, talk with friends did not displace talk with family members but rather appeared to represent a new aspect of adolescent experience.⁴ As discussed earlier, the amount of time girls were talking showed a linear increase across the three age groups, while boys showed a modest increase between the youngest and to oldest age groups (see Fig. 1). The increase in girls' reports of talking was accounted for by age differences between the youngest and oldest grade group in talk with friends ($p < .001$) and others ($p < .001$). The overall proportion of time girls spent talking with family members remained stable across the three age groups. Boys showed a small but significant increase in time spent talking with friends between the youngest and two older age groups ($p < .01$), but no differences in talk with family members or others. With age, then, both sexes showed increased talk with friends but maintained a stable level of communication with family members.

⁴The incidence of conversations with different companions was not equal across individuals. Of the 401 participants, 76 provided at least one self-report when talking to one parent, 35 provided at least one when talking to siblings, 131 provided one or more when talking to family groups, and 258 provided self-reports when talking to friends. Thus, the data on talking reflect the experience of a subset of participants, and may not represent all adolescents.

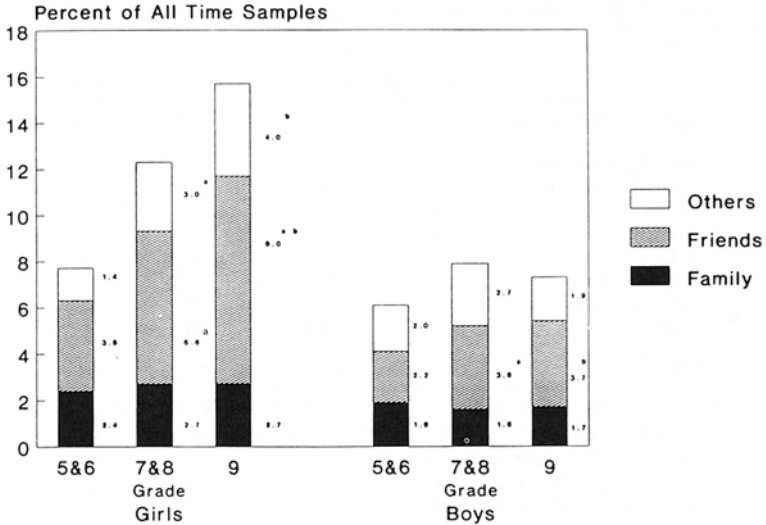


Fig. 1. Age differences in whom young adolescents talk to. (a) Significantly different than next youngest group at the .05 level. (b) Significantly different than 5th and 6th graders.

There were significant gender differences in the amount of time children in the different age groups were talking with friends but not family members. Girls talked with friends more than boys at all ages ($p < .001$ for all comparisons). In contrast, the only gender difference in talk with family emerged in the middle age group, where girls reported significantly more conversations ($p < .01$). In addition, 9th-grade girls talked more with others than 9th-grade boys. With age, then, girls talked increasingly to people in the social world outside the home. The next question we addressed was what these youngsters discussed with family members and friends.

Topic of Conversation with Different Companions

For this analysis, self-reports where participants' primary activity was talking, either in person or on the phone, with family members or friends were selected. An examination of the frequencies of the seven topics of conversation categories revealed that teenagers talked to these companions about different topics (Table II).

Girls reported proportionally more discussions of family concerns, leisure, and maintenance when talking with family, while talk with friends was more likely to center around peer concerns. Boys showed similar differences in with whom they discussed peer and family concerns. Thus, for example, a high school freshman talked to her father about when her divorced parents should meet that weekend, and a 6th-grade girl planned a family camping

