



# Friendships On- and Off-Line: The Effect that Posting on Instagram has on Friendship Quality

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## Introduction

- Adolescence is a time of outward exploration of peer communities.
- Social media transforms the nature of friendships<sup>1</sup>.
- Peer conflict is a fundamental aspect of adolescent development, revealing an understanding of mutual interdependence and cooperation regarding goals and behaviors<sup>2</sup>.
- This study aimed to understand how adolescent motivations behind posting on social media can impact their friendship qualities.

## Methods

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Sample from ACHIEVE Dataset**  
n = 409

Grade	n	Gender Identity	Race
10 <sup>th</sup>	3	Female 62.1%	White 46.7%
11 <sup>th</sup>	241	Male 37.2%	Black 23.2%
12 <sup>th</sup>	165	Other 0.5%	Hispanic/Latinx 22.2%
		Missing 0.2%	Mixed Race/Other 7.1%
			Asian 0.7%

### MEASURES

- Friendship Posts: participants were asked 7 questions about motivations for posting positively about a friend online. Oblique exploratory factor analysis (RMSEA=.054) suggested two reasons for these posts:
  - Show: to show off a friendship to their audience
  - Care: to demonstrate caring for a friend
- Markers of Friendship Quality: Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI)<sup>3</sup> – conflict, companionship, and intimate disclosure subscales
  - 3 items per subscale, 5-point Likert scale
- Covariates:
  - Digital Status Seeking (DSS; sociometric measure)
    - Participants were asked to nominate classmates who “try hard to get more activity on their social media profiles”
  - Peer Importance Scale<sup>4</sup> – the importance of popularity and peers’ opinions
    - 4 items, 5-point Likert scale

## Results

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Caring IG posts	3.27 (1.04)	1.00						
2. Showing IG posts	2.56 (1.04)	.56***	1.00					
3. NRI Companionship	3.61 (.89)	.22**	.18***	1.00				
4. NRI Conflict	1.97 (.82)	.001	.12*	.17***	1.00			
5. NRI Intimate Disclosure	3.68 (1.08)	.31***	.21***	.58***	.10*	1.00		
6. Sociometric DSS	.32 (1.20)	.16***	.15**	.23***	.11*	.18***	1.00	
7. Peer Importance	1.78 (.80)	.06	.19***	.04	.07	.001	.08	1.00

Note. All variables are measured at Time 5. IG = Instagram, NRI = Network of Relationships Inventory, DSS = digital status seeking. \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .

**Table 3. Separate Longitudinal Regressions Predicting In-Person Best Friendship Quality**

	T6 NRI Companionship		T6 NRI Conflict		T6 NRI Intimate Disclosure	
	Std. $\beta$	$p$	Std. $\beta$	$p$	Std. $\beta$	$p$
Outcome at T5	.48	<.001***	.37	<.001***	.38	<.001***
Caring IG posts	.01	.92	-.18	.02*	.10	.19
Showing IG posts	.03	.74	.21	.01*	.13	.10
Sociometric DSS	-.002	.98	.04	.56	.01	.92
Peer Importance	-.05	.411	-.08	.21	-.12	.06
Model $R^2$	.234		.182		.247	
Model $F(p)$	12.33 (<.001***)		8.97 (<.001***)		13.23 (<.001***)	

Note. All predictors are measured at Time 5. T5 = Time 5, T6 = Time 6, IG = Instagram, NRI = Network of Relationships Inventory, DSS = digital status seeking. \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \* $p \leq .05$ .

## Discussion

### POPULARITY MEASURES

- Adolescents who make either type of friendship post on Instagram are more frequently nominated by their peers as someone who tries hard to get more activity on their social media profiles.
- Adolescents who make showing posts self-rate a higher level of popularity seeking.

