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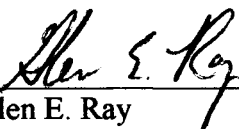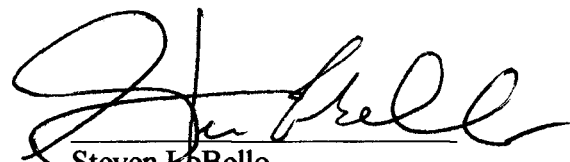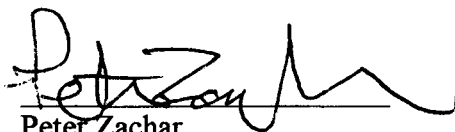
QUALITY IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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Perceptions of Parental Security and Relationship

Quality in Middle Childhood

Angel Kiel

A Thesis

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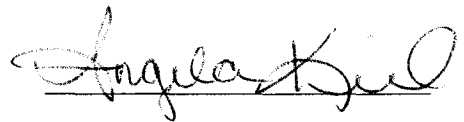
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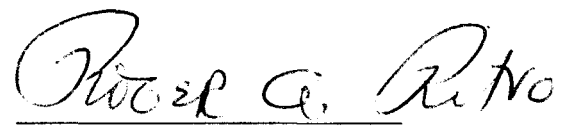PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL SECURITY AND RELATIONSHIP

QUALITY IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Angela Whitfield Kiel

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VITA

Angela Whitfied Kiel, daughter of John C. Kiel and Marion A. Kiel, was born November 4, 1979, in Joliet, IL. She graduated from Providence Catholic High School in 1997. She attended Clark Atlanta University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in May, 2001. In June 2002 she entered Graduate School at Auburn University Montgomery.

THESIS ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL SECURITY AND RELATIONSHIP

QUALITY IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Angela Whitfield Kiel

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The present study assessed perception of parental security and relationship quality with second, third, fifth and sixth grade children. All children completed questionnaires regarding perceptions of parental security using the Kerns Security Scale (KSS) and questionnaires regarding their classroom friend and classroom best friend using the Relationship Quality Questionnaire (RQQ). The KSS has two subscales: Availability and Dependability. The RQQ taps seven relationship quality dimensions: Caring, Conflict Resolution, Betrayal, Help, Companionship, Intimacy, and Exclusivity. Replicating previous work, results demonstrated that children evaluated the qualities of their Best Friend relationships higher than the qualities of their Friend relationships. As hypothesized, developmental differences emerged in children's perceptions of parental security. Specifically, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents to be more dependable than did Grade 5-6 children. Further, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents as being

more dependable (i.e., "...really understands them...") than available (i.e., "...spends time with..."). Further, mothers were perceived as being more available than were fathers. Results also demonstrated a relationship between perceptions of parental security and relationship quality. Perceptions of security to mother were positively correlated with best friend qualities while perceptions of security to father were positively correlated with friend qualities. Findings are discussed in terms of how the present study extends previous research on elementary school age children's perceptions of parental security. Implications of the findings for teachers, parents, and child development researchers are also discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Research on children's attachment to their primary caregiver has demonstrated

that this first relationship is important to children's cognitive development, (Cassidy,

1986) social development, (Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992) and emotional

development (Kobak & Sceery 1988). In general, the more positive and supportive the

attachment relationship to their primary caregiver, the more socially competent the child

is outside the family, in the company of their peers. With few exceptions (e.g., Kerns,

1996; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999) most research investigating the

relationship between parent-child attachment and children's social functioning outside

the home has been at the global peer relations level (e.g., popularity) focusing on general

social behaviors (e.g., cooperation). The purpose the current study was to extend this line

of research by investigating the relationship between parent-child attachment and

children's close peer relationships (i.e., friends and best friends). What follows is a

review of children's peer relationships and the attachment literature focusing on infant

attachment and the linkages between parent-child attachments in middle childhood

children's close peer relations.

Peer Relationships

Peer acceptance is a major goal of children in middle childhood (Gottsman &

Mettetal, 1986). Research consistently demonstrates that peer relationships are important

to all facets of development (see Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996). For example,

with regard to social development, peers facilitate the development of self-esteem, the

learning of age appropriate norms for play behavior, and the development of needed

social skills for interactions with others. With regard to cognitive development, peers facilitate learning experiences and also cultivate positive attitudes towards school. Further, peers provide a context in which children not only learn new skills and behaviors, peers protect each other from potential victimizing situations and thus peers provide a sense of security to the individual (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996).

In general, researchers investigating the importance of peer relations have made the distinction between two types of peer relationships: popularity and friendship (Bukowski &Hoza, 1989). Popularity is a global measure and is the experience of being liked or accepted by one's peer group while friendship is distinguished as a close, mutual, dyadic relationship. Popularity is a unilateral construct that refers to an individual's acceptance and degree of likability by their peer group. Friendship is a more personally specific construct that refers to the reciprocal relationship that takes place between two individuals.

Though popularity and friendship are related conceptually and empirically, and research demonstrates that both are linked to children's security, it has been suggested that popularity and friendship provide unique contributions to children's development (Bukowski, Hoza & Boivin, 1993; Parker & Asher, 1993). For example, the "social provision" theory proposed by Furman and Robbins (1985) states that there are different provisions available to children depending on the type of relationship that they are involved in, be it an intimate relationship (e.g., friend) or a general peer relationship (e.g., one's popularity). Of the eight provisions outlined by Furman & Robbins (1985) that are desired and given by children in peer relations, these provisions can be attained by way of intimate relationships, general peer relationships, or both. Affection, intimacy, and

reliable alliance are satisfied through intimate relationships, while a feeling of being included in a group is best achieved by general peer relations. Provisions that can be fulfilled through either intimate or general peer relations are instrumental aid, nurturance, companionship, and enhancement of worth. While the current study examined the relationship between peers and parent-child attachment, children's close peer relations are the focus of investigation because research has demonstrated that security is related to children's friendships but not popularity (Lieberman, et al., 1999). This study is the first to examine parent-child attachment as it relates to different types of close peer relationships (friends and best friends),

Friendship Quality

In 1996, Hartup stated that to understand the developmental significance of children's friends, we must not only know about network extensivity (number of friends) and friendship identity (similarity between friends) we need to also focus our attention on the quality of children's friendships. Children's perception of friendship quality characterizes their interpersonal relationships in terms of their evaluation(s) of positive and negative features. Some features of their interpersonal relationships might include the degree of companionship, supportiveness, and amount of conflict present (Parker & Asher 1993). Aboud and Mendelson (1996) classify friendship quality as the social, emotional, and instrumental characteristics sought in the relationship by one friend and provided by another. Friends provide more companionship, intimacy, help, emotional security, and self-validation than do non friends and these qualities are linked to relationship quality (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996).

Research by Cauce, (1986) and by McGuire & Weiz, (1982) has demonstrated that a positive correlation exists between perceived support from friends and school involvement, academic achievement, and self-esteem. Additional longitudinal studies (e.g., Berndt & Keefe, 1992; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996) demonstrate that children's perceptions of positive relationship qualities facilitated increased popularity, more positive attitude about school peers, and more positive attitudes about school in general (Berndt & Keefe, 1992). Thus, it appears that just having friends is not enough; children need friends high in relationship quality.