Table II. Topic of Conversation when Talking with Family and Friends^a

	Girls		Boys	
	Family ^b	Friends	Family ^b	Friends
Number of self-reports	139	376	85	146
Topic of conversation				
Academic/school	10.8	14.4	9.4	15.8
Peers	11.5	44.7 ^c	8.2	31.5 ^{cd}
Family	18.7	5.6 ^c	16.5	3.4 ^c
Sports	8.6	8.8	20.0 ^d	17.1 ^d
Other leisure	30.2	10.9 ^c	21.2	16.4
Maintenance	12.2	6.1 ^c	15.3	9.6
Self	7.9	9.6	9.4	6.2
Total	99.9	100.1	100.0	100.0

^aValues are percentages based on the subset of self-reports where the primary activity was designated as "talking" either in person or on the phone. Self-reports where the topic of conversation was related to the beeper study or was unspecified are excluded.

^bIncludes all three family categories: parents, siblings, and family groups.

^cSignificant difference ($p < .05$) between family and friends within sex.

^dSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the girls.

trip with her mother. When with friends, the freshman was describing her embarrassment when a boy tried to kiss her goodnight; an 8th-grade boy was planning a party. There is a clear differentiation between peer and family concerns that is repeated throughout our sample.

Age differences in topics of conversation discussed with family members and friends are shown in Table III. Since the pattern of topics of conversation reported in Table II revealed few significant differences for girls and boys, data for both sexes were collapsed for the comparison of family and friends. Table III shows that as children entered adolescence, their discussions with both family and friends shifted away from leisure concerns. By the 9th grade, about a third of all conversations with family members focused on family issues, and over two-fifths of conversations with friends centered on peer concerns. Older teens also reported discussing the self with friends more frequently than younger teens. With age, then, young adolescents devoted conversations with different companions more exclusively to shared concerns and less to general topics.

A comparison of what was discussed with family as opposed to friends showed that friends discussed peer concerns more frequently at all three age groups, and family members discussed family concerns more than friends in the two older groups (see Table III). The gap between the proportions for these topics widened with age as youngsters showed increasing differentiation in what they discussed with family and friends. Peer conversations described by older children encompassed such topics as drug abuse, sexual orientation, and violence among peers. For example, one 8th-grade girl reported being upset during a conversation with friends because she "learned that

Table III. Age Differences in Topic of Conversation when Talking with Family and Friends^a

Grade	Family ^b			Friends		
	5 and 6	7 and 8	9	5 and 6	7 and 8	9
Number of self-reports	85	96	44	123	258	142
Topic of conversation						
Academic/school	7.1	11.5	13.6	17.9 ^c	16.3	9.9
Peers	10.6	11.5	6.8	35.0 ^c	42.6 ^c	43.0 ^c
Family	8.2	19.8 ^c	31.8 ^d	6.5	1.6 ^{ce}	9.9 ^{ce}
Sports	14.1	16.7	2.3 ^{cd}	6.5	12.8	12.0
Other leisure	34.1	24.0	18.2	22.8	10.1 ^{ce}	8.4 ^d
Maintenance	15.3	13.5	9.1	8.1	6.6 ^c	6.3
Self	12.6	3.1 ^c	18.2 ^c	3.2 ^c	10.1 ^{ce}	10.6 ^d
Total	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1

^aValues are percentages based on the subset of self-reports where the primary activity was designated as "talking," either in person or on the phone. Self-reports where the topic of conversation was related to the beeper study or was unspecified are excluded.

^bIncludes all three family categories: parents, siblings, and family groups.

^cSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the next youngest age group.

^dSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from the 5th and 6th graders.

^eSignificantly different ($p < .05$) from family.

a good friend might be a druggie"; another was interested but disappointed and "mad because we found out that our friend was a lez [lesbian]." These were new concerns for teens, and were discussed primarily with peers. The same 8th-grade girl who discussed drugs with her friends was found talking to her mother about her plans for the upcoming week; another discussed a trip to Great America. Thus, adolescents appear to maintain channels of communication to their family while exploring emerging age-related concerns with peers.

