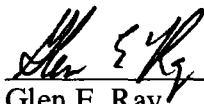


RECIPROCITY AND SIMILARITY IN  
CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

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RECIPROCITY AND SIMILARITY IN  
CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

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DAVID JAMES CLEARY

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## VITA

David James Cleary, son of James Gerard Cleary and Virginia Bernadette (McLoughlin) Cleary, was born on September 11, 1970 in Summit, New Jersey. He attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology in December 1993. In September 1999 he entered Graduate School at Auburn University at Montgomery.

THESIS ABSTRACT

RECIPROCITY AND SIMILARITY IN  
CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

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This study examines children's understanding and perceptions of relationship quality in reciprocal friend and best friend relationships. Second, third, fifth, and sixth grade children evaluated the relationship quality of a reciprocal classroom friend and a reciprocal classroom best friend. Similarity, with regard to question responses between reciprocal friends and similarity between reciprocal best friends were also assessed. Relationship qualities are assessed using the Modified Relationship Quality Questionnaire (Meurling, Ray, and LoBello, 1999). Further, to investigate children's understanding of self in relation to others, a Relationship Knowledge Questionnaire is also used. Both the Relationship Quality and Relationship Knowledge Questionnaires assess seven relationship quality dimensions known to be important in special relationships: caring, help and guidance, companionship, intimacy, conflict and betrayal, conflict resolution, and exclusivity. Results demonstrate that reciprocal best friends are evaluated higher than are reciprocal friends, reciprocal best friends are more similar than are reciprocal friends (for girls only), and older reciprocal best friends are more accurate in their relationship knowledge than are older reciprocal friends. The study replicates and

extends previous research investigating children's understanding of close peer relationships. Implications for future research into children's expectations and understanding of close peer relationships are considered.

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## Reciprocity and Perceptions of Similarity in

### Children's Peer Relationships

Research (e.g., Newcomb, Bukowski and Pattee, 1993; Hartup, 1996)

convincingly demonstrates that children's peer relationships are vital to development.

Peers provide a context in which needed social skills are developed and refined. Peers provide support and security, particularly in unfamiliar situations, and they facilitate the development of self-esteem and personality. Given the importance of peer relationships, much research has focused on children's friendship development. Much is known about how children conceptualize their friends (e.g., Bigelow, 1977; Ray and Cohen, 1996), and the behaviors they engage in together (e.g., Necombe and Bagwell, 1995).

Similarity has been shown to play a role in all aspects of friendship development.

Similarity is an attractor that helps in the formation of new relationships. Increasing similarity or tolerating growing dissimilarity is central to friendship maintenance, and those who cannot maintain common ground often terminate their relationships. Previous studies on friendship similarity have focused on age, gender, race, socioeconomic factors, attitudes and values, personality, and self-concept (see Aboud and Mendelson, 1996 for review). However, little work has been done investigating how children evaluate their special relationships and the similarity between children's evaluations. Thus, the purpose of this study is to: 1) investigate children's evaluation of relationship quality between reciprocal friends and best friends, 2) determine the similarity that exists between children's evaluations of special relationships, and 3) examine the accuracy of children's perceptions of themselves in special relationships. Given that reciprocal relationships are

used, the current study will also extend and attempt to replicate earlier work (e.g., Meurling, et al., 1999) that focused on non-reciprocated relationships.

### The Importance of Peer Relationships

Sullivan's (1953) developmental theory of friendship is one of few theoretical models that attach any significance to friendship relations during childhood. He proposed that the need for interpersonal intimacy with a member of the same sex develops and facilitates the formation of close friendships. Through this relationship, the child develops an increased sensitivity to others, and this sensitivity can eventually transcend the relationship through the development of an altruistic perspective (Sullivan, 1953). For Sullivan, the critical issue was to identify the mechanism by which the specific sensitivity generated within a friendship becomes a more general concern for the welfare of others. Sullivan (1953) uses the phrase "sense of humanity" to suggest that a friend represents one instance of humanity for the child. As youngsters communicate openly with peers, they realize qualities similar to their friends (Sullivan, 1953). Consequently, the child begins to appreciate the common humanity of people, and compassion for his or her fellows is extended not only to friends but those unknown to him or her as well.

The moral developmental theory proposed by Piaget (1932) postulated that a child's peers have a more positive influence on moral development than do parents (Berndt, 1996). Piaget believed that parents' power and authority were a negative influence on children's moral development because obedience often occurs without the child's understanding of the reasons for obedience other than the avoidance of punishment (Berndt, 1996). Piaget outlined three characteristics of peer relationships:

cooperation, mutual respect, and reciprocity norms. Cooperation refers to interactions among peers. Mutual respect is the attitude that promotes cooperation, and reciprocity norms are the principles that children accept as legitimate (Berndt, 1996). According to Piaget, children's peer relationship quality is based on seeing each other as equals. Consequently, he viewed the reciprocity norms as particularly important (Berndt, 1996).

More recent research (e.g., Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman, 1996) documents that friends provide certain resources that cannot be provided as well by adults. These functions include providing opportunities for learning social skills, developing social comparisons, and fostering a sense of group belonging (Kerns, 1996). These skills include the ability to communicate successfully, and the ability to imagine oneself in another person's role (Buhrmester, 1996). Relationships with peers contribute to the learning of many other social skills, including the resolution of conflict (Parker and Asher, 1993). Children learn from interactions with peers how to survive among equals in a wide range of social situations (Kerns, 1996). Relationships with peers also provide a context in which children can compare themselves to others (Buhrmester, 1996). Social comparison is necessary for children to develop a valid sense of identity. Children compare themselves with their peers to find their strengths and weaknesses (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995). Furthermore, beginning in early childhood, children have a strong need for a sense of belonging, which can be fulfilled only by friendships with their peers (Buhrmester, 1996). Because children's friendships serve these functions and others, a child's friendships have an enduring impact on social adjustment throughout life.

Gender differences in children's friendships and age related differences in children's understanding of these relationships, have been studied extensively (e.g.,

Aboud and Mendelson, 1996; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Haselager, Hartup, van Lieshout, and Riksen-Walraven, 1998; Howes, Hamilton, and Philipson, 1998; Ray and Cohen, 1996). Research suggests that girls perceive friendships as more supportive and as more intimate than do boys (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). According to prevailing sex role stereotypes, girls respond more emotionally to external events than do boys (Howes, et al. 1998). Consequently, girls are expected to be more empathic than boys (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). Most theorists agree with this characterization, whether they stress biological, cultural, or social structural determinants of empathy (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Howes, et al. 1998).

Research on children's conceptualization of friendships demonstrates developmental change. For example, younger children tend to focus more on concrete aspects of interaction (e.g., toys) whereas young adolescents emphasize the importance of more abstract dimensions, such as intimacy and trust (Buhrmester, 1996). Buhrmester (1996) mentions that older children show greater awareness of the psychological aspects of friendship, and of the rules of reciprocity that govern interaction. These findings are consistent with a study by Ray and Cohen (1996), which found that children's friendship expectations change as they get older. Specifically, younger children described their friends in terms of observable characteristics, such as behaviors (e.g., sharing) and physical attributes (e.g., height and weight). Conversely, older children tended to describe their friends on the basis of personality characteristics, such as being trustworthy (Ray and Cohen, 1996).

Research has shown that children differentiate between types of relationships as they get older (Kerns, 1996). According to Ray and Cohen (1996), preschool children

differentiate between best friends, acquaintances, and enemies, as well as adolescents and adults. However, younger children have more difficulty making finer distinctions between friends and best friends (Ray and Cohen, 1996). In a study by Hayes, Gershman, and Bolin (1980), there were significant descriptive differences among preschoolers when their responses were directed toward a reciprocal friend versus a friend in whom the nomination was not reciprocated. Reciprocated friends described each other in terms of common activities and appraisals as reasons for liking each other (Lea and Duck, 1982). Studying similarity among individuals may be useful in exploring the extent to which similarity is a central variable in the selection of friends (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Lea and Duck, 1982).

#### The Role of Similarity in Peer Relationships

The similarity-attraction hypothesis postulates that attraction toward others is based on the degree of perceived similarity with regard to attitudes and behaviors (Drigotas, 1993). The similarity hypothesis predicts that we seek out similarities in others (Drigotas, 1993). Drigotas (1993) states that we seek consistency (similarity) and not inconsistency (dissimilarity) when interacting with others. According to this view, the effect automatically occurs for every evaluation and judgment of others (Drigotas, 1993). When others exhibit characteristics that are similar to the individual, it is perceived as attractive and provides the initial basis for interaction (Aboud and Mendelson, 1996). Consequently, individuals may choose to rely primarily or exclusively on similarities when forming relationships.



### Behavioral Similarity

Friends' behaviors are highly correlated, especially antisocial behavior (Haselager, et al., 1998). Hartup (1996) uses the phrase "reputational salience" to describe attributes that determine a child's social reputation. Hartup (1996) found that overt attributes, especially behaviors, had a greater impact on a young child's reputation than less observable ones. For instance, fighting is more consistently related to reputation than intelligence or shyness (Hartup, 1996). With regard to behaviors, Hartup (1996) states that girls are more similar to each other than are boys for both pro-social and anti-social behaviors.