Parker and Asher (1993) examined children's friendship quality in third through eighth grade students who were sociometrically accepted and rejected. They also explored in their study was children's understanding of their best friends. Based on previous friendship research and pilot testing, Parker and Asher (1993) developed the Friendship Quality Questionnaire which consists of six relationship dimensions. Validation and caring ($\alpha = .90$) measures the extent to which the friendship is characterized by interest, caring, and support. Conflict and betrayal ($\alpha = .84$) in the friendship is measured by the amount of disagreement, annoyance, and mistrust that is present in the friendship. Companionship and recreation ($\alpha =. 75$) measures how much quality time the friends spend together both in and out of school. Help and guidance ($\alpha = .90$) measures the children's attempts to help one another in both ordinary and strenuous tasks. Intimate exchange ($\alpha = .86$) measures the extent to which the friends are willing to express personal information and share their feelings. Finally, Conflict Resolution ($\alpha = .84$) measures how quickly disagreements are resolved.

Parker and Asher (1993) reported that children form their perceptions of their best friend based on a combination of the six previously mentioned qualities. Additionally, girls were reported as having more intimate exchanges, more caring and validation, more help and guidance, and more ease in resolving conflicts than were boys. Girls tended to have at least one friend, and girls were shown to have substantially more friends than boys. Children who were better accepted were more likely to be involved in a specific dyadic relationship (e.g., best friendship) than were children who were less accepted. Interestingly, high-accepted as well as average-accepted children were twice as likely to have a very best friend as were low-accepted children. Relationship quality also varied as a function of sociometric status with popular and average status children having higher quality relationships than unpopular children.

Investigating the differences in quality of relationships between perceived classroom friends and perceived classroom best friends, Meurling, Ray, & LoBello (1999) developed the Relationship Quality Questionnaire. The RQQ is a modified version of Parker & Asher's (1993) Friendship Quality Questionnaire, consisting of 21 items. In addition to the original six dimensions from the FQQ the dimension of "exclusivity" was included. Reliability coefficients of the RQQ for friends and best friends, respectively are: Caring and Validation (.75 and .75), Conflict Resolution (.61 and .57), Conflict and Betrayal (.72 and .71), Help and Guidance (.75 and .77), Companionship (.68 and .67), Intimacy (.61 and .69), and Exclusivity (.77 and .69).

Using second through sixth grade children, Meurling et al., (1999) demonstrated that children consistently evaluated their best friends higher than their friends on five of the seven quality dimensions (caring, companionship, conflict resolution, intimacy, and

exclusivity). Furthermore, children received more assistance and support from their best friends than they did from their friends. Girls evaluated the relationship quality dimensions more positively than did boys; this was especially true in the dimensions of caring, intimacy, and help/guidance, which suggests that girls are more apt to give and receive assistance to their friends than are boys. Moreover, Meurling et al., (1999) investigated whether age is a factor in differentiating between the relationship dimensions. Their findings indicated that when distinguishing between classroom friends and classroom best friends, older children consistently made greater distinctions, than did younger children, on the dimensions of help, caring, companionship, exclusivity, and conflict resolution.

In summary, relationship quality has been shown to be important in facilitating healthy developmental outcomes for children. Further, relationship quality has also been valuable to researchers investigating children's understanding of different types of close peer relationships. The current study extended these research efforts by investigating the associations between parent-child attachment and the quality of children's friend and best friend relationships.

Infant Security

As an originator of attachment theory, John Bowlby's theory was based on the idea that infant's attachment to their mother is manifested in behaviors such as sucking, clinging, following, crying and smiling (Bowlby, 1958). As the child grows into toddlerhood, attachment behaviors tend to center around proximity seeking towards mother and using mother as a secure base from which to explore his/her surroundings.

In 1969, Bowlby modified his original theory to include the concept of the

internal working model. The internal working model is a cognitive template of behaviors

and expectations that individuals create and attempt to model in their daily interactions

with others. Through interacting with their primary caregiver, children develop a

cognitive representation of the relationship, complete with expectations for further

interactions which include an emotional component as well. It is assumed that the

internal working model serves as a "prototypical social relationship" upon which the

child builds future social relationships.

Building on Bowlby's work, Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978)

developed a methodology for classifying children into different attachment categories

based on the child's attachment-type behaviors. Classifications of infant-caregiver

attachment were based on observations of behavior made during what came to be called

the "Strange Situation". This standardized laboratory procedure involves separations and

reunions between the caregiver, the infant, and a stranger.

Research using the Strange Situation paradigm requires that the mother and child

begin together in an observation room. The observation room is equipped with age

appropriate toys and games that the child can access. There are a total of seven, three

minute interactions: 1) mother/infant- the infant explores while the mother watches, 2)

mother/infant/stranger-stranger silently enters the room, then talks to the mother and then

plays with the infant, 3) infant/stranger- mother is absent from the room while the

stranger interacts with the child, 4) mother/infant- mother returns to the room and settles

the infant, stranger exits the room, 5) infant- child is left alone in the

room, 6) infant/stranger- stranger enters the room and interacts with the child, and 7) mother/infant- mother returns and comforts the infant.

The observations of interest during the strange situation paradigm are the child's proximity seeking behaviors (i.e., do they run to mother at reunion), mother's ability to comfort the child, separation protest, and the ability of the stranger to comfort the child. The overall focus of the methodology involves the observation of the amount of stress a child endures during the separation, and the child's willingness/ability to be comforted by mother at reunion.

Based on these parent-child observations children are classified into four different attachment categories (Type A, B, C, & D). Type B (secure) is considered the most desired level; the child is able to use the mother as a secure base from which to explore his/her new surroundings. These children are able to explore the room with only casual concern for the mother's location. When mother leaves the room, the child's exploration becomes limited. These children's level of stress varied with some becoming more upset than others. The key to this relationship was the child's response to the mother upon her return. All of these children were very receptive to their mother when she returns to the room and were readily comforted by her, enabling them to rapidly return to their exploration. Ainsworth's Baltimore study classified 65% of all the children studied into this category (Goldberg, 2000).

Type A (avoidant) children were the second most common group. These children appeared to be unconcerned with their mother's proximity and explored the room comfortably without relying on the mother for assistance. Avoidant children do not appear to be under a great deal of stress at the notice of the mother's disappearance. It

was evident that the mothers return was not of great importance either, due to the fact that the child did not acknowledge her presence. Ainsworth's Baltimore study classified 21% of all the children studied into this category (Goldberg, 2000).

The third classification was type C (resistant) children. These children display a difficulty in exploring the room even in the presence of the mother. In addition these children become extremely distressed at the notice of the mothers absence. When she returns to the room, the resistant child displays a mixture of emotions (pouting or screaming). These children are concerned about being physically close to the mother; however, they are not receptive to her attempts to provide comfort. This child desires being in arms reach of the mother, but will not allow her to pick him/her up. Ainsworth's Baltimore study classified 10-14% of all the children studied into this category (Goldberg, 2000).

The fourth classification type was D (disorganized/disoriented). Children in this category display the greatest insecurities. These children typically reject comforting. A Type D child in this classification might look away from the caregiver while being held, or display a flat affect or depressed gaze. The most commonly recognized pattern of disorganized/disoriented children is a dazed facial expression (Berk, 1996).