Peer discussions also formed a context within which gender differences became prominent. Separate analyses exploring gender differences in age patterns of topics of conversation showed that, with age, an intensification of gender-related patterns emerged in conversations with friends but not family. In conversations with friends, 9th-grade girls discussed people or personal concerns almost three-quarters of the time (peers 50%, family 11%, and self 12%) while 9th-grade boys discussed these topics one-third of the time (peers 21%, family 6%, and self 6%), talking more about sports (24%) and leisure (15%). In contrast, youngsters of both sexes showed more similar topics of discussion when talking with family members. The emergence of gender differences in conversations with friends but not family reinforces the idea that these companions provide different opportunities for learning about the world.

Given these differences in conversations with family members and friends, we might expect differences in the accompanying subjective experience. In order to investigate this issue, we turned next to an analysis of youngsters' affect while talking.

Subjective Experience when Talking

How youngsters felt when talking was examined by selecting all self-reports where the primary activity was talking and comparing reported affect using analysis of variance. An examination of overall levels of affect showed that both girls and boys experienced elevated affect when talking (girls; $N = 830$, mean affect = .16; boys: $N = 463$, mean affect = .22), but no significant gender or age effects emerged.

Subjective experience when talking with family members as opposed to friends was examined next. A comparison of mean affect when talking with family and friends revealed a significant effect for companions. Both boys and girls showed higher levels of affect when talking with friends as compared to family members [friends: $N = 648$, mean affect = .23; family: $N = 306$, mean affect = .03; $F(1, 954) = 7.1, p < .008$]. Additionally, a significant interaction between grade and sex emerged in this set of self-reports. Girls reported increasing affect with age while boys experienced a slight decrease in affect with age [girls—5th and 6th graders: $N = 175$, mean affect = $-.02$; 9th graders: $N = 170$, mean affect = .18; boys—5th and 6th graders: $N = 118$, mean affect = .28; 9th graders: $N = 53$, mean affect = .19; $F(2, 954) = 3.1, p < .04$]. However, these analyses revealed no interactions between companions and grade or sex.

Further analyses comparing individual family categories revealed that conversations with one parent alone were accompanied by levels of affect comparable to those experienced when talking with friends (parents: $N = 86$, mean affect = .25; friends: $N = 648$, mean affect = .23), while conversations with siblings and family groups were characterized by neutral affect (siblings: $N = 37$, mean affect = .0; family groups: $N = 183$, mean affect = $-.06$). These differences in affect by companion were significant [$F(3, 954) = 4.6, p < .004$].

The issue of whether differences in affect might be due to variations in what was discussed with each set of companions was examined by comparing youngsters' affect when talking to different companions about different topics. No significant differences emerged, perhaps due to the small number of self-reports in individual topic of conversation by companion categories. The overall pattern of results, however, suggests that it was companions and not topic of conversation that influenced how youngsters felt while talking.

DISCUSSION

The data presented in this paper show that talking comes to represent a major activity for young adolescents. The amount of time girls spent talk-

ing doubled across the period from 5th to 9th grade, while boys showed a smaller increase. By the 9th grade, girls were spending an average of 16 hours a week, and boys about 8 hours a week, "just talking." This figure does not include occasions when youngsters were engaged in an activity such as eating, doing sports, or watching TV, and carrying on a conversation at the same time, but is limited to times when talking was the primary activity. Youngsters, especially girls, engaged in increasingly extensive conversations with friends, family members, and other people in their social networks. This rise in time spent talking may reflect the use of age-dependent social skills that enable older children to discuss abstract topics and ideas (Dorval and Eckerman, 1984). Carrying on a discussion is an acquired skill; children must learn the rules of conversation in order to sustain verbal interactions (de Villiers and de Villiers, 1978). These skills allow teenagers to use talk as a way of interacting and developing relationships, and probably contribute to the dramatic increase in time spent in conversation.