In order to understand the effects of behavioral similarity on friendship, it is important to examine how these similarities differ in their manifestations (Kupersmidt, DeRosier, and Patterson, 1995). In a study of conformity and misconduct, Hoving, Hamm, and Galvin (1969) found that increasing conformity with age (between seven and thirteen years of age) was conditioned by the ambiguity of the task. They found decreasing conformity to group judgment on unambiguous tasks, and suggest that eighth-grade children conform under ambiguous circumstances but not when matters are factually clear, while the opposite is true for younger children (Hoving, et al. 1969). Furthermore, females are more resistive to subscribing to peer-pressured misconduct than are males. Piaget (1954) postulates that children become increasingly more rule conscious until twelve years of age, as measured by their growing conformity. Subsequently, children internalize and individualize rules and show less conformity (Piaget, 1954). Evidence by Kohlberg (1984) suggests that knowledge of rules regarding right and wrong conduct is well established by age seven and is relatively stable

afterward, which would suggest an invariant wrongness judgment over the different grades.

### Attitude and Value Similarity

Friendships provide validation for an individual's attitudes and values (Duck, 1973). In addition to behaviors, friendships provide a context in which similar attitudes and values are developed. Indeed, similarities in attitudes and values between friends increase over time (Aboud and Mendelson, 1996).

Another issue concerning the salience of attitudinal similarity is whether the effect originates from consensual validation (Duck, 1973). The tendency to assume that most other people are similar to oneself is engendered by the need to find similarity in others, especially when there are social incentives (Aboud and Mendelson, 1996). Consistent with the looking glass self model, the appraisals of others predominate an individual's sense of self-worth (Harter, Waters, and Whitesell, 1998). Interestingly, research shows that self-perceptions are more closely aligned with perceived opinions than with actual opinions (Harter, et. al, 1998). Duck (1973) states that friends will become more alike as the relationship progresses, and that similarity originates and sustains friendship. Thus, similarity is an antecedent for relationships as well as an outcome in the sense that we are attracted to those who are similar to us, and given that friends spend a great deal of time together sharing activities, they become more similar over time. Developing relationships may not be characterized by unvarying similarities but by progressive changes in interests which provide broadened scope for consensual validation (Duck, 1973). For instance, once a friend's attitudes on particular issues are known, it is of considerable value to find out how these attitudes are structured and

interrelated. This deeper knowledge of another individual may be necessary for further development of the relationship (Duck, 1973).

### Gender and Age Similarity

There are distinct behavioral play styles among children of the same sex. Boys tend to play in large groups and engage in rough and tumble, aggressive play, whereas girls tend to engage in more dramatic play in smaller groups. As children's groups become segregated by gender, boys' and girls' groups also take on a different character (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). Boys tend to view the group as a collective entity, emphasizing loyalty and solidarity. Conversely, girls tend to view the group as a network of intimate two person friendships (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). This tendency for boys to form large groups and girls to form dyads may reflect differences in boys' needs for autonomy and girls' needs for intimacy and may reflect general play style preference (Maccoby, 1990). These gender specific friendship patterns may be related to early learning experiences, such as learning to play different games and sports. Boys' games (e.g., football or hockey) are more likely to be played in large groups, where they learn to operate within rules and to get along with others they may not necessarily like. Girls' games (e.g., playing house) are likely to involve close contact with one or two other friends, where they develop skills for emotional support and expressiveness. Whether sex-typed games and sports are viewed as causing the differences or as reflections of already existing differences, it is clear that boys and girls grow up with different models of social relations. Each sex learns something of importance, but at the same time each sex is deprived of opportunities to learn other important skills.

### Relationship Quality

Recently, Hartup (1996) has called for work in the area of relationship quality to better understand how friendships are tied to developmental outcomes. Relationship quality has been measured by examining the dimensions, such as intimacy and caring, that children use to interpret friendships (e.g., Berndt and Perry, 1986; Kurdek and Krile, 1982; Hartup, 1996; Ladd and Emerson, 1984; Parker & Asher, 1993). For example, the Friendship Qualities Scale developed by Bukowski et al. (1994) evaluates children's relationships with their best friends and consists of five dimensions of friendship quality considered integral to the formation and maintenance of close relationships. The companionship dimension focuses on the amount of time children interact with each other. The conflict dimension deals with disagreements and includes any fights or quarrels. Conflict may be a great determinant in the maintenance and termination of a friendship. Children who resolve conflicts maintain their relationships, while those children who do not resolve conflicts terminate their relationships. Help is also an important facet in friendship and is divided into two subcategories. First, Aid refers to mutual help and assistance and second, Protection from Victimization refers to help of a friend. Help is an essential element in a relationship because it provides a sense of security. Children need to have a sense of trust in a friendship so that the friend may be relied upon in problem situations. Also, in the event of conflict there should be trust between friends so that the relationship will remain strong and intact. Lastly, closeness deals with the positive feelings friends have for each other.

Bukowski et al. (1994) reported that Security, Companionship, Help, and Closeness were the most important dimensions used in describing friendships. Further,

reciprocal friendships were evaluated in more positive terms than were unreciprocated friends and stable friendships (6 months duration or more) were described in more positive terms than unstable friendships on all but the conflict dimension. According to Ladd and Emerson (1984), reciprocal friends develop shared knowledge by observing each other in shared activities. Regardless of grade level, reciprocal friends were more able to accurately and reciprocally predict each other's characteristics.

Parker and Asher (1993) examined the quality of friendship between accepted and rejected children by assessing their evaluations of best friends. These friendship features were evaluated using a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient and included companionship and recreation (.75), help and guidance (.90), validation and caring (.90), intimate exchange (.86), conflict and betrayal (.84), and conflict resolution (.84).

Validation and caring assessed the amount of caring and support in friendships. Conflict and betrayal assessed the extent to which the relationship is defined by disagreement and mistrust. Companionship and recreation measured the time children spend with each other both in and out of the school. Help and guidance assessed the amount of time and effort a child will give to help a friend with tasks. Intimate exchange assessed sharing with one another regarding personal experiences and feelings, and conflict resolution gauged the difficulty children experience resolving their conflicts (Meurling, et al. 1999).

Parker and Asher (1993) state that children accepted by their peers describe their friendships more positively than those who are not well accepted. Moreover, girls describe their relationships more positively than do boys. Boys reported fewer intimate exchanges, received less help and guidance from friends, had more problems resolving conflicts, and were less caring towards one another than were girls. However, boys and

girls were similar on the companionship, recreation, and conflict/betrayal dimensions. According to Furman and Buhrmester (1985), girls rely more on their best friends than boys do. Consequently, girls report more intimacy, affection, and enhancement of self-worth in their best friendships than boys do (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985).

The qualitative characteristics of children's peer relationships have been successfully measured using dimensional assessments (e.g., Meurling, et al., 1999). The reasons for the success of the different dimensional assessments are because the dimensions did not arise from theory but rather were constructed from reviews of past literature (e.g., Furman, 1996). Furman (1996) states that devising measures from a review of past literature instead of theory provides a more comprehensive structure in which the phenomena of friendship can be observed. Meurling, et al. (1999) point out that most studies consider up to six features, but only five are usually displayed (e.g., Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Parker & Asher, 1993; Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993). Furthermore, most of the dimensional assessments have qualities that are considered to be either positive or negative (Meurling, et al., 1999). Relationships are defined by a combination of these qualities, which helps organize relationships into a structured framework that often varies with both age and gender. Moreover, some of these qualitative combinations may be palpable only with best friends and not with friends or acquaintances (Meurling, et al., 1999). According to Meurling, et al. (1999), these qualities may not only be different from group to group but also may differ in amount or frequency.

### Similarity and Relationship Quality

Although friendship comes in many varied forms (e.g., close, casual), friendship quality is directly related to friendship similarity (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995). According to Aboud and Mendelson (1996), similarity is rewarding in two ways. First, similarity provides consensual validation of one's attitudes and beliefs by those who share similar views. Second, participating in shared activities with others having similar interests provides a sense of belonging by those with interests in similar activities. Concepts such as attitudes and values seem to be variations of the same central theme. The major distinction that one might make among these terms is the level of similarity that is conveyed by them. Given that similarity is a major determinant of attraction, it becomes essential to consider the impact of various similarities on friendship quality (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995). If the underlying cause of attraction in friendship is similarity, then its positive effects should be manifested in marked changes in friendship quality.

Friends provide security, give standards for self-measurement, and help confirm one's own developing sense of competence and ability (Hartup, 1996). Acceptance and companionship are provided by friendship, and these relationships have enormous value for children (Hartup, 1996; Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995). If there is a single predictive principle beyond physical proximity, it is that children are attracted to those who are similar to themselves or who they perceive to be similar (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1996). For example, friends tend to be the same age, sex, physical size and level of intelligence (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) state that children who become and remain friends are likely to have similar activity styles, interests, and values.

By forming quality friendships through shared similarities in social interactions, children display a new mastery over their environment. Earlier in life, young children come to exert control over inanimate objects, which can be made to respond in predictable ways (e.g., bouncing a ball), and over parents, who are eager to reward the child with encouraging responses. But a peer is much less predictable than an inanimate object, and much less obliging than a parent. Consequently, lack of experience in forming quality friendships is more difficult for young children because they require both similarities and cooperation in social interactions (Berndt, 1996). Through increased interaction, children develop the skills necessary to gain mastery in their relationships with others. These similarities engender friendship because they encourage interaction and promote social comparison (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995). Buhrmester (1996) states that children's friendships promote the discovery of shared attitudes. The discovery that one is similar to another child demonstrates that one is not alone in one's tastes or views (Buhrmester, 1996). In such ways, the recognition of similarities may contribute to the growth of self-acceptance.