According to psychoanalytic and ethological theory, there is a link between a child's healthy attachment relationship to their primary caregiver and the child's inner feelings and sense of security. It is believed that this positive relationship supports all aspects of a child's psychological development. In support of this belief, research demonstrates that secure mother-child attachments are related to social and cognitive development in early and middle childhood (Berk, 1996). In one longitudinal study,

infants who were securely attached were more enthusiastic in pretend play, more pleasant, and were better at solving problems by the age of two than were same-aged insecurely attached children. These same children were reassessed at the age of four by their preschool teachers as showing higher levels of self-esteem, being socially competent, empathic, cooperative, and more autonomous than were less securely attached peers. Avoidant children were evaluated as being disconnected and isolated from their peers, while resistant children were labeled as being disruptive and difficult. These children were once again studied at the age of eleven, during a summer camp. Results demonstrated that children who were evaluated as being securely attached in infancy had more lasting friendships, were more likely to have close friendships, and were well like by the camp counselors compared to insecurely attached children (Elicker, et al., 1992; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978; Sroufe, 1983).

Further longitudinal work by Sroufe and his colleagues demonstrated that regardless of the developmental period (i.e., early childhood or middle childhood) children with more secure attachments were more positively affective and less negatively affective than were their peers who were less securely attached. It was also found that more securely attached children formed deeper friendships, participated more actively with peers, and were more popular than were their less securely attached peers. These findings remained constant regardless of who the raters were, be they teachers using a variety of objective procedures, or by other children using sociometrics (Freitag et al., 1996). These findings support the fundamental hypothesis (The Internal Working Model) within attachment theory, which states that the quality of children's early relationships

has significant impact on the development of relationships outside the family (Freitag et al., 1996).

Peer relations researchers (e.g., Sroufe & Fleeson 1986) state that attachment theory may be used as a predictive measure of the associations between the quality of the mother-child attachment and other familiar relationships. When provided with a secure base, children may feel more confident to explore the environment and interact with their peers (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). This experience would allow them the opportunity to sharpen their social skills and gain exposure to peer models. Elicker et al., (1992) predicted that the mother-child attachment formed in infancy creates a stable pattern of personal and social adaptation for the individual throughout childhood. The quality of the child's determination to achieve each of the developmental issues (i.e., attachment in infancy; individuation in the toddler period; peer relations and self-regulations in the preschool period; and agency, friendship and successful functioning in the peer group in middle childhood) was said to establish the child's level of competency.

Investigating security and peer competence in early childhood in terms of early responsiveness (e.g., the child's willingness to interact with other peers), Pastor (1981) demonstrated that differences in early peer competence were associated with the quality of the infant security. For example, toddlers who were securely attached at 18 months exhibited higher sociability than children who were anxiously attached. Further, Waters, Wippman, and Sroufe (1979) assessed the competence of 3 1/2 year old middle class children in a preschool classroom. Their research showed that children who were securely attached at 15 months received significantly higher peer competence scores than children who were anxiously attached.

Between infancy and adolescence occurs, children endure major changes in their social, moral, physical development, as well as changes in their internal working models and cognitive capacities (Connolly, Paikoff, & Buchanan, 1996). Despite these changes, research has found that children who adapted well in early development tend to continue doing so in adolescence; those children who experienced more problematic adjustment continue to show difficulty (Jacobson & Hoffman, 1997).

As previously noted, research supporting The Internal Working Model has demonstrated that children who were more securely attached had the ability to form longer lasting friendships, enjoyed interacting with peers, and were rated as being better liked than peers who were less securely attached (Freitag et al., 1996 & Sroufe et al., 1993). Lieberman et al., (1999) states that caregivers who are sensitive and respond to their infant's needs are likely to cultivate secure attachments with their children. Therefore, securely attached children develop an internal representation of themselves that is loveable and view others as being capable of responding to their needs. In contrast, those children who are the product of inconsistent caregivers are likely to develop similar insecure attachments. Thus, it is likely that these same patterns will be recognized in their own children (Ainsworth, et al., 1978).

Linkages Between Security in Middle Childhood and Peer Relationships

More recently, researchers (e.g., Kerns, 1996) have begun investigating elementary-school aged children's perception of security with their primary caregiver. Kerns, Klepac, and Cole (1996) hypothesized that more securely attached children would be evaluated as being more popular by their peers, have more reciprocated friendships, report higher levels of friendship quality, and feel less lonely than their less securely

attached peers. The second hypothesis of the study stated that secure-secure and secure-insecure same gender dyads would differ in their interactions during conversation, reports of friendship quality, and stability of friendship.

Mother-child security was measured using the Kerns Security Scale (KSS), which assessed the child's perception of the parent-child relationship in middle childhood and early adolescence. The KSS assesses the security of specific parent-child attachment relationships (both mother and father). The dimensions of the KSS are as follows: (1) parental availability-the degree to which children believe a particular attachment figure is responsive and available; (2) dependence on parents-the child's tendency to rely on the attachment figure in times of stress; and (3) communication-children's reported ease and interest in communication with the attachment figure. The KSS is rated on a 4-point likert scale using Harter's (1982) "Some kids...Other kids" format, with higher scores indicating a more secure attachment. Reliability for the KSS generally exceeds .80 and the validity of the measure has been somewhat validated by being significantly positively correlated to the Separation Anxiety Test and doll play interview measures of security.

Kerns and her colleagues (Klepac and Cole, 1996) found a moderate positive association between mother-child attachment and children's peer group standing. That is, as popularity goes up so does the child's perceptions of security. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that the more secure the children's attachment is, the more positive their peer relations are expected to be (Putallaz & Heflin 1990; Sroufe & Flesson, 1986; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). Interestingly, there was no association between self-reported friendship quality and mother-child attachment. Kerns et al., (1996) speculated that because only one child in the dyad was studied, the data became

somewhat impoverished because only one child's perception was obtained. Results further demonstrated that secure-secure dyads were less critical and more responsive than were secure-insecure dyads. Friendship pairs that consisted of secure-secure children were less critical of their mothers and were overall more responsive during the observation period than were insecure children. This suggests that children who are securely attached to their mothers have more developed social skills than those who are less securely attached to their mothers and are better able to have higher quality relationships than peers that are insecurely attached.

The results of Kerns et al., 1996 further validate the hypothesis that children who share a secure mother-child attachment may have access to expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that assist them in their ability to advance their own peer relationships (Putallaz & Heflin, 1990, Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). Kerns et al., 1996 builds upon longitudinal studies that link early mother-child attachments to middle childhood assessments of the number of friendships and the peer competence (Elicker et al., 1992; Grossman & Grossman, 1991; Lewis & Feiring, 1989).

In another study on attachment in middle childhood, Finnegan, Hodges, and Perry (1996) assessed childhood attachment in terms of preoccupied and avoidant coping styles to investigate adjustment problems suggested by the "specific linkage hypothesis". The specific linkage hypothesis is based on the idea that particular behavior problems will arise from insecure attachments depending on whether the child copes in an avoidant or preoccupied way (Finnegan et al., 1996). Preoccupied attachments, which are also referred to as ambivalent or resistant attachment are identified by the child's strong need for their caregiver in taxing situations, difficulty separating from the caregiver, and

difficulty receiving comfort from the caregiver when distressed. Avoidant attachments are marked by a limited affective interaction with the caregiver, which also includes avoiding the caregiver during exploration and reunion, and a failure to seek the caregiver for comfort (Finnegan et al., 1996).

