Methodological Issues Regarding Sociometric Status Assessment in Early Adolescents

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The quality and reciprocity of children's peer experiences substantially impact their psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional development (Hartup, 1992). Contemporary studies of peer relationships commonly distinguish between two important components of a child's association with his or her peers, friendship and popularity (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Various measurement techniques are utilized to assess these two separate but interrelated constructs, which respectively comprise of dyadic and group interactions with the individual. The traditional method of determining a child's sociometric status uses rating scales of likability. An alternative approach is to base popularity scores on the number of positive friendship nominations each individual receives from other members of the peer group.

These two methods of assessing sociometric status were compared in a group of 115 children in grades four through eight enrolled in one public and one private school from the intermountain west. In addition to the conventional methods of assessing popularity, the nominations method was calculated in two ways: by assessing friendships using a relatively unrestricted nominations technique and by means of restricting the number of good friends to three, as is commonly done in research for this particular area. The association between sociometric rating scales and the reverse nomination technique of assessing popularity ranged from highly related in the case of the unlimited nominations procedure ($r = .77$) to modestly related ($r = .48$) in the case of the more restrictive method. These results suggest that although methodology incorporating rating scales and nominations are not interchangeable, the procedure using unlimited nominations of friendship is comparable to traditional methods of assessing sociometric status.