### Reciprocity in Relationships

Quality friendships are psychologically important to an individual's sense of identity and well being (Buhrmester, 1996). Indeed, qualitative differences in children's friendships may have developmental implications (Furman, 1996; Hartup, 1996; Berndt, 1996). For instance, when a child receives reciprocal validation of competence from a friend, it facilitates social skills that will continue to develop with maturation. The importance of friendship quality may reflect, in part, the difficulty some children have in achieving rewarding and stable relationships (Buhrmester, 1996). Hartup (1996) states



that knowing an adolescent has friends denotes one thing, but the identity of his or her friends reveals much more. Individuals are expected to select friends compatible with their own values and interests as a means of developing a sense of identity (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995).

Friendship must be built at least in part on similarity, but most friendships also rely on reciprocity, or a fit between two people in which each brings something distinctive to the relationship and which results in each learning from the other (Lea and Duck, 1982). As children grow older, they become more concerned with differentiating between and identifying friends and best friends. An important criterion of friendship is the sharing of personal information and feelings that are not known to other people (Lea and Duck, 1982). Because close friends know a great deal about each other, especially their fears and failings as well as their strengths, friendships can give children the opportunity to reciprocate feelings to another person openly without concern of rejection (Lea and Duck, 1982). The reciprocity of personal facts and feelings also relates to other obligations of friendship. For instance, being friends involves trust and knowing that information about the other person will not be shared with others.

Relationships are more satisfying and stable when the rewards for each partner are perceived to be more or less equal (Harter, et al., 1998). Perception of giving more support than one receives leads to feelings of unfairness and resentment, whereas the feeling of receiving more support than one gives leads to feelings of guilt and shame. In personal relationships such as friendships, individuals are supposed to accept the other person, to be concerned with the well being of the other, and to take care of the other without extrinsic rewards (Ray and Cohen, 1996). Although the perception of reciprocity

may be important in relationships, the importance attached to reciprocity varies considerably between individuals (Harter, et al., 1998). The degree of perceived reciprocity in relationship quality should be greater with best friends than with friends (Hartup, 1996). A theoretical implication to a better understanding of the role of perceived reciprocity in relationship quality is that the type of relationship (best friend vs. friend) is important when examining the value attached to reciprocity (Meurling, et al., 1999). Harter, et al., (1998) found that when comparing relationship types, the association between perceived reciprocity and perceived relationship quality appears to be strongest in best friendships.

### The Present Study

The importance of children's friendships to social development has been studied extensively (see Newcomb, and Bagwell , 1995 for meta-analysis). While previous work has considered children's expectations, understanding, and support structures of friends, less work has been directed toward children's understanding of the similarities and quality of different types of peer relationships. Thus, the present study investigates children's evaluations of relationship quality with reciprocal friends and best friends.

First, the current study will extend previous work (e.g., Meurling, et al., 1999) documenting that children evaluate perceived best friends more favorably than perceived friends on dimensions of relationship quality. By using reciprocated friend and best friend relationships, the current study will attempt to replicate work on children's understanding of special relationships. Specifically, children should evaluate reciprocal best friends more favorably than reciprocal friends on the various relationship quality dimensions.

Second, the current study predicts a higher degree of reciprocity (response similarity between dyads) in terms of relationship quality, between reciprocated best friends than between reciprocated friends. Third, with regard to relationship quality reciprocity, it is predicted that older children's relationships will be higher than will relationships of younger children. Further, because the intimacy that characterizes girls' relationships, the fourth hypothesis predicts that girls will have more reciprocity in their relationships than will boys.

Given research (e.g., Barenboim, 1981; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985; Kurdek and Krile, 1982; Ladd and Emerson, 1984; Ray and Cohen, 1996) documenting the intimacy, understanding, and personal knowledge that characterize best friend relationships, the fifth hypothesis states that reciprocated best friends will be more accurate in their relationship knowledge compared to reciprocated friends. That is, best friends should make more precise evaluations about their close relationship (e.g., understanding self with others) than do friends. Further, because girls tend to be more "relationship-oriented" than boys, the sixth hypothesis predicts that girl's will be higher on relationship knowledge than will boys. Furthermore, research (e.g., Berndt and Perry, 1986; Furman and Bierman, 1983; Meurling, et al. 1999; Patterson, et al. 1990) on age-related changes in children's relationship understanding leads to the final prediction that older children should be more sophisticated in their evaluations of special relationships than younger children. Thus, the seventh hypothesis predicts that older children will be more accurate in their relationship knowledge than younger children.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 106 boys (50 second-third graders, 56 fifth-sixth graders) and 140 girls (70 second-third graders, 70 fifth-sixth graders). To maximize grade effects, grade levels were combined to form two age groups, a younger group (grades 2-3; mean age = 8.7; n = 143) and an older group (grades 5-6; mean age = 11.7; n = 103). All participating children attended a public school in Montgomery, Alabama. All children returned written parental consent forms as well as gave their own written consent (see Appendix A). All children were told that they did not have to participate if they did not want to and could stop at any time.

### Design

The design employed for this study is made up of two between-participants factors: age and gender and two within-participants factors: relationship type and relationship dimension. Thus, children's evaluation of the relationship quality, response similarity, and accuracy of relationship knowledge are assessed with a series of 2 (Age: 2-3; 5-6) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Relationship type: best friend, friend) x 7 (Dimensions: Caring, Conflict Resolution, Betrayal, Help and Guidance, Companionship, Intimacy, and Exclusivity) mixed factorial ANOVA's.

### Measures

Children completed a total of five questionnaires. One questionnaire was used to identify classroom friends and classroom best friends, two questionnaires assessed perceived relationship quality about a particular peer (one for friend, one for best friend), and two questionnaires assess relationship knowledge (one for friend and one for best

friend). From these original questions, additional measures of reciprocity were constructed assessing reciprocal relationships (friend, best friend), reciprocated friendship qualities (friend, best friend), and accuracy of relationship knowledge (friend, best friend).

Relationship Nominations Questionnaire. Children identified classroom friends and classroom best friends using a class roster containing the names of all their classmates. Children are instructed to circle the names of all their friends and are instructed to place an "X" beside their best friend's name (e.g., Meurling, et al., 1999; Ray, et al., 1995). Reciprocal friends and best friends are identified using reciprocated friendship nominations (i.e., mutually nominated each other) following Ray, et al., (1995). If more than one reciprocal friend and more than one reciprocal best friend was identified, a single friend name and a single best friend name was randomly selected for forming a dyad.

Relationship Quality Questionnaires. Children's understanding of relationship quality is assessed by employing a modified version of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Meurling, et al., 1999) originally developed by Parker & Asher (1993) (see Appendix B). The modified Friendship Quality Questionnaire measures seven qualitative features: a) companionship and recreation, b) conflict and betrayal, c) conflict resolution, d) help and guidance, e) intimate exchange, f) validation and caring, and g) exclusivity (see Appendix D for cronbach alpha reliability coefficients and Appendix E for dimensions). There were a total of twenty-one items on the questionnaire and each relationship quality dimension was represented by three questions. Children's responses

are assessed using a Likert type format ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 4 (Very true). Thus, each relationship quality dimension had total scores ranging from zero to twelve.

Relationship Knowledge Questionnaires. To further evaluate children's understanding of close relationships, relationship knowledge was examined by using the same Friendship Quality Questionnaire as outlined above with one addition: Children were asked to predict how their reciprocal friends and reciprocal best friends will describe them (see Appendix C). There were a total of twenty-one items on the questionnaire and each relationship quality dimension was represented by three questions. Children's responses are assessed using a Likert type format ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 4 (Very true). Thus, each relationship quality dimension had total scores ranging from zero to twelve.

#### Procedure

Children were individually interviewed in a quiet area outside his or her classroom on two separate occasions. The first interview lasted approximately ten minutes and was used to assess children's reciprocal relationships. During this first interview, children completed the relationship nomination questionnaire and the peer acceptance questionnaire. Once reciprocated friend and best friend dyads were identified, children were interviewed again. During the second interview, children completed the two relationship quality questionnaires (friend, best friend), and the two relationship knowledge questionnaires (friend, best friend). Order of presentation of the four relationship questionnaires was counter-balanced to control for possible sequence and practice effects. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the child was thanked for

his or her participation and asked whether he or she had any questions regarding the project. The child was then escorted back to his or her classroom by the experimenter.

## Results

Analyses are presented in three sections. Section I is a replication of Meurling, et al. (1999), consisting of analyses on measures of reciprocal relationship quality. Section II examines the similarity between reciprocal friend's evaluation of relationship quality and the similarity between reciprocal best friend's evaluation of relationship quality. Section III examines children's understanding of themselves in a reciprocal relationship and the accuracy of their understanding when compared to the actual responses of a reciprocal friend and reciprocal best friend. Of the 246 children originally interviewed, 54 are identified as having both a reciprocal classroom friend and a reciprocal classroom best friend, and thus serve as participants in all the following analyses. For all analyses, Grade and Gender are between participant variables and Relationship Type and Quality Dimension are repeated measures. Thus, a series of 2 (grade) x 2 (gender) x 2 (relationship type) x 7 (quality dimensions) mixed factorial ANOVA's were conducted. Follow-up tests were conducted using t-tests to examine statistically significant findings. A Bonferroni alpha correction was employed (.05/number of comparisons) to control for the possibility of alpha inflation.