Finnegan and her colleagues hypothesized that a preoccupied coping style is associated with internalizing difficulties (e.g., depression) while avoidant coping style is associated with externalizing difficulty (e.g., empathy). These hypotheses were formulated because a preoccupied coping style inhibits exploration and mastery of the environment and disrupts age-appropriate development strategies for regulating affect during minor stressors. Thus, the child is left fearful and perceives himself as inferior to among his peers. These problems are manifested as anxiety and depression. Alternatively, an avoidant coping style disrupts proper development of feelings of emotional connectedness and creates and inflated view of the self. This method of coping leads to externalizing behaviors such as exploration and aggressiveness (Finnegan et al., 1996).

Coping styles were measured using a self-report questionnaire format similar to the one developed by Harter (1982). The "Coping Strategies Questionnaire" contains 36 items, which are broken into two scales of 18 items each. This questionnaire was designed to measure the preoccupied and avoidant styles of relating to mothers during everyday stressors. The children were asked to imagine that they were experiencing a specific event with their mother and to describe how they thought they might respond.

Results demonstrated that both girl's and boy's externalized problems were predicted by avoidant coping but not by preoccupied coping, as predicted. Boys' internalizing difficulties were better predicted by preoccupied coping style than by avoidant coping styles. Internalizing problems associated with boys' preoccupied coping style mediates the boy's victimization by peers. That is, a preoccupied coping style leads to internalizing behaviors, which in turn, leads to victimization. It appears that internalizing behaviors suggest or signal vulnerability to potential aggressors. Girls' internalizing problems were not predicted from the coping measures. Finnegan et al., (1996) concluded that internalizing symptoms derived from preoccupied coping may be perceived as gender-inappropriate in boys creating the gender difference. For example, it is more gender acceptable for girls to be timid and shy whereas these same attributes in a boy may cause his peers to tease or pick on him.

In 1999 Hodges, Finnegan, and Perry purposed that children with skewed autonomy had adjustment difficulties when relating to their mothers. Skewed autonomy refers to any extreme in autonomous behavior, be it seeking too much separation or being too clingy to mother or father. Within a 1-year time period, the same children from the Finnegan et al., 1996 were retested. At this point, children were reassessed for avoidant and preoccupied attachments towards their mothers. Children again completed reports of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. It was hypothesized that a skewed autonomous relationship places children at risk of experiencing adjustment difficulties over time. Results from this longitudinal design demonstrated that having a skewed parent-child relationship puts the child at risk for future maladjustment. These findings confirmed

that skewed-autonomy relatedness should serve as a risk indicator of future maladjusted relationships.

Another purpose of Hodges et al., 1999 was to examine questions about continuity (consistency) and discontinuity (inconsistency) in children's relationship stances according to who the relationship was with. Children's preoccupied and avoidant styles were no longer confined to their mother, but were now open to their father and a close same-gender best friend. The three issues examined were the degree of association between the skew of mother and the skew of father, whether preoccupied and avoidant stances were evident in children's same-gender-friendships and if so, how related was that stance towards the parents, and if preoccupied and avoidant stances are present to what degree does the skew between friendships relate to skew between the child-parent relationships? Results demonstrated a high positive correlation between children's perception of mother-child attachment and father-child attachment, suggesting that the child's parents share similarities in various rearing practices. Also found was evidence that these similarities were also present among close same-gendered friends. A child's relationship with their same-gender friend was predictable based on their parent's stance.

Lieberman et al., (1999) studied developmental changes in attachment security during the transition from middle childhood to early adolescence. It was hypothesized that as children's autonomy develops from childhood to early adolescence, they will be less dependent on their parents, with girls especially being less dependent on their fathers. This shift in autonomy was expected to occur even though the parent's availability remained stable. Difference in mother and father attachment security as a function of the child's age was also explored.

Lieberman et al., (1999) also examined differences in attachment security to mother and father (i.e., parental availability and dependency on the parent when in need of help) with children's friendships (i.e., presence of reciprocated friendships and friendship quality) and popularity. It was hypothesized that children who reported being securely attached to their parents would have more reciprocated close friendships, experience greater peer acceptance, and report their friendships as providing them with security and companionship and reduced incidence of conflict.

In order to examine parent-child attachments, Lieberman et al., (1999) divided the KSS measure into two scales. The Dependency Scale indicated whether children sought or needed their parents' help (nine items). The availability scale, measured the children's perception of their parent's availability (six items). Both scales had acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha α coefficients of .85 and .74, respectively, for mother and .87 and .77, respectfully for father. See Appendix (D) for subscale items.

Reciprocated friendship was measured by providing the children with a list of their classmates and asking them to write the name of their same-gender best friend or the children that they like to "hang out" with most at school, with the most liked friend being listed first. The nominations were considered a reciprocated friendship if two children listed one another in their top three choices (Bukowski and Hoza, 1989).

Friendship quality was measured using the 23 item Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski and Hoza, 1989). The scale is composed of the following five attributes of friendship quality: companionship (e.g., I spend all of my free time with my friend), help (e.g., I can get help from my friend if I need it), closeness (e.g., If my friend moved away

I would miss him), security (e.g., If something was wrong at home or school I could talk to my friend about it), and conflict (e.g., I can get into a disagreement with my friend).

Lieberman et al., 1999 did not find any age differences in the perceived availability of their mother for boys or girls. Results demonstrated that dependency on parents decreases for boys and girls, indicating that parental help may be less needed; nonetheless, their findings showed that when the children did need help, they felt that they could rely on their parents, particularly their mother for comfort. Contrary to their hypothesis, the presence or absence of a reciprocated friendship was not associated with the security of the attachment to the mother or father. Popularity was related to the security of attachment to either parent.

Security of attachment was associated with friendship quality, with positive friendship qualities (e.g., help, closeness, and security) being related to the overall security of attachment to mother and father. It was also found that the relation of mother-child dependency to positive friendship qualities varied as a function of the mother's availability. Children who reported their mothers to be available had an overall low dependency on her, which was associated with more positive friendship qualities. Thus, children with higher quality attachments to their mother may depend on their friends for help in certain situations, but feel sure that their mother will be available should they need her.

Additionally, as expected children who had a more secure attachment to their mother and father experienced less conflict in their friendships. These finding suggest that as a result of the positive relationship the child shares with her parents, the greater

her understanding and controlling of her negative affect and expression of her positive affect with close peers.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was first to replicate existing research into children's understanding of different types of close peer relationships (i.e., least liked friends and very best friends) and to replicate existing research on developmental and gender differences in children's perceptions of parental security. A second purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between children's perceptions of their parental security and the quality of their close peers. To date, no research has been conducted investigating the relationship between children's perceptions of their parental security and the quality of different types of close peer relationships (i.e., least liked friends and very best friends). Thus, children's perception of parental security with both their mother and father was assessed and the quality of their relationships with a self-nominated classroom least liked friend and very best friend was investigated.

Relationship Quality. Based on previous research investigating relationship quality differences between least liked friends and very best friends (e.g., Cleary, Ray, LoBello, & Zachar, 2002; Meurling, et al., 1999) it was predicted that children would evaluate their best friends higher than their friends on the quality dimensions of Caring, Companionship, Conflict Resolution, Intimacy, and Exclusivity.

Parental Security. Based on previous research investigating changes in children's perceptions of their parental security (e.g., Kerns, 1996; Lieberman et al., 1999) it was predicted that dependency on parents would be greater for younger children (Grade 2-3) than for older children (Grade 5-6). Further, children were predicted to perceive their

mothers to be more available than their fathers. Lastly, Grade 5-6 girls were hypothesized to perceive their fathers as being less available than were Grade 2-3 girls.

