Children and young people need friends. For very young children, friends are partners and playmates with whom time is spent and interesting activities can be pursued (Ginsberg, Gottman, & Parker, 1986). When they grow older, they need friends not only to do things together, but also to obtain help and support from each other (Bernt, 1989). During adolescence, friendship becomes more important, as ‘adolescents believe that they learn more about reality and about themselves from their friends than from anyone else. Indeed, it is within friendship that adolescents feel least as if they are living out a role and most like themselves – the personalities they believe themselves to be’ (Youniss & Smollar, 1985, p. 143).

Friendship networks contribute substantially to adolescents’ social and cognitive developments. Close friends provide social supports and coping assistance against potential stresses that adolescents cannot comfortably discuss with parents (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993). Peer groups provide valuable networks through which adolescents’ personal identities and self-esteem development is achieved. Peer groups also influence adolescents’ social behaviours, attitudes, and academic adjustments (Plata & Trusty, 2005).
A major hindrance to research on adolescent friendship network has been the lack of a reliable method of assessment, in that no psychometrically sound instrument has been developed to measure an adolescent’s friendship networks. Previous measures have been inconsistent across studies, and it is difficult to compare the processes and results between studies. In addition, the existing measurement tools have not been informed by the social capital theory, which offers a powerful framework to conceptualise social networks. Therefore, this study sets out to fill the gap in the literature. The ultimate aim of this study is to develop a psychometrically sound instrument to measure an adolescent’s friendship social capital, which will involve three stages: Item Generation, Scale Development, and Scale Evaluation (Hinkin, 1995). The process and results presented in this paper is the first stage of the study: Item Generation. A combination of deductive and inductive approaches was used, in that the items were generated both from theory and empirical field research.

In the following sections, the author briefly traces the roots of social capital theory and adopts Halpern’s conceptual map of social capital as the theoretical basis of this scale. Based on the Halpern’s conceptual map, the author criticises previous measures of an adolescent’s friendship networks and friendship social capital. After that, she presents the item generation process of this study. At the end of the paper, she discusses the strengths and limitations of the scale and proposes the direction of future research.

**Theoretical Basis of the Scale: Halpern’s Ecological Model of Social Capital**

Social capital theory treats social relationship as a resource, and it offers a powerful tool to conceptualise social networks. The social capital metaphor is that people who do better are somehow better connected. Each person holds a position in a certain network, in that the person is connected to certain others, trusting certain others, obligated to support certain others and dependent on exchange with certain others. Holding a position in a network is an asset in its own right, and that asset is social capital (Burt, 2000).

Social capital theory was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1972), developed and popularised by James Coleman (Coleman, 1988, 1990), and achieved public awareness through the work of Robert Putnam (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Each of the three key authors (Bourdieu, Coleman, & Putnam) offered seminal contributions to the development of the concept. Bourdieu’s early writings during the 1970s and 1980s set the ontological assumptions of the concept. He wrote within a Marxist framework and distinguished three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu considered social capital as a form of resource possessed by individuals. His treatment of social capital emphasised how the privileged individuals maintain their positions by using their connections with other privileged people (Field, 2003).

Coleman pointed out that people from non-elite groups could also benefit from the possession of social capital. His definition of social capital emphasised its function. According to him, social capital consists some aspects of social structures, and facilitates the actions of actors within social structures (Coleman, 1988; Field, 2003).

Drawing on a range of theories and empirical data, Robert Putnam’s (1995, 2000) analyses of social capital in the United States reached wider audience. One of his contributions to the theory of social capital was that he distinguished between two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital is inward looking and echoes the ‘strong ties’ between family members and close friends; while bridging social capital is outward looking and echoes the ‘weak ties’ between acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

Putnam’s (1995, 2000) writings of the declining social capital in the United States lighted a major spark to the literature, and there