### I. Reciprocal Friend and Best Friend Relationship Dimensions

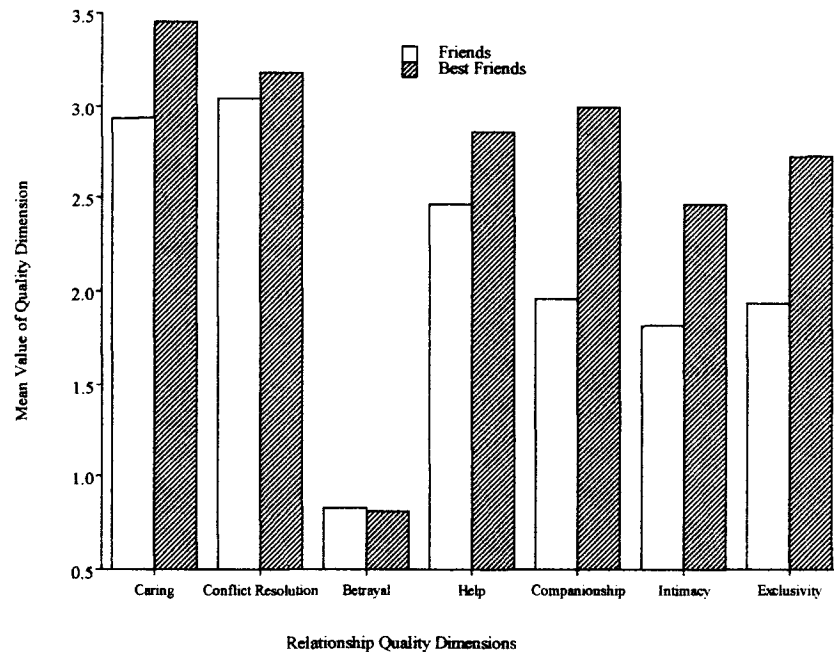
Analysis for hypothesis one, predicting that reciprocal best friends will be evaluated higher than will reciprocal friends on the various relationship quality dimensions, reveals a significant Dimension x Relationship Type interaction,  $F(6, 300) = 7.01, p < .001$ . As shown in Figure 1, children evaluate best friends significantly higher than friends on all relationship quality dimensions except Helping, Betrayal, and Conflict



Resolution. For this analysis, the dependent variable consisted of the seven relationship quality dimensions.

Within friends, Caring and Conflict Resolution did not differ and are evaluated higher than Betrayal, Helping, Companionship, Intimacy, and Exclusivity. Further, Helping is evaluated higher than Intimacy and is equal to Companionship and Exclusivity, which do not differ. Thus for friends, the dimensions of Caring and Conflict Resolution are evaluated as most important followed by Helping and Companionship, then Exclusivity and Intimacy, and finally Betrayal. It should be noted that Betrayal is expected to be evaluated the lowest because a lower evaluation indicates less betrayal and higher relationship quality.

Within best friends, Caring is evaluated higher than all other dimensions except Conflict Resolution. Conflict Resolution is evaluated higher than Intimacy and Betrayal, but is equal to Helping, Companionship, and Exclusivity, which did not differ. Although Helping and Companionship do not differ, they are higher than Intimacy, while Exclusivity and Intimacy do not differ. Lastly, Betrayal is evaluated lower than all other dimensions. Thus, for best friends, Caring and Conflict Resolution are evaluated as the most important dimensions followed closely by Helping and Companionship, then Exclusivity and Intimacy, and lastly Betrayal. Again, it should be noted that Betrayal is expected to be the lowest given the wording of the questions pertaining to this dimension (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations).



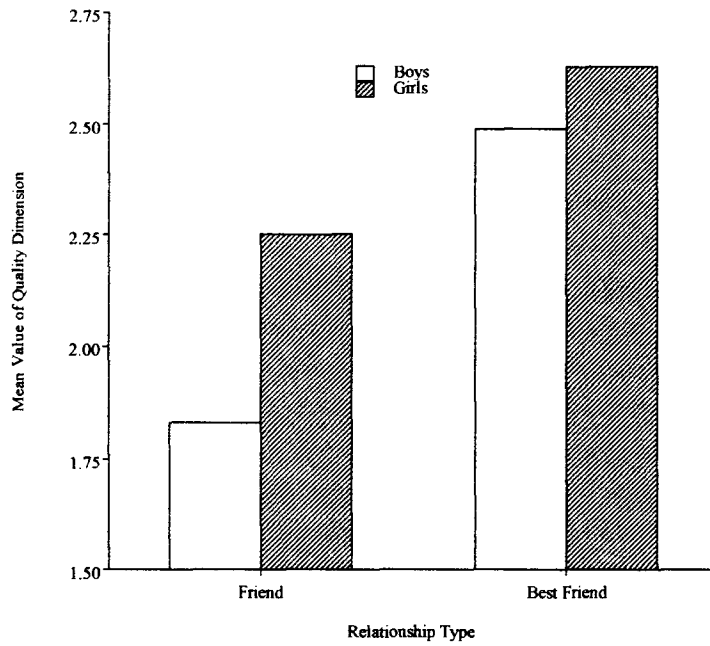
**Figure 1:** Relationship Quality: Relationship Type x Dimension Interaction.

**Table 1.** Reciprocal friend and best friend quality dimensions: Relationship Type x Dimension interaction.

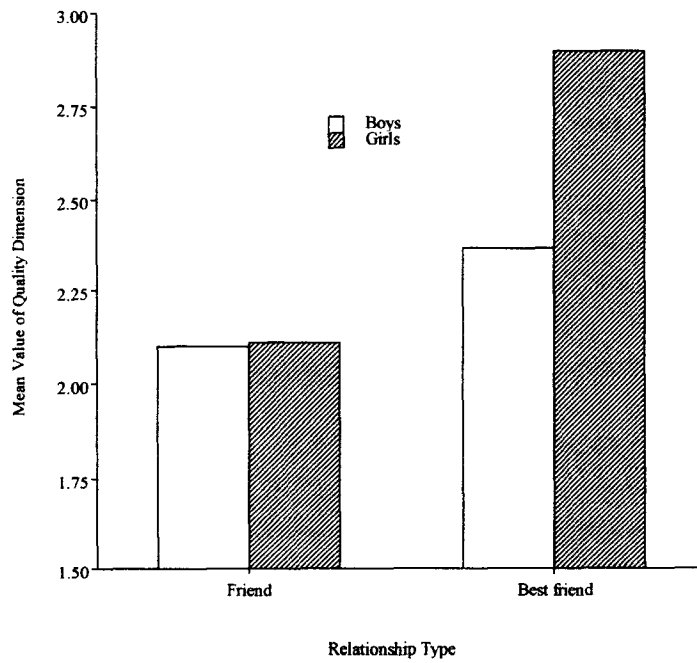
Quality Dimension	Friend	Best Friend
Caring	2.93 (0.97)	3.45 (0.58)
Conflict resolution	3.04 (1.05)	3.18 (0.90)
Betrayal	0.83 (0.89)	0.81 (0.89)
Help/Guidance	2.46 (1.16)	2.86 (1.00)
Companionship	1.96 (1.04)	2.99 (0.96)
Intimacy	1.81 (1.07)	2.46 (1.00)
Exclusivity	1.93 (1.12)	2.72 (1.05)

Taken together, both reciprocal friends and reciprocal best friends evaluate Caring as the most important relationship quality dimension and evaluate Betrayal the lowest. Differences between friends and best friends emerge on the remaining five relationship quality dimensions. Specifically, friends evaluate Conflict Resolution as more important than Helping, Betrayal, Companionship, Intimacy, and Exclusivity whereas best friends evaluate Conflict Resolution equal to Helping, Companionship, and Exclusivity, but higher than Intimacy and Betrayal. Thus, there is agreement between friends and best friends over which two qualities are considered most important in a high quality relationship, but disagreement over the remaining relationship qualities in relation to the two most important qualities and their level of importance.

Analysis also reveals a significant Gender x Grade x Relationship Type interaction,  $F(1, 50) = 4.29, p < .05$ . For ease of interpretation, this three-way interaction is shown in Figures 2 and 3 as two 2-way interactions: one for each grade level. Both boys and girls evaluate their best friends significantly higher compared to their friends. Further, girls evaluate their best friends significantly higher than do boys, while no gender differences emerge for friends (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations).