Linkages between Perceptions of Parental Security and Relationship Quality. Based on past research (e.g., Kerns et al., 1996; Lieberman et al., 1999) it was hypothesized that the more securely attached a child is to their mother and father, the higher the quality the relationships would be with the child's Least Liked Friend and Very Best friend. Additionally, given that previous research has demonstrated that parent-child security is related to close peers and not popularity, it was predicted that the relationship between attachment and close peers would be greater for very best friends than for least liked friends. Because younger children are more dependent on their parents than older children, and given that younger children evaluate their peers more positively than do older children, it was hypothesized that the relationship between attachment and relationship quality would be stronger for Grade 2-3 children compared to Grade 5-6 children.

Method

Participants

Of the original 117 participants, 11 participants were omitted from the data

analysis because of incomplete data. The resulting sample contains 106 participants (53

from the second and third grades mean age = 8.1 years, and 53 from the fifth and sixth

grades mean age =11.4 years) from a public elementary school in Montgomery, AL.

Participants returned a signed parental consent form and children also gave their own

written consent (see Appendix A). Children were informed that their participation in this

study was not related to their school work and that they were free to stop participating in

the study at any time without penalty.

Design

The study had two between-participants variables: Grade and Gender; and two

within participant variables: Relationship Type (Least Liked Friend and Very Best

Friend) and Attachment Figure (Mother and Father). Dependent variables were the

relationship quality scores and the security scores which are detailed below. In one

supplemental analysis, Security Dimension (Availability and Dependability) was used as

an additional within-participants variable in order to examine the relative importance of

the two security dimensions.

Materials

Each child completed six questionnaires. The first questionnaire identified same-

gender classroom least liked friends and a same-gender classroom very best friend. The

second questionnaire asked children to evaluate how much they liked each of their same-

gender classmates. The third and fourth questionnaires assessed the quality of each of the

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child's relationships: one for their least liked friend and one for their very best friend. The fifth and sixth questionnaires assessed the parent-child attachments: one for mother and one for father.

Relationship Nomination Questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to identify same-gender classroom Least Liked Friends and same-gender classroom Very Best Friends (as in Cleary, et al., 2002 & Meurling et al., 1999; see Appendix B). Two forms of the questionnaire were used, one for boys and one for girls, both of which consisted of a roster of the child's same-gender classmates. The child was asked to circle the names of all his or her friends, and then placed an "X" next to his or her very best friend's name, even if the name was not circled. This measure allowed the child's classroom least liked friends and classroom very best friends to be identified.

Relationship Rating Questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to assesses the degree of liking for each of his or her same-gender classmates (see Appendix C). This instrument uses a six-point Likert rating scale, ranging from 1 (Like very little) to 6 (Like very much). A roster of the names of all of the same-gender classmates was presented to the child and the child was asked to evaluate how much he liked each classmate using the number scale at the top of the page.

Classroom Friend and Classroom Best Friend Selection. Using the relationship nomination questionnaire and the relationship rating questionnaire, a same-gender classroom Least Liked Friend and same-gender classroom Very Best Friend was selected for each child. The two relationships selected were the child's identified very best friend from the relationship nomination questionnaire and the nominated least liked friend with the lowest Likert rating from the relationship rating questionnaire. This was done to

maximize potential differences between a Least Liked Friend and Very Best Friend. In the event of a tie between Likert ratings for the least liked friend, the least liked friend was selected using a table of random numbers.

Kerns Security Scale. The function of this questionnaire was to tap children's perceptions of security to their mother and father. The content of this scale reflected aspects of security present during middle childhood. Children were asked to rate their felt levels of security for both their mothers and fathers separately (see Appendix D). As described in the introduction, the KSS is broken into two components; dependency (nine items) which determined whether adolescents sought their mothers when they were in need of help and availability (six items) which determined if the parents were available to the child. Previous research demonstrates that both the dependency and availability scales are internally consistent with Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) of .85 and .74, respectively for mother, and .87 and .77, respectively for the father (Lieberman et al., 1999). There was only a moderate correlation between the scales, r(541)= .51, $p < .001$, for mother, and r(533) = .64, $p < .001$, for father (Lieberman et al., 1999). These findings represent a distinction between the dimensions of attachment, with higher scores indicating a greater dependence on parents for help and greater availability of the parents

For the present study, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients (α) for children's perceptions of mother's dependability and availability and security were .73, .49, and .71, respectively. For father, reliability coefficients were .77, .64, and .83, for dependability, availability and total security, respectively. The correlation between the two subscales was r(106) = .33, $p< .001$, for perceptions of security to mom, and r(104)= .65, $p < .001$, for perceptions of security to dad. Each child received a dependency score composed of

the average of the dependency items, an availability score composed of the average of all availability items, and a total security score composed of the average of all items.

Relationship Quality Questionnaire. Children's understanding of relationship quality was assessed using a modified version of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Meurling et al., 1999) originally developed by Parker and Asher (1993). The Relationship 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 E for the RQQ and Appendix F for the RQQ reliability coefficients). Each child received seven quality dimension scores composed of an average of the three items that make up each dimension. Similar to previous research on relationship quality (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993; Ray & Cohen, 1996), the name of each child's Least Liked Friend and Very Best Friend was embedded into every item on the respective questionnaires to discourage participants from evaluating and responding to the items based on an idealized or prototypical mental representation of friendship.

Procedure

Each child was individually interviewed in a quiet area outside his or her classroom in one 20-30 minute session. Each of the six questionnaires was completed during this time. Children first completed the Relationship Nomination Questionnaire and then the Relationship Rating Questionnaire. Once the relationships were identified, children completed the two Relationship Quality Questionnaires; one for Least Liked Friends and one for Very Best Friends. Lastly, children completed the two security scales; one for mother and one for father. Order of presentation of the two Relationship

Quality questionnaires and the two security questionnaires were counter balanced to control for recency and practice effects. After all of the tasks were completed, the child was thanked for his or her participation, asked if there were any questions, and returned to his or her classroom by the experimenter.

Results

To examine grade effects with ample group size, the four grade levels have been combined into two larger age levels, creating a younger group (Grades 2-3; mean age = 8.1 years) and an older group (Grades 5-6; mean age = 11.4 years).

For analysis regarding relationship quality, Grade and Gender were between-participants variables and Relationship Quality Dimension and Relationship Type were within-participant variables. Thus a 2 (Grade) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Relationship Type: Least Liked Friends/Very Best Friends) x 7 (Quality Dimension) mixed factorial ANOVA was performed. For analysis pertaining to perceptions of parental security, a pair of 2 (Grade) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Gender of Parent) mixed factorial ANOVAs were conducted, one for perceptions of availability and one for perceptions of dependency. For all ANOVAs, follow up tests to statistically significant interactions were conducted as tests for simple effects followed by Neuman Keuls post hoc tests to determine sources of difference where appropriate. For analysis investigating the linkages between perceptions of parental security and relationship quality, a series of Pearson correlations (r) were conducted.

Relationship Quality. Hypothesis 1, predicting that children would evaluate their Very Best Friends higher than their Least Liked Friends on the various relationship quality dimensions was supported. Analysis revealed a significant Relationship Type x Quality Dimension interaction, $F(6, 612) = 7.57$, $p < .001$. All children evaluated the relationship with their Very Best Friend more positively than the relationship with their Least Liked Friend for all seven dimensions (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations).

