ABSTRACT

Expectations for friends' behavior (e.g., friends should help one another) sometimes conflict with principles of individualism (e.g., people should be self-reliant). To examine how people resolve such conflicts, 15-, 18-, and 21-year-olds (N = 144) rated dilemmas in which expectations conflicted with individualism. For each dilemma, participants were asked what decision they would make for each dilemma, how an individualistic decision would affect their friend, and whether each decision broke a rule or expectation of friendship. The quality of the participants' friendships and their endorsement of individualism were also assessed. The first hypothesis was that participants with high-quality friendships would more often make judgments and use reasoning consistent with friendship expectations. The second hypothesis was that participants who more strongly endorsed individualistic attitudes and values would be more likely to make judgments and use reasoning consistent with individualism. At all ages, these hypotheses were supported. The analyses explored age and sex differences in participants' judgments and reasoning.

METHOD

Fifteen-, 18-, and 21-year-olds participated in the study (N = 144). The sample was evenly divided by age and sex. In individual interviews, participants were told about five dilemmas in which expectations of friendship conflicted with some aspect of individualism. For example, in one dilemma the participants had to decide whether to accompany a friend to a movie or to do something else. For each dilemma, participants were asked whether a decision would be consistent with friendship expectations, individualistic attitudes, or both. Participants were also asked to indicate how a decision would be consistent with their friends' feelings about the relationship and whether they would be upset if their friend were to make an individualistic decision. Participants also completed a questionnaire adapted from Braithwaite and Loe (1985) and from Triandis, Berry, and Leung (1980) that assessed individualistic attitudes and individualistic behaviors. These measures were created on the basis of the results of studies on the attitudes and values of competitive, individualistic, and self-reliant friends, social values, and self-oriented goals. These measures were also high in internal consistency (α = .70 to .85).

RESULTS

Age Differences in Judgments and Reasoning about the Dilemmas

Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) with age and sex as between-subjects factors and type of dilemma (e.g., original or reversed) as a within-subjects factor showed that age and sex interacted to predict the quality of participants' judgments and reasoning. To control for verbal fluency effects, proportion scores were computed for each individual question across all dilemmas of one type and used as the final dependent variables.

Table 1: Age Differences in Judgments about Friendship and Individualism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dilemma</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Reversed</th>
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| 1. Movie | 1.75 | 4.98
| 2. Assignment | 3.52 | 4.04
| 3. Break a Rule | 3.65 | 3.62
| 4. Workout | 3.65 | 3.62
| 5. Tutoring | 4.98 | 5.88

Notes. p < .05. At age 18 only, females (M = 4.48) made more friendship-oriented decisions.

In general, 15-year-olds judged the dilemmas to be more consistent with friendship expectations than did 18- and 21-year-olds. This pattern is consistent with the literature on age differences in the development of friendships. For example, in adolescence friendships may become more self-reliant and less governed by the expectations of others (e.g., the expected role of friendship). As adolescents reach adulthood, however, the expectations of their friends may become more important to them. These findings may be related to the quality of their friendships; more competitive and self-oriented friends may imply that adolescents spend more time with their friends. Because these students experienced more conflict and rivalry in their friendships, they may have been more aware of their friends' expectations and needs.

After hearing each dilemma, participants first indicated what they would do by using a 7-point scale on which the highest point was 7 and the lowest point was 0. Participants were also asked whether their friend would be upset by a decision to go to the movie, how their friend would feel about their decision to go to the movie, and whether their friend would be upset if they decided not to go to the movie. These questions were always presented in a standardized order to control for verbal fluency effects.