**Figure 2: Relationship Quality: Grades 2-3: Gender x Relationship Type Interaction**



**Figure 3: Relationship Quality: Grades 5-6: Gender x Relationship Type Interaction.**

**Table 2.** Reciprocal friend and best friend quality dimensions: Gender x Grade x Relationship Type

Relationship Type	Boys	Girls	Grades 2-3	Grades 5-6
Friend	2.06 (0.56)	2.25 (0.68)	2.24 (0.70)	2.15 (0.60)
Best Friend	2.43 (0.35)	2.77 (0.63)	2.64 (0.62)	2.69 (0.54)

Grades	Boys	Girls
2-3	2.21 (0.41)	2.49 (0.65)
5-6	2.26 (0.34)	2.54 (0.54)

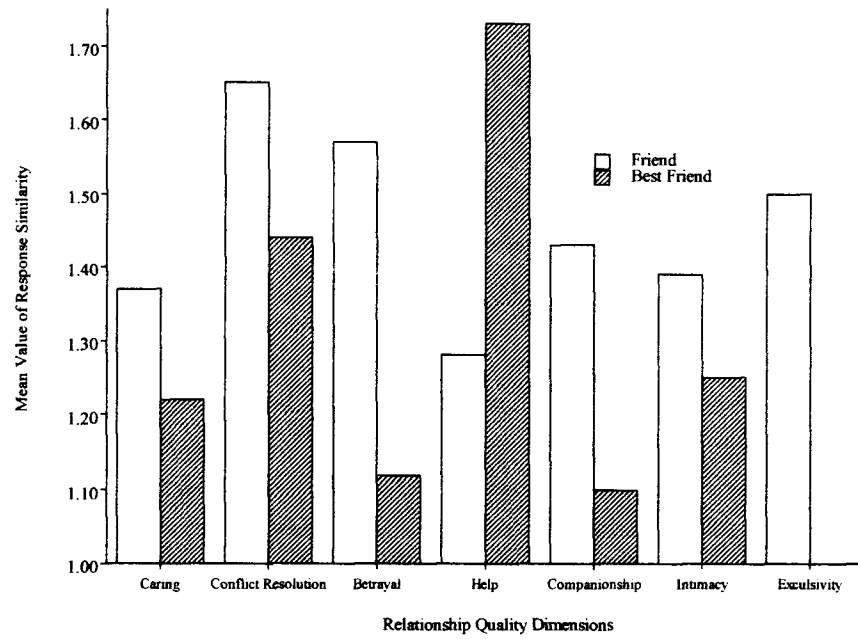
## II. Reciprocal Friend and Best Friend Similarity Analyses

The following analyses pertain to hypotheses about relationship similarity.

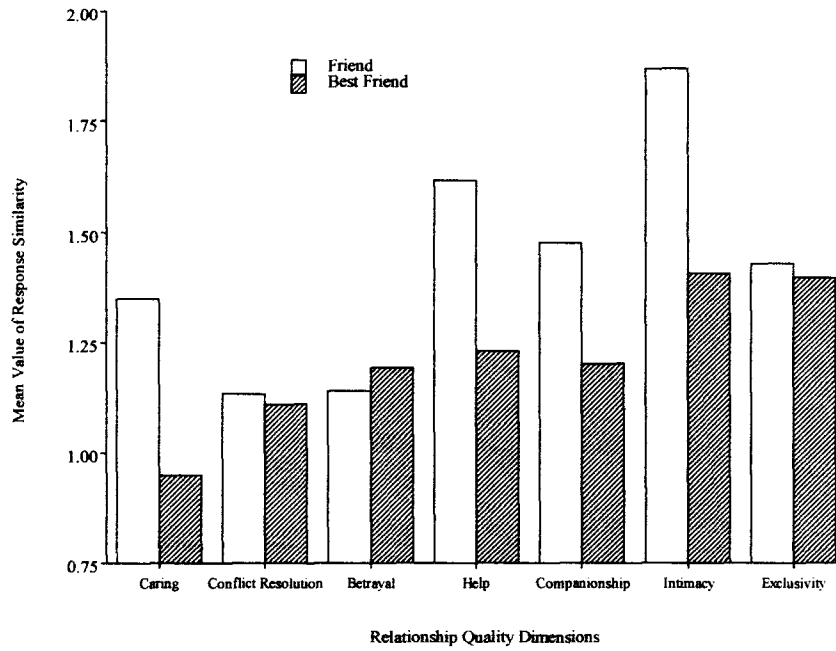
Hypothesis two predicts best friends would be more similar than friends, hypothesis three predicts older children's relationships would be more similar than younger children's relationships, and hypothesis four predicts girls' relationships would be more similar than boys' relationships. For these analyses, the dependent variables (one for friends and one for best friends) are absolute difference scores between reciprocal dyads. Thus the smaller the score, the greater the similarity.

Analysis reveals a significant Gender x Relationship Type x Dimension interaction,  $F(6, 612) = 2.82, p < .05$ . For purposes of interpretation, this three-way interaction is shown in Figures 4 and 5 as two-way interactions: one for each gender. Girl best friends are more similar in their responses across the various quality dimensions compared to girl friends, while no relationship differences emerge for boys. Significant gender differences emerge on the dimension of Conflict Resolution, where girls are significantly more similar than are boys. For girls, a higher degree of similarity emerges

on the dimension of Caring, which is higher than the dimensions of Intimacy and Exclusivity, which do not differ. Further, for girls, Conflict Resolution and Betrayal do not differ, but are higher in similarity than Intimacy. No differences across the various relationship quality dimensions emerge for boys. Best friends are more similar on the dimensions of Companionship and Intimacy compared to friends. Within best friends, children are most similar on the dimension of Caring, in which responses are more similar than Helping and Intimacy, which do not differ. Within friends, responses are significantly more similar on the Caring dimension than the Intimacy dimension. In sum, more similarity emerges for girls' relationships than boys' relationships, with girl best friends being more similar than girl friends. Further, girls' relationships are more similar on the Conflict Resolution dimension compared to Boys' relationships. Lastly, best friends are more similar than friends, but only on the dimensions of Companionship and Intimacy (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations).



**Figure 4: Response Similarity: Boys: Relationship Type x Dimension Interaction.**



**Figure 5: Response Similarity: Girls: Relationship Type x Dimension Interaction.**

**Table 3.** Reciprocal friend and best friend quality dimensions: Gender x Relationship Type x Dimension

Quality Dimension	Boys	Girls	Friend	Best Friend
Caring	1.28 (1.02)	1.01 (0.91)	1.36 (0.88)	1.04 (0.98)
Conflict resolution	1.47 (0.90)	1.11 (0.83)	1.35 (0.93)	1.22 (0.84)
Betrayal	1.34 (0.89)	1.14 (0.99)	1.33 (1.06)	1.17 (0.89)
Help/Guidance	1.55 (1.10)	1.36 (0.94)	1.47 (0.98)	1.40 (1.02)
Companionship	1.22 (0.79)	1.28 (0.74)	1.46 (0.64)	1.16 (0.79)
Intimacy	1.31 (0.83)	1.58 (0.81)	1.67 (0.77)	1.36 (0.84)
Exclusivity	1.20 (0.87)	1.42 (0.87)	1.46 (0.80)	1.27 (0.90)

Relationship Type	Boys	Girls
Friend	1.43 (0.51)	1.48 (0.52)
Best Friend	1.32 (0.64)	1.20 (0.49)

Analysis also reveals a significant Grade x Dimension interaction,  $F(6, 612) = 2.12, p < .05$ . As shown in Figure 6, older children are more similar on the relationship quality dimension of Helping compared to younger children. Although no differences emerge for older children, younger children are significantly more similar on the Caring dimension compared to the Helping and Intimacy dimensions, which do not differ (see Table 4 for means and standard deviations).



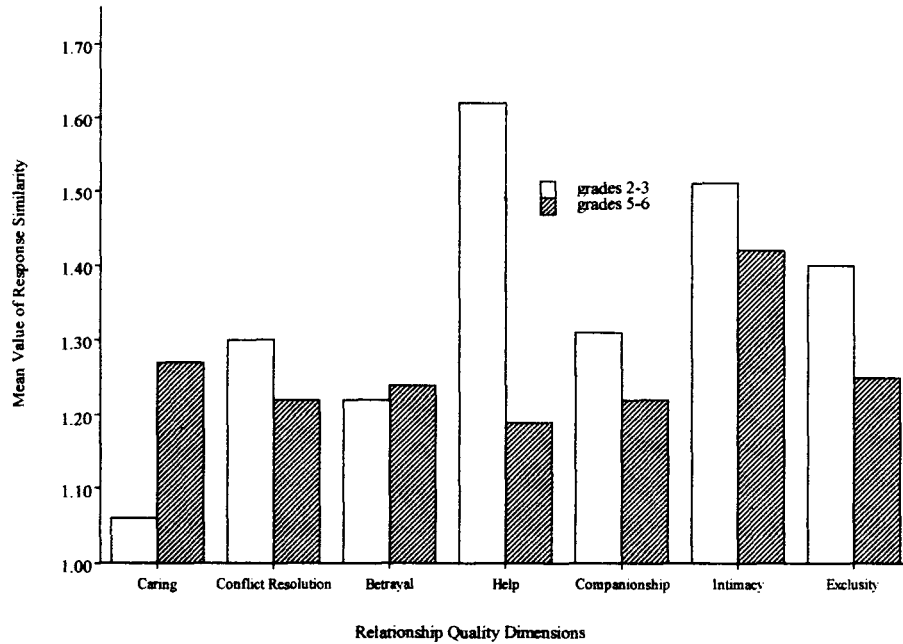


Figure 6: Response Similarity: Grade x Dimension Interaction.