Table 1: *Relationship Quality Dimensions: Relationship Quality Type x Quality Dimension Interaction*

Dimensions	Least Liked Friend Mean (SD)	Very Best Friend Mean (SD)
Caring	2.64 (1.56)	3.94 (1.24)
Conflict Resolution	2.43 (1.62)	3.54 (1.43)
Betrayal	3.01 (1.17)	4.06 (1.19)
Help	2.13 (1.61)	3.39 (1.46)
Companionship	2.13 (1.59)	3.96 (1.11)
Intimacy	1.77 (1.57)	2.85 (1.55)
Exclusivity	2.16 (1.59)	3.93 (1.20)

Analysis also reveled a Grade x Quality Dimension interaction, $F_{(6,612)} = 4.61$, $p < .001$. Grade 2-3 children evaluated the dimensions of caring, intimacy, and exclusivity as being more important than did Grade 5-6 children (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations).

Table 2: *Relationship Quality Dimensions: Grade x Quality Dimension Interaction*

Dimension	Grade 2-3 Mean (SD)	Grade 5-6 Mean (SD)
Caring	3.55 (1.12)	3.03 (1.13)
Conflict Resolution	2.94 (148)	3.04 (1.06)
Betrayal	3.39 (1.27)	3.68 (1.17)
Help	2.96 (1.39)	2.56 (1.26)
Companionship	3.23 (1.14)	2.85 (0.99)
Intimacy	2.62 (1.22)	2.00 (1.16)
Exclusivity	3.24 (1.21)	2.74 (0.98)

Analysis also revealed a Gender x Quality Dimension interaction, $F(6, 612) = 4.11, p < .001$. Girls evaluated the dimension of intimacy as being more important in their close peer relationships than did boys. No other gender differences emerged (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations).

Table 3: *Relationship Quality Dimensions: Gender x Quality Dimension Interaction*

Dimension	Girls Mean (SD)	Boys Mean (SD)
Caring	3.47 (1.10)	3.08 (1.19)
Conflict Resolution	3.09 (1.39)	2.87 (1.16)
Betrayal	3.53 (1.14)	3.54 (1.32)
Help	3.81 (1.34)	2.71 (1.24)
Companionship	2.90 (1.14)	3.21 (0.99)
Intimacy	2.62 (1.25)	1.96 (1.17)
Exclusivity	2.91 (1.26)	3.20 (0.97)

Analysis also revealed a Grade x Relationship Type interaction, $F (1, 102) = 4.22$, $p < .05$. While no grade differences emerged with regard to evaluations of Best Friends, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their Least Liked Friend more positively than did Grade 5-6 children. Further, all children evaluated their Very Best Friend more positively than their Least Liked Friend (see Table 4 for means and standard deviations).

Table 4: *Relationship Quality Dimensions: Grade x Relationship Type Interaction*

Type	Grade 2-3	Grade 5-6
Least Liked Friend	2.60 (1.23)	2.05 (1.05)
Very Best Friend	3.69 (0.91)	3.64 (0.81)

In summary, analysis of relationship quality revealed that children evaluated their Very Best Friends more positively than their Least Liked Friends. Additionally, gender differences emerged with girls evaluating their close peer relationships as being more intimate than did boys. Lastly, developmental trends emerged with Grade 2-3 children evaluating their Least Liked Friends more positively than did Grade 5-6 children. Specifically, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their close peer relationships to be more caring, more intimate, and more exclusive than did Grade 5-6 children.

Evaluations of Parental Security. Hypothesis 2, predicting that dependency on parents would be greater for grade 2-3 children than for Grade 5-6 children was supported. Analysis revealed a Grade main effect, F (1, 102) = 10.43, $p<.05$. Grade 2-3 children (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.36) evaluated their parents as being more dependable than did Grade 5-6 children (Mean = 3.13, SD = 0.52).

Analysis also revealed a Target main effect, F (1, 102) = 7.10, $p<.05$. Children evaluated their mothers (Mean = 3.37, SD = 0.51) as more dependable than their fathers (Mean = 3.18, SD =0.64).

Hypothesis 3, predicting children would evaluate their mothers to be more available than their fathers was partially supported. Analysis revealed a Grade x Target interaction, F (1, 102) = 4.92, $p<.05$ (see table 5 for means and standard deviations). Results implicate that mothers were evaluated as more available than were fathers, but only for Grade 5-6 children.

Table 5: *Perceptions of Parental Availability: Grade x Target Interaction*

Target	Grade 2-3	Grade 5-6
Mother	3.26 (0.53)	3.38 (0.58)
Father	3.17 (0.59)	2.97 (0.77)

Analysis also revealed a Gender main effect, F (1, 102) =6.29, $p<.05$. Boys (Mean= 3.32, SD=.42) evaluated their parents as being more available than did girls (Mean= 3.08, SD=.53).

Hypothesis 4, predicting that Grade 5-6 girls would perceive their fathers as being less available than Grade 2-3 girls was not supported.

Additional Analyses on evaluation of Parental Security. To directly compare the two dimensions of security (dependability and availability), an additional analysis was conducted to assess the relative importance of the security dimensions. Thus a 2 (Grade) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Target) x 2 (Security Dimension) mixed factorial ANOVA was performed with Target (mother, father) and Security Dimension (dependability, availability) being within-participant variables. Analysis revealed a Gender x Target x Security Dimension interaction, F (1, 102) = 5.85, $p<.01$, (see tables 7, 8, and 9 for means and standard deviations).

As shown in table 6, girls evaluated their relationships to be more secure with their mothers compared to their fathers, while no differences emerged for boys.

Table 6: *Perceptions of Security: Gender x Target Interaction.*

Target	Girls	Boys
Mother	3.31 (0.44)	3.40 (0.43)
Father	3.04 (0.58)	3.25 (0.61)

Further, as revealed in the analysis on Availability only, boys evaluated their parents as being more available than did girls (see Table 7). And, while no security dimension differences emerged for boys, girls evaluated their parents as more dependable than available.

Table 7: *Perceptions of Security: Gender x Dimension Interaction.*

Dimension	Girls	Boys
Dependability	3.24 (0.47)	3.33 (0.47)
Availability	3.08 (0.53)	3.33 (0.46)

As demonstrated in Table 8, children evaluated their mothers to be both more dependable and more available than their fathers. While no security dimension differences emerged for mother, fathers were perceived as being more dependable than they were available (see Table 8 for means and standard deviations).

Table 8: *Perceptions of Security: Target x Dimension Interaction.*

Dimension	Mother	Father
Dependability	3.37 (0.37)	3.18 (0.63)
Availability	3.32 (0.56)	3.07 (0.69)

Analysis also revealed a Grade x Security Dimension interaction, F (1, 102) = 9.79, $p<.05$. Grade 2-3 children demonstrated greater dependability on their parents than did Grade 5-6 children, while no grade differences emerged on the availability dimension. Further, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents to be more dependable than available, while no differences emerged for Grade 5-6 children (see Table 9 for means and standard deviations).