### FRIENDSHIP CONFLICT

- Caring posts are longitudinally predictive of conflict, but not concurrently.
- Showing posts are positively related to concurrent and longitudinal conflict.
- ½ of adolescent peer conflict results in disengagement, and conflict affect is carried forward in time<sup>2,5</sup>. These may be explanations towards why adolescent who perform show posts may lead to further conflict down the line.

### OTHER VARIABLES

- Personality-related characteristics such as narcissism are known to affect close relationships in both positive and negative ways<sup>6</sup>. These factors may influence motivations behind friendship posts, and it may not be well-captured in our data.

Posting on social media may appear benign, but the desire to gain popularity may influence friendship conflict. The intent with which adolescents use social media has long-term impacts on friendship conflict. However, the mechanisms with which motivations behind posting influences friendship outcomes is not well understood.

### References

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### SHOWING POST

“I post about my friends on social media because it is a good way to show others how good of friends I am with someone.”

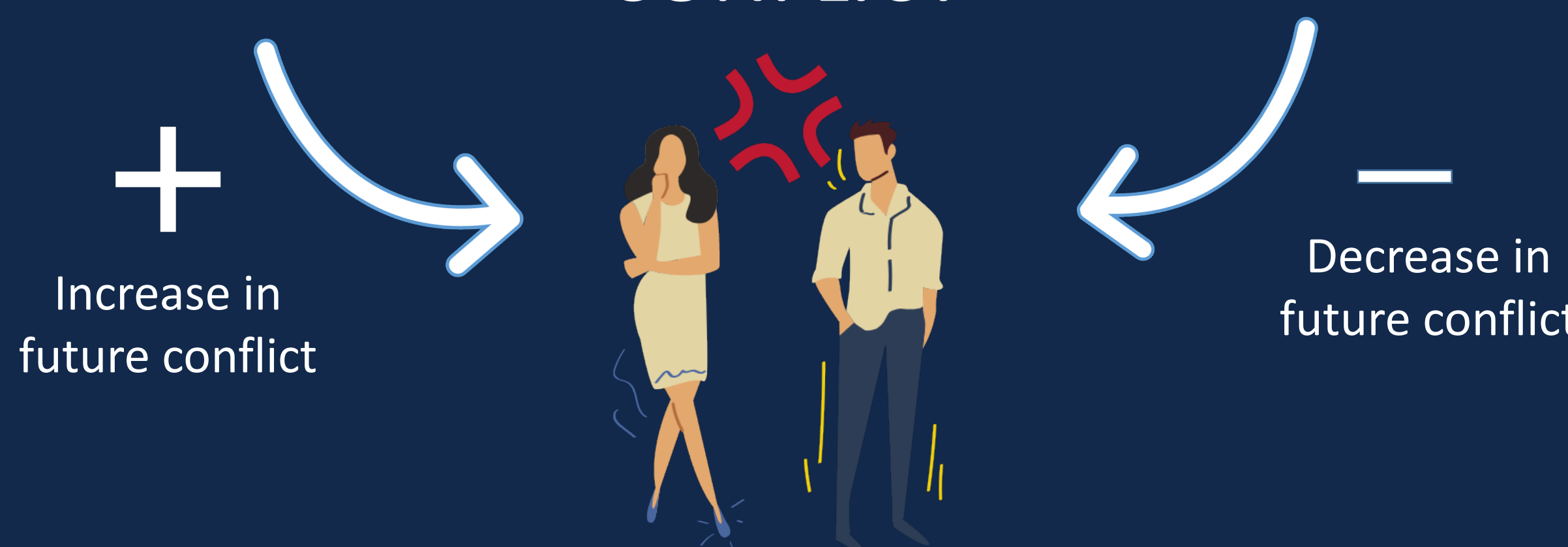


### CARING POST

“I post about my friends on social media because it is a nice thing to do for my friends.”



### FUTURE CONFLICT



Motivations behind posting content on Instagram influences friendship conflict 1 year later. Although showing and caring posts have high overlap, each interacts with friendship conflict differently.