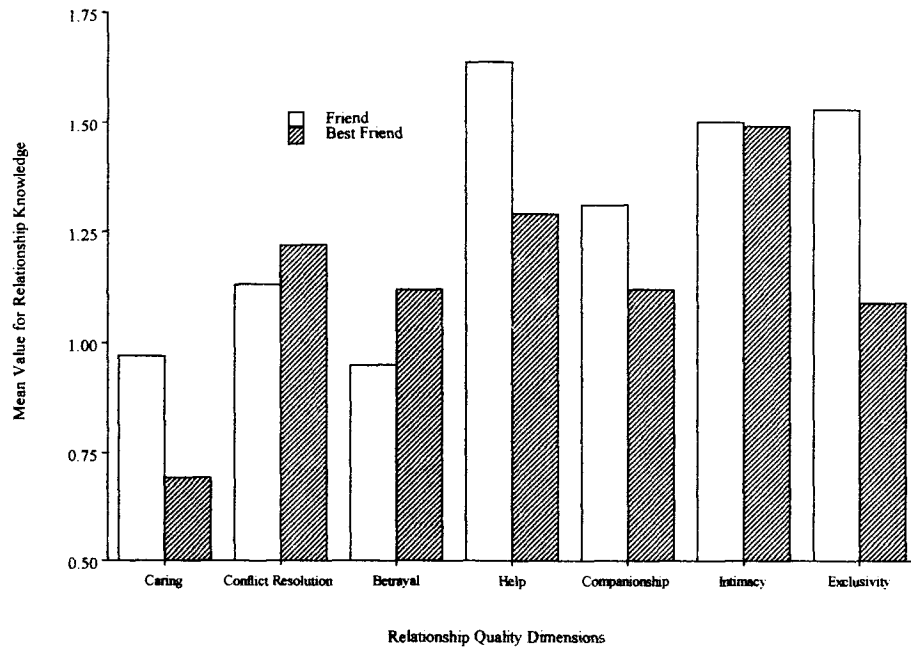
Table 4. Reciprocal friend and best friend relationship quality dimensions: Grade x Dimension

Quality Dimension	Grades 2-3	Grades 5-6
Caring	1.06 (0.97)	1.27 (0.93)
Conflict resolution	1.30 (0.90)	1.22 (0.85)
Betrayal	1.22 (0.97)	1.24 (0.95)
Help/Guidance	1.62 (1.04)	1.19 (0.91)
Companionship	1.31 (0.78)	1.22 (0.72)
Intimacy	1.51 (0.82)	1.42 (0.83)
Exclusivity	1.40 (0.88)	1.25 (0.86)

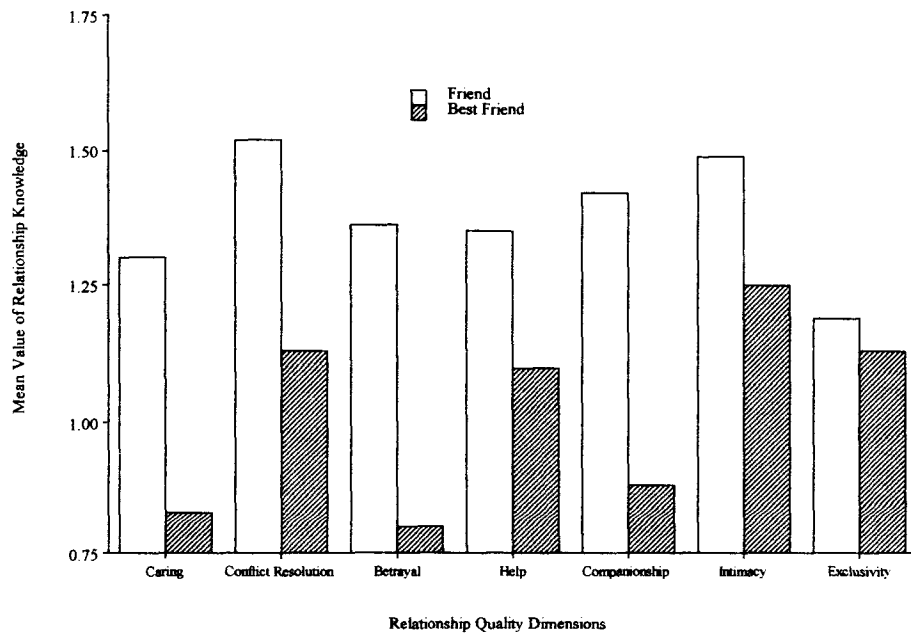
### III. Reciprocal Friend and Best Friend Relationship Knowledge Analyses

The following analyses pertain to hypotheses about the accuracy of children's relationship knowledge. Specifically, hypothesis five predicts that best friends will evidence more accurate relationship knowledge than will friends. Hypothesis six predicts that older children will be more accurate in terms of relationship knowledge than will younger children. Hypothesis seven predicts that girls will be more accurate with their relationship knowledge than will boys. For this analysis, the dependent variables (one for friends and one for best friends) are absolute difference scores between how a child predicted their friend would evaluate them and how that friend actually evaluated them. Thus smaller scores reflect greater accuracy of relationship knowledge.

Analysis reveals a significant Grade x Dimension x Relationship Type interaction,  $F(6, 300) = 3.60, p < .01$ . For ease of interpretation, this three-way interaction is shown in Figures 7 and 8 as two 2-way interactions: one for each grade level. Best friends are more accurate on the relationship quality dimensions of Caring and Companionship compared to friends. Within best friend relationships, more accuracy emerges on the relationship quality dimension of Caring compared to the Conflict Resolution, Helping, and Intimacy dimensions, which do not differ. Also, best friends are more accurate on the dimension of Companionship compared to Intimacy. Older best friends are more accurate than older friends. While no differences emerge between younger and older children, older children are more accurate on the Companionship dimension compared to the Intimacy dimension. Younger children are more accurate on the Caring dimension compared to the Helping, Intimacy, and Exclusivity dimensions, which do not differ (see Table 5 for means and standard deviations).



**Figure 7: Relationship Knowledge: Grades 2-3: Relationship Type x Dimension Interaction.**



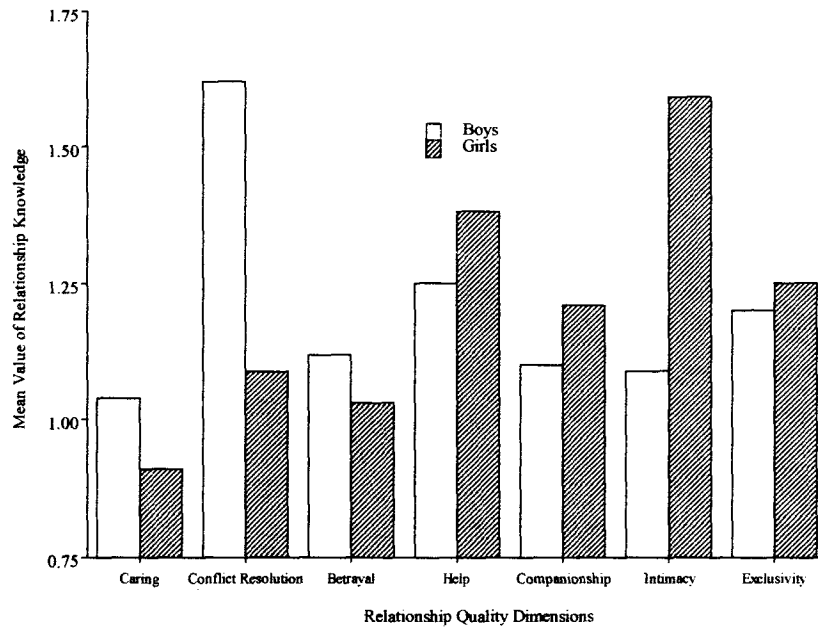
**Figure 8: Relationship Knowledge: Grades 5-6: Relationship Type x Dimension Interaction.**

**Table 5.** Means for relationship knowledge for reciprocal friends and reciprocal best friends: Grade x Dimension x Relationship Type

Quality Dimension	Friends	Best Friends	Grades 2-3	Grades 5-6
Caring	1.14 (0.87)	0.77 (0.65)	0.83 (0.69)	1.07 (0.45)
Conflict resolution	1.33 (0.86)	1.17 (0.86)	1.17 (0.66)	1.33 (0.60)
Betrayal	1.16 (0.96)	0.95 (0.86)	1.03 (0.82)	1.88 (0.60)
Help/Guidance	1.49 (0.87)	1.19 (0.86)	1.47 (0.80)	1.22 (0.47)
Companionship	1.26 (0.71)	0.96 (0.70)	1.21 (0.52)	1.15 (0.46)
Intimacy	1.49 (0.80)	1.36 (0.75)	1.49 (0.69)	1.32 (0.44)
Exclusivity	1.35 (0.71)	1.11 (0.84)	1.31 (0.56)	1.16 (0.51)

Relationship Type	Grades 2-3	Grades 5-6
Friend	1.26 (0.42)	1.37 (0.39)
Best Friend	1.14 (0.47)	1.01 (0.41)

Analysis also reveals a significant Gender x Dimension interaction,  $F(6, 300) = 3.60, p < .01$ . As shown in Figure 9, girls are more accurate on the relationship quality dimension of Conflict Resolution than are boys, whereas boys are significantly more accurate on the Intimacy dimension than are girls. For boys, more accuracy is evidenced on the Caring dimension compared to the Conflict Resolution dimension. Further, boys are more accurate on the Intimacy and Exclusivity dimensions compared to the Conflict Resolution dimension. The Intimacy and Exclusivity dimensions do not differ. Girls are significantly more accurate on the relationship quality dimension of Caring compared to the Helping, Intimacy, and Exclusivity dimensions, which do not differ. Further, girls are more accurate on the Intimacy dimension compared to the Conflict Resolution, Betrayal, and Companionship dimensions, which do not differ (see Table 6 for means and standard deviations).