Table 9: *Perceptions of Security: Grade x Dimension Interaction.*

Dimension	Grade 2-3	Grade 5-6
Dependability	3.43 (0.36)	3.13 (0.52)
Availability	3.21 (0.43)	3.17 (0.59)

In summary, with regard to children's perceptions of parental security, Grade, Gender, and Target differences emerged. Specifically, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents as being more dependable than did Grade 5-6 children. Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents as being more dependable than available and, Grade 5-6 children evaluated their mothers as being more available than their fathers. Gender differences

also emerged, with girls evaluating their mothers as more available than their fathers. Girls also evaluated their parents as more dependable than available and boys evaluated their parents to be more available than did girls. Lastly, while mothers were perceived to be equally dependable and available, fathers were perceived to be more dependable than they were available. Further, mothers were evaluated as being both more dependable and more available than were fathers.

Linkages between Relationship Quality and Perceptions of Parental Security. For hypothesis 5, predicting a positive association to exist between perceptions of parental security and relationship quality, a Pearson (r) correlation was performed. Specifically, perceptions of parental security (mother & father combined) correlated with relationship quality (Least Like Friend & Very Best Friend combined) revealed a positive correlation, $r(104) = .25, p < .05$. Thus, this hypothesis was supported.

As an additional analysis, Table 11 provides a series of Pearson (r) correlations investigating the association between perceptions of security to mom and the various relationship quality dimensions (Least Liked Friend and Very Best Friend) and perceptions of security to dad and the various relationship quality dimensions (Least Liked Friend and Very Best Friend).

Table 10: *Linkages between Relationship Quality and Perceptions of Parental Security*

Quality Dimensions	Mother	Father
Caring		
Least Liked Friend	0.04	0.17
Very Best Friend	**0.23**	0.07
Conflict Resolution		
Least Liked Friend	0.12	0.14
Very Best Friend	**0.20**	0.04
Betrayal		
Least Liked Friend	0.13	0.14
Very Best Friend	0.14	0.03
Help		
Least Liked Friend	-0.01	0.16
Very Best Friend	**0.19**	0.18
Companionship		
Least Liked Friend	0.08	**0.24**
Very Best Friend	**0.29**	0.05
Intimacy		
Least Liked Friend	0.02	0.12
Very Best Friend	**0.21**	-0.10
Exclusivity		
Least Liked Friend	0.14	**0.19**
Very Best Friend	**0.25**	0.04

While not part of the original hypotheses of the current study, Table 10 reveals that the relationship between perceptions of parental security and perceptions of peer quality were not consistent across parental Targets (mothers, fathers) or Relationship Type (Least Liked Friend, Very Best friend). That is, perceptions of security to mother were correlated with Very Best Friend quality and not with Least Liked Friend quality. Further, perceptions of security to father were correlated with Least Liked Friend quality and not Very Best Friend quality.

For hypothesis 6, predicting that the parental security- Very Best Friend quality relationship would be greater than the parental security-Least Liked Friend quality relationship was not supported. As shown in Table 11, the correlation coefficient for the

security-Very Best Friend quality relationship was .20 and the correlation coefficient for the security-Least Liked Friend quality relationship was .21.

Table 11: *Correlations of Perceptions of Parental Security and Relationship Quality*

Security	Least Liked Friend	Very Best Friend
Total Security	.21	.20
Mom Security	.10	.32
Father Security	.23	.05

As an additional analysis, the relative strength of the parental security-Very Best Friend quality relationship compared to the parental security-Least Liked Friend quality relationship was analyzed separately: one for perceptions of security to mother, and one for perceptions of security to father. As shown in Table 11, the correlation coefficients for perceptions of security to mother and Very Best Friend quality were .32 and .10 for Least Liked Friend Quality. To directly compare the correlation coefficients, a Hotelling t was used for testing the difference between dependant correlations (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). Analysis revealed that for perceptions of security to mother, the relationship between parental security-Very Best Friend quality was higher than the relationship between parental security-Least Liked Friend quality, $t(104)= 1.99, p<.05$. Interestingly, no differences emerged for perceptions of security to father. Further, it is important to note that these are relatively low correlations. For example, the largest coefficient of determination is $.32^2 = .10$. Thus the relationship between perceptions of security and relationship quality is relatively small, meaning that they share little variance.

For hypothesis 7, predicting that the relationship between perceptions of parental security and relationship quality would be greater for Grade 2-3 children $r(51) = .15$ compared to Grade 5-6 children $r(51) = .28$ was not supported.

Discussion

According to attachment research children who share a secure mother-child attachment may have expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that assist them in their own peer relationships outside the family (Putallaz & Heflin, 1990, Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). Research has been successful in validating the hypothesis that the more secure the child's attachment is, the more positive their peer relations are expected to be (Putallaz & Heflin 1990; Sroufe & Flesson, 1986; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). However, few researchers have focused on children's understanding of different types of close peer relationships or investigated the developmental and gender differences in children's perceptions of parental security. Therefore, the present study investigated the relationship between children's perceptions of their parental attachment and the quality of different types of close peer relationships (i.e., least liked friends and very best friends). What follows is a discussion of the hypotheses of the current study, including limitations and areas for future research.

The prediction that children would evaluate their very best friend higher than their least liked friend on the quality dimensions of Caring, Companionship, Conflict Resolution, Intimacy, and Exclusivity was supported. All children evaluated all dimensions of quality more positively for their Very Best Friend than their Least Liked Friend. Consistent with Meurling et al., (1999) it was hypothesized that children would evaluate their Very Best Friend higher than their Least Liked Friend, however the current study revealed that Very Best Friends were evaluated higher than their Least Liked Friends on all dimensions of the RQQ.

The hypothesis that Grade 2-3 children would be more dependent on their parents than Grade 5-6 children was supported and is consistent with Lieberman et al., (1999) demonstrating that younger children were more dependant on their parents than were older children. The present study also extends previous research as well. Participants in the Lieberman et al., (1999) study were a younger group (ages 9-11) and an older group (ages 12-14). Thus not only is there a shift in independence from childhood to adolescence as evidenced in the Lieberman et al., (1999) study, the present study demonstrated that older elementary school age children (Grades 5-6) are more independent than younger elementary school age children (Grades 2-3).

Further, all children perceived their mother as being more dependable than their father. Thus, all children tend to rely on their mothers more often than their fathers when help is needed. Perhaps mothers are looked to most often for assistance because they typically assume the role of primary caregivers regardless if the child's father is present or not.

The hypothesis predicting that all children would evaluate their mothers as being more available than their fathers was supported for Grade 5-6 children only. Perhaps Grade 5-6 children are becoming curious about many things, some of which may be embarrassing to discuss. For example, questions may emerge regarding puberty and sex. It is possible that Grade 5-6 children believe their mothers will be more sensitive to their curiosity thus, children interpret their interactions with their mothers as being more comfortable. Another possibility for the difference demonstrated between mother and father availability may be that fathers view their parenting role differently as their children grow older. That is, fathers may be fostering more independence in older

children by being less available. It will be important for future research to investigate "why" children evaluate their fathers as being less available compared to mothers.

Additionally, girls evaluated their relationships with their mother to be more secure than their relationship with their fathers and also evaluated their parents to be more dependable than available. It may be that girls evaluated their relationships with their mothers to be more secure than their relationship with their fathers because their mother provided more care than their father. That is, mothers are usually the primary caregiver, even when mother works outside the home. Thus the majority of the child's interactions are with mother and this may account for the findings that girls are more securely attached to mother compared to father. It is interesting to note that boys were equally secure to both mother and father.