An examination of gender differences in the amount of time spent talking suggests that talk plays a different role in male and female adolescents' lives. While both boys and girls spent roughly the same amount of time with different companions, their activities with these companions differed. Girls spent more time with people just talking and with age, reported increased use of the telephone, while boys engaged in other activities such as sports (Kirshnit *et al.*, this issue) and watching TV (Larson *et al.*, this issue). This pattern is likely to continue into adulthood; women have been described as more socially-oriented and relational than men (Chodorow, 1974), and time use studies indicate that women spend more time in conversations than men (Robinson, 1977).

Although no age or gender differences in overall affect while talking were found, our analyses of conversations with family and friends suggests that girls and boys come to experience talk in intimate relationships differently. The youngest girls showed lower affect while talking to these companions than either boys their own age or older girls. That this effect emerged only within conversations with family members or friends suggests that it is talk within close relationships that is taking on an increasing significance in girls' but not boys' lives.

This finding shows that it is not just talking that influences development. Who children talk to and what they discuss play an equally important part in molding their lives. The messages conveyed by various people differ in their values and what information they contain; who children talk to must influence what they learn about the world and how they perceive their options. Prior research shows that peers feel free to discuss taboo topics and share information on sexual behavior, deviance, and nonconformist views (Fine, 1987). In contrast, when with parents, adolescents tend to be more constrained (Larson, 1983) and their discussions center on traditional social

goals (Csikszentmihalyi, and Larson, 1984; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Our results corroborate these findings, suggesting that adolescents use family members and friends to fulfill different needs in their lives.

Conversations with family members remained at a low but constant level across this age period (an average of less than 3 hours a week for girls, and less than 2 for boys). This continuity in family conversations suggests that youngsters are not withdrawing from the family but rather are maintaining communications with family members while expanding conversations with peers. Although affect during general family interactions was only average, conversations with one parent alone were characterized by elevated affect. Given this fact, the question of why parent-child talks are so rare is intriguing. One possible reason is suggested by a study of Finnish 7-year-olds, which found that parent-child discussions of the child's experiences and problems were more likely to be initiated by the child than the parent (Takala, 1984). Opportunities to claim a parent's undivided attention may be rare in the communal milieu of the family, where interactions are constrained by the demands of home life and diverging agendas. The routine nature of family conversations may explain why reported affect during these interactions is only average. Family conversations are devoted largely to such issues as family matters, maintenance, and leisure activities, with little focus on the child's personal concerns. In contrast, peers share the same interests and are at a similar stage in their lives.

Talk with friends plays an increasingly large part in the daily lives of these adolescents, particularly for girls. By the 9th grade, girls spent an average of 9 hours a week just talking to friends, while boys spent nearly 4 hours. Age differences in what was discussed support the hypothesis that talk takes on a new role in teenagers' friendships. Our data show that among older children, conversations encompassed age-related concerns such as the opposite sex, mutual friends, and one's own attributes. These conversations allow young adolescents to explore new ideas and topics, using peers as a sounding board and a source of emotional support (Romaine, 1984). Friends provide a context where age and gender-related concerns may be freely discussed. The dramatic increase in conversations about people among older girls supports Gilligan's (1982) assertion that girls define themselves in the context of relationships while boys define themselves as individuals. Conversations with peers provide a context within which such differences are articulated, as girls focus on people while boys focus on activities.

Talking is clearly a critical component of the early adolescent age period, especially for girls, and comes increasingly to be a peer experience. If it is true that children learn from conversations, then we can conclude that they are learning primarily from friends as they move into adolescence. Conversations with family members show continuity, both in terms of quantity

and topics discussed, and do not appear to undergo the changes seen in conversations with friends. The young adolescents in our sample maintained communications with the family while expanding discussions with peers. The balance between these two primary groups, and the degree to which our data have accurately captured the experience of talking with each, merits further study. It may be that friends do not replace family members but rather represent a supplementary source of social information, with whom teenagers can co-construct and explore the world, while continuing to utilize the family as a base for discussions of ongoing concerns and issues.

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