**Figure 9:** Relationship Knowledge: Gender x Dimension Interaction.

**Table 6.** Means for relationship knowledge for reciprocal friends and reciprocal best friends: Gender x Dimension

Quality Dimension	Boys	Girls
Caring	1.04 (0.54)	0.91 (0.61)
Conflict resolution	1.62 (0.64)	1.09 (0.55)
Betrayal	1.12 (0.70)	1.03 (0.72)
Help/Guidance	1.25 (0.40)	1.38 (0.75)
Companionship	1.10 (0.45)	1.21 (0.51)
Intimacy	1.09 (0.47)	1.59 (0.56)
Exclusivity	1.20 (0.44)	1.25 (0.57)

## Discussion

Children's peer relationships play an important role in cognitive, social, and emotional development (see Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995 for meta-analytic review). The focus of recent research on children's peer relationships has been the impact of relationship quality in children's friendships (e.g., Hartup, 1996; Parker and Asher, 1993). While most of the previous research (e.g., Ashton, 1980; Berndt and Perry, 1986; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985) has attempted to determine what constitutes quality in a relationship, less research has been conducted examining children's understanding and perceptions of these qualities. Thus, the present study examines children's evaluations of relationship quality as a function of relationship type (reciprocal friends and best friends), gender, and age of the participants. Further, the present study examines children's perceptions of themselves with their reciprocal friends and reciprocal best friends. What follows is a more detailed account and interpretation of the findings.

The hypothesis that children will evaluate a reciprocal best friend higher than a reciprocal friend on the various relationship quality dimensions is supported. When investigating differences between friends and best friends with regards to relationship quality, best friends are evaluated higher than are friends in the areas of caring, companionship, intimacy and exclusivity. That children evaluate reciprocal best friends higher than reciprocal friends is consistent with previous research using measures of perceived friends and best friends (Meurling, et al., 1999). Meurling, et al., (1999) reported that close friendships provide more emotional support and guidance than casual friendships, thereby elevating a child's sense of worth. Children typically spend more time with best friends than friends, and perhaps a child's perception of their best friend

reflects how each child views himself or herself contributing to the relationship as well. That is, children perceive qualities in best friends that they admire and they strive to achieve those same qualities. As a consequence of viewing the qualities of a best friend as an extension of the self, a child's investment in the relationship is inextricably tied to his or her sense of worth and identity.

Using measures of perceived friends, Berndt and Perry (1986) concluded that children perceive close relationships as more supportive than other relationships (e.g., acquaintances). Thus, a child has a vested interest in keeping the positive qualities of a best friend more salient than the positive qualities of a friend resulting in a higher evaluation of a best friend over friend. These findings are consistent with previous research by Furman and Buhrmester (1992) also using measures of perceived friendship, demonstrating that children evaluate their best friends based on comparisons with their friends, leading to higher evaluations of best friends.

Not only does the current study extend earlier research (e.g., Meurling et al., 1999) into children's differential evaluations of friends and best friends, there is an important methodological advancement as well. While self-report friendship nominations are among the most common method of assessing friendships, many friendship researchers consider unilateral nominations or perceived measures of friendship to be a "less clean" measure of special relationships compared to reciprocal relationships. For example, children may nominate classmates as friends and not actually be in a reciprocal close relationship for a variety of reasons: 1) they may really think they are in a mutual dyadic relationship with the nominee; 2) they may wish they were in a closer relationship with the nominee; 3) they may be in a relationship that is just

beginning; 4) they may be in a relationship that is terminating with the nominee; or 5) they may feel pressure just to make nominations of classmates even though they have no friends in that particular class. Children's mutual or reciprocal relationships are assessed and compared in the present study, supplying much needed support for these earlier studies that used only unreciprocated self-report measures of children's peer relationships.

A comparative analysis between Meurling, et al. (1999) and the present study revealed similar findings as well as differences. The results of the present study are consistent with the Meurling, et al. (1999) finding that best friends were evaluated higher than friends. With regard to consistent findings, Meurling, et al. (1999) reported that best friends were evaluated higher than friends on five of the seven relationship quality dimensions, with the exceptions of Betrayal and Conflict Resolution. The present study finds that reciprocal best friends are evaluated higher than reciprocal friends on four of the seven relationship quality dimensions, with the exceptions being Betrayal, Conflict Resolution, and Helping. With regard to different findings, Meurling, et al. (1999) reported a Gender main effect with girls evaluating their relationships to be more Caring than did boys, while the current study reveals that girls evaluate their reciprocal best friends higher than boys evaluate their reciprocal best friends. Further, Meurling, et al. (1999) reported that younger children evaluated their relationships to be more Caring, Intimate, and Exclusive than did older children. Meurling, et al. (1999) also reported that younger children evaluated friends more positively than did older children, a finding not replicated in the present study.



The finding that girls evaluate their reciprocal best friend relationships more positively than do boys is also in agreement with previous research (e.g., Aboud and Mendelson, 1996; Furman and Bierman, 1983). Girls' relationships are characterized by more intimacy compared to boys' relationships. Greater intimacy in a relationship provides validation for a child's developing sense of worth because it confirms that others share one's interests and attitudes (e.g., Harter et al., 1998). Harter, et al. (1998) states that the opinions of one's best friends become ingrained into one's self-worth, elevating the perceived support for oneself in the relationship. Thus, an intimate relationship is more rewarding for a child because it provides the child with the belief that he or she is valued and this results in a more positive perception of the best friend. Further, from an early age, girls are socialized to be more relationship oriented than are boys. Girls tend to prefer smaller groups playing in triadic and dyadic close knit relationships, while boys tend to engage in larger group activities with specific behavioral goals and agendas. Boys are also less emotionally and physically tied to their friends compared to girls. Thus for girls, relationships are ends in themselves, whereas for boys relationships are a means to an end. These socializing agents could also explain why girls evaluate close special relationships higher than do boys.

The hypothesis that a higher degree of response similarity between dyads will exist between reciprocal best friends than reciprocal friends in terms of relationship quality is partially supported. The present study finds a higher degree of similarity between reciprocal best friends compared to reciprocal friends. Children select friends based, in part, on similarity, and previous research (e.g., Aboud and Mendelson, 1996) examining similarity has demonstrated that initial factors used by children for selecting

friends include gender, age, and demographics. Thus, children typically befriend those who live near them, who are close in age, and who are the same gender. However, what determines the length of a relationship and whether or not a peer is elevated to the status of best friend is the quality of the relationship. Further, underlying the quality of relationships is the degree of similarity between friends, whether in attitudes, values, or interests shared. In the present study, reciprocal best friends are more similar on the Companionship and Intimacy dimensions compared to friends. Best friends spend more time together and share more personal information compared to friends. Reciprocal friends are most similar on the Caring and Conflict Resolution dimensions. Although best friends are more similar than friends are, girl best friends are more similar than are boy best friends.

The hypothesis that girls will have a higher degree of response similarity compared to boys is partially supported. More similarity emerges for girls' relationships than boys' relationships on Conflict Resolution. This finding is consistent with previous research (Erwin, 1985) showing higher levels of similarity in girls' relationships compared to boys' relationships. According to Duck (1973), early attraction is contingent upon interaction style, while later attraction moves in the direction of cognitive similarity. Erwin (1985) argues that the different interaction styles between boys and girls creates different types of information sought and exchanged for validation in their relationships. Further, interaction style is inextricably tied to differences in socialization between girls and boys (Erwin, 1985). The present study also reveals that girl best friends are more similar than are girl friends, while no differences emerge for boys.

The hypothesis that a higher degree of response similarity between dyads will emerge for the relationships of older children compared to the relationships of younger children is partially supported. Older children are more similar in their responses when describing the helping behavior of their close peer relationships compared to younger children. Pro-social behaviors such as helping play an important role in attraction to one's peers, especially for older children. According to Aboud and Mendelson (1996), attributes (e.g., attention-seeking behavior and dominance) initially associated with quality friendships for younger children change with age. Older children place a higher value on pro-social behaviors and emotional support, while simultaneously rejecting peers who engage in aggressive or domineering behavior. Helping behavior provides a concrete reminder of the support received when fulfilling one's needs, and receiving this type of support from friends and best friends increases in importance and frequency as children grow older. According to Parker and Asher (1993), friends' perceptions of their relationship are moderately related to their partners' perceptions, and these differences arise because the same experiences are interpreted differently by each partner.

The hypothesis that reciprocal best friends will be more accurate in their relationship knowledge compared to reciprocated friends was partially supported. Reciprocal best friends are more accurate on the relationship quality dimensions of Caring and Companionship compared to mutual friends. Although the current study does not examine length of relationships, previous research (e.g., Ladd and Emerson, 1984) investigating children's knowledge of their friends have found that accuracy is contingent on the length of the relationship and that the duration of the relationship is determined by a higher degree of similarity. Consequently, an increased amount of shared knowledge is

more likely to occur within close relationships because more similarity and time buttress these relationships. Further, the present study finds that older reciprocal best friends are more accurate than were older reciprocal friends. Ladd and Emerson (1984) also state that the extent of children's knowledge about their friends is related to both the quality of their relationships and their age. Younger children employ the self as the basis for an acceptable standard against which to evaluate the characteristics of friends. Conversely, older children employ a broader set of criteria for evaluating their friends, and the basis for mutual attraction consists of not only the shared knowledge of their similarities but also a reciprocal awareness of their differences, or characteristics unique to their partner (Ladd and Emerson, 1984). Thus, older children are attracted not only to the similarities between themselves and a friend, but also to the characteristics a friend possesses making him or her exceptional.

The hypothesis that girls will be more accurate in their relationship knowledge compared to boys is not supported. Girls are more accurate on the relationship quality dimension of Conflict Resolution than were boys, whereas boys are more accurate on the relationship quality dimension of Intimacy than were girls. The finding that boys are more knowledgeable and accurate about how they are evaluated in terms of intimacy than are girls is an intriguing finding and worthy of future research.

The hypothesis that older children will be more accurate in their relationship knowledge compared to younger children is not supported. Children's self-esteem is based on their perceptions of how others view them. Consequently, children are motivated to see themselves in a more positive light than they actually are which results in the inaccuracy of perception. Harter, et al. (1998) states that there is a stronger

relationship between reflected appraisals and self-appraisals than between the actual appraisals of significant others and self-appraisals. In other words, children tend to see themselves in a way consistent with how they believe others perceive them (or how they would like to be perceived), not in the way that others actually see them. Perhaps perception is more important than having an accurate picture of how others see us.

Limitations of the present study of reciprocity and similarity in children's relationship quality deserve consideration. In the present study, children are restricted to seven relationship quality dimensions when distinguishing between a friend and best friend. The forced choice questionnaire format does not allow the opportunity to explore additional dimensions or qualities relevant to children's understanding of peer relationships. Future investigation into differences between relationships need to provide participants with the opportunity to express their personal opinions about possible differences between friends and best friends. A second limitation is having children engage in "perspective taking". Given the cognitive limitations of younger children compared to older children, it is not clear that both age groups are able to accomplish this task with equal mastery. Further, it may be possible that the method employed in the present study for perspective taking was impractical for both age groups. A third limitation of the present study is that it pertained only to classroom relationships. This results in having to find a large number of children with both a reciprocal friend and reciprocal best friend in the same classroom. Lastly, the findings of the current study are limited to classroom relationships. It would be important for future research to investigate children's friends and best friends in non-classroom, and out of school environments.

In conclusion, research in the area of children's peer relationships has made tremendous strides in understanding the components of friendship quality as well as the factors determining differences within relationships. Understanding what elements of a friendship constitute quality (e.g., companionship and helping behavior) is necessary for identifying factors that foster a child's development and anticipating those factors that impede it. The present study uses reciprocal relationships to support and extend earlier work. The findings of the present study reveal that reciprocal best friends are evaluated higher than reciprocal friends, girls' reciprocal best friends are more similar to each other compared to reciprocal friends, and older children exhibit greater accuracy in their relationship knowledge of reciprocal best friends compared to reciprocal friends. Relationship quality, similarity, and relationship knowledge are important elements in peer relationships. Peer relationships foster a child's sense of worth, identity formation, and self-esteem, and relationships high in quality cultivate development in these areas. Relationships are formed based on the degree of similarity between two individuals and it is the primary element binding people together. Similar interests, attitudes, behaviors, and hobbies are not only responsible for initiating a relationship, but are necessary for sustaining it. Relationships higher in similarity are more validating for the individuals involved, because the individual feels that his or her beliefs, attitudes, and interests are valued and worthwhile. Further, the similarity shared by two individuals in a relationship increases in tandem with the duration of and repeated exposure to a relationship.

Accurate relationship knowledge, or having the capacity to see oneself as a peer sees us, is important for maintaining a relationship high in quality. Relationship knowledge enables an individual to anticipate the needs of his or her partner with greater

accuracy. Further, understanding how one comes across to others in general, and with peers specifically, is important for maintaining healthy relationships. If an individual comes across as cold or indifferent to a friend or best friend when their partner needs help, then the partner will perceive the individual as less helpful and supportive and the perceived quality of the relationship will be diminished. Relationship quality, similarity, and relationship knowledge are intertwined with each other and are necessary components of special relationships. A relationship high in quality is contingent upon a high degree of similarity coupled with an accurate understanding of a friend's needs and how one is perceived in meeting those needs.

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Appendix A

**INFORMED CONSENT**

Your child is being invited to participate in a project looking at the importance of children's friendships. We hope to learn more about children's understanding of friends and best friends. Your child has been selected because all second, third, fifth, and sixth grade children at Dannelly Elementary School are being asked to participate.

If you decide to participate, we will interview your child for approximately fifteen minutes and they will be asked to complete five questionnaires about a friend and a best friend. There are no apparent risks to children, and the names of all participants will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will your child leave the school. They will be interviewed right outside their classroom at a time scheduled by their teacher. The principal, Mr. Armistead, has approved the project and we need your consent to continue.

All information obtained by this project will remain confidential. All data will be grouped together, and no individuals will be identified.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relations with the Dannelly Elementary School. If you decide to allow your child to participate, your child will be free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If your child decides later to withdraw from the study, you may also withdraw any information which has been collected about your child.

If you have any questions, we expect you to ask us. If you have additional questions later, please call David Cleary (396-7472) or Dr. Glen Ray (244-3690), and we will be happy to answer them.

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my child may participate in the project mentioned above.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, my child may not participate in the project mentioned above.

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness' Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Relationship Quality Questionnaire

Instructions: Use the numbers below to describe how important your friend \_\_\_\_\_ is to you. Try to think of your friend as they are right now and not as you want them to be. Circle the correct response using the numbers below. Remember, this is about your friend \_\_\_\_\_ so make sure to think about them when you answer the questions.

0 = Not At All 1 = A Little True 2 = Somewhat True 3 = Pretty True 4 = Really True

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| 1. _____ makes me feel good about my ideas.....                           | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 2. _____ and I make up easily when we fight.....                          | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 3. _____ and I argue a lot.....   | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 4. _____ helps me so that I can get done quicker.....                     | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 5. _____ and I always sit together at lunch.....                          | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 6. _____ and I always tell each other our problems.....                   | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 7. _____ likes me more than anybody else in class.....                    | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 8. _____ tells me I'm good at things.....                                 | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 9. _____ gets over our arguments really quickly.....                      | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 10. _____ and I help each other with school work a lot.....               | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 11. _____ and I always pick each other as partners for things.....        | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 12. _____ talks about things that make us sad.....                        | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 13. _____ and I make each other feel important and special.....           | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 14. _____ plays mostly with me on the playground.....                     | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 15. _____ and I talk about how to get over being mad at each other.....   | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 16. _____ gets mad a lot.....   | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 17. _____ gives me advice with figuring things out.....                   | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 18. _____ and I fight a lot.....  | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 19. _____ and I always play together at recess.....                       | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 20. I talk to _____ when I am mad about something that happens to me..... | 0..1..2..3..4 |
| 21. I like . _____ more than I like any other kids.....                   | 0..1..2..3..4 |

## Appendix C

### Relationship Knowledge Questionnaire

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Instructions: Pretend that you are your friend \_\_\_\_\_ right now. How would your friend describe you? Use the numbers below to indicate how your friend \_\_\_\_\_ will describe you. Circle the correct response using the numbers below. Remember, this is about how you think your friend \_\_\_\_\_ feels about you, so be sure to think about them when you answer the questions.

0 = Not At All 1 = A Little True 2 = Somewhat True 3 = Pretty True 4 = Really True

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. _____ makes me feel good about my ideas.....                           | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 2. _____ and I make up easily when we fight.....                          | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 3. _____ and I argue a lot.....   | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 4. _____ helps me so that I can get done quicker.....                     | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 5. _____ and I always sit together at lunch.....                          | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 6. _____ and I always tell each other our problems.....                   | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 7. _____ likes me more than anybody else in class.....                    | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 8. _____ tells me I'm good at things.....                                 | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 9. _____ gets over our arguments really quickly.....                      | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 10. _____ and I help each other with school work a lot.....               | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 11. _____ and I always pick each other as partners for things.....        | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 12. _____ talks about things that make us sad.....                        | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 13. _____ and I make each other feel important and special.....           | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 14. _____ plays mostly with me on the playground.....                     | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 15. _____ and I talk about how to get over being mad at each other.....   | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 16. _____ gets mad a lot.....   | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 17. _____ gives me advice with figuring things out.....                   | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 18. _____ and I fight a lot.....  | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 19. _____ and I always play together at recess.....                       | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 20. I talk to _____ when I am mad about something that happens to me..... | 0...1...2...3...4 |
| 21. I like . _____ more than I like any other kids.....                   | 0...1...2...3...4 |

Appendix D  
 Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficients for  
 the Modified Relationship Quality Questionnaires

Dimension	Friend	Best Friend
Caring and Validation	.75	.75
Conflict Resolution	.61	.57
Conflict and Betrayal	.72	.71
Help and Guidance	.75	.77
Companionship	.68	.67
Intimacy	.61	.70
Exclusivity	.77	.69
All Items	.85	.86



## Appendix E

### Dimension: Caring

Questions 1,8,13

1. Makes me feel good about my ideas
8. Tells me I am good at things
13. And I make each other feel important and special

### Dimension: Conflict Resolution

Questions 2,9,15

2. And I make up easily when we fight
9. gets over our arguments really quickly
15. talks about how to get over being mad at each other

### Dimension: Conflict and Betrayal

Questions 3,16,18

3. And I argue a lot
16. Gets mad a lot
18. And I fight a lot

### Dimension: Help and Guidance

Questions 4,10,17

4. Helps me so I can get done quicker
10. And I help each other with schoolwork a lot
17. Gives me advice with figuring things out

### Dimension: Companionship

Questions 5,11,19

5. And I always sit together at lunch
11. And I always pick each other as partners for things
19. And I always play together at recess

### Dimension: Intimacy

Questions 6,12,20

6. And I always tell each other our problems
12. Talk about things that make us sad
20. I talk to \_\_\_\_\_ when I am mad about something that happens to me

### Dimension: Exclusivity

Questions 7,14,21

7. Likes me more than anybody else
14. Plays mostly with me on the playground
21. I like \_\_\_\_\_ more than I like any other kids