All children evaluated their mother to be more dependable and available than their father. Perhaps children perceive their mother as being more dependable and available than their father because their mothers more readily come to their aid when they are in need. That is, throughout their lives their mothers have been there for them when they needed her regardless if they had an accident in bed at night or if they felt like they did not "fit in" with their peers. Again, as discussed earlier, it is likely that children may feel more comfortable in a variety of situations with their mothers than they would with their fathers.

Further, Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents as being more dependable than available. Perhaps Grade 2-3 children evaluated their parents as being more dependable because younger children are beginning to recognize a distinction between dependability and availability. These children may now understand the idea that a caregiver can be

depended on if they need them even if they are not right there when the initial concern arises.

The hypothesis that Grade 5-6 girls would perceive their fathers as being less available compared to Grade 2-3 girls was not supported. The lack of support for this Grade by Gender interaction could have resulted because of the closeness in age of the two Grade groups of the current study. That is, this hypothesis was based on the Lieberman et al., (1999) study that included much older children (ages 9-14) than the current study.

The hypothesis regarding linkages between perceptions of parental security and close peer quality was successful. As perceptions of security increased so to did evaluations of relationship quality. This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., Freitag et al., 1996; Kerns et al., 1996) documenting the association between parent-child relationships and the child's social relationships outside the home. While it has been theorized that the parent-child attachment relationship serves as a prototype for the establishment of relationships for the child outside the home (i.e., the internal working model), the current study is only more evidence that the child's family relationships are related systematically to the child's social world outside the family. It will be important for future research to examine, from a causal standpoint how these social relationships influence each other as theorized by the internal working model.

The hypothesis that the relationship between perceptions of security and close peer quality would be greater for very best friends than for least liked friends was not supported. Further the prediction that the relationship between perceptions of parental security and close peer quality would be greater for Grade 2-3 children than for Grade 5-

6 children was not supported. Perhaps as discussed above Grade differences would have emerged if greater age ranges were used. Or perhaps, even though younger children are more dependent of their parents than are older children, this does not also translate into a greater influence on younger children's peer relationships compared to the influence that parental security has on older children's peer relationships.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the current study was that children's perceptions of security to mother was correlated only with best friend quality while perceptions of security to father was correlated only with friend quality. It is possible that these links between mothers and Best Friends exist because mothers model more nurturing and close intimate relationships while fathers tend to model more playful and less intense relationships as customary in friendships. That is, perhaps some of these differences could be explained by the general model used in the infant attachment literature that conceptualize mother as the "caregiver" and father as the "playmate" (Berk, 1996). It is easy to understand given the mother's primary role in all aspects of develop how this parental figure would facilitate deep close interpersonal relationships. Further, documentation on father attachment demonstrates that children securely attached to their fathers are more sociable outside the family than are children insecurely attached to their fathers. Thus the relationship between perceptions of security to father and friend qualities is understandable. More research is needed to explain "why" perceptions of security to mother relate only to the child's best friends and perceptions of security to father relate only to the child's friends.

There are several apparent limitations to the current study. First, children were asked to complete questionnaires on their Friends and Best Friend; however they were

limited to classroom Friends and Best Friends. Perhaps a child's Best Friend is not in their class. Thus, it will be important for future research to allow children to answer relationship quality questions on the Friends and Best Friend of their choice, regardless if they are in their classroom or not. This becomes important particularly if the goal of the study is to maximize potential differences between different types of positive peer relationships. Second, children were the only source of information for the current study. It will be important for future research to receive input from teachers as well as parents to gain a more thorough understanding of the relationships between Friendship Quality and Parental Security. Third, friends and best friends were given the same questionnaire to evaluate the quality of their relationships. It will be important for future researchers to investigate the possible differences between Friendship Quality and Best Friend Quality. Fourth, the current study investigated Friendship Quality and Security only in dual parent households. It will be important for future researchers to investigate Relationship Quality and Security in single parent households. Lastly, the reliability for the Availability subscale for Mothers was low (α=.49) suggesting heterogeneity with regard to this construct. Findings using this measure need to be interpreted with this information in mind and future research is needed to clarify this issue.

In conclusion, one might expect children to evaluate their best friends more positively than their friends simply because "best" signifies that this particular friendship is better than any other. Further, it may even be expected that children would evaluate their mothers as being more dependable and available than their fathers considering they spend the majority of their time with her particularly when they are young. It was however unexpected that differences between the relationships of friends and best friends

qualities would vary with regard to parental gender. As demonstrated through the present study as well as Lieberman et al., 1999 we see that parental security and positive peer relationships are centered around one another, making the role of the parent more important than previously acknowledged. It is now apparent that this relationship not only affects the children in their home environment, but it also extends to their formation of social networks; thus, the need for collaboration between parents and teachers will become more important than ever. That is both parties will begin acknowledging the onset of problems either in the home or with the children's friendships, reducing the number of damaging relationships that children will endure. Although it is too early to simplify Security as being the most important factor in children's peer relationship formation, it will be important for future research to determine its impact.

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Appendix A

Auburn University at Montgomery
Informed Consent

Children's Friendship Project

Angela Kiel (graduate student researcher)
Dr. Glen E. Ray (faculty supervisor)

Your child is being invited to participate in a project looking at children's friendships. We hope to learn more about how the relationship between parents and children affect children's relationships with their 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 spend a few moments familiarizing your child with the necessary tasks, which include filling out friendship nomination questionnaires and answering questions about different qualities of their relationships with parents and friends. There are no apparent risks to children; names of participants will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will your child leave the school. The study will be performed in a quiet hallway outside your child's classroom at a time scheduled by your child's teacher. The interview will take about 20-30 minutes. All information obtained by this project will remain confidential. All data will be grouped together and no individuals will be identified by name on any reports.

Your decision whether to participate will in no way prejudice your relationships with Dannelly Elementary School. If you decide to allow your child to participate, your child will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

This project has the approval of the principal, Judy Crockett. If you have any questions, we expect you to ask us. If you have additional questions later, please contact Angela Kiel (280-0435) angel1ofakind@yahoo.com or Dr. Glen E. Ray (244-3306) gray@mail.aum.edu and we will be happy to answer them.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICPATE, 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:_____

Witness:_____Date:_____

Appendix A

Participating Child's Assent/Consent Form

Today, I am doing a project about children's friendships and I would like you to help me. I want to know how you think about your friends here at school. To tell me about your friends, you will be filling out some questionnaires. There are no right or wrong answers and this is not a test. Once we get started, you can stop at any time if you want to. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Child's Signature:_____

Appendix B

Relationship Nomination Questionnaire

*Participant's Name:*_____ *23456 BG*   *Today's Date:*___/___/___

Teacher's Name:_____   Date of Birth:___/___/___

*Age:*___

Instructions: Here is a list of names of all the boys and girls in your class. First, find your name on the list and mark a line through it. Second, circle the names of all of your friends. Then, put an "X" next to the name of your very best friend in the class.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

(Numbers show place holdings only and will not be present on actual questionnaire.)

Appendix C

Relationship Rating Questionnaire

*Participant's Name:*_____ *23456 BG*   *Today's Date:*___/___/___

Teacher's Name:_____   Date of Birth:___/___/___

*Age:*___

Instructions: First, find your name and mark a line through it. Second, I want you to think about how much you like all your classmates. Try to think of each of your classmates as they are right now and how important they are to you. Use the numbers below to tell me.

Like Very Little	*Don't Like*	*Dislike a Little*	*Like a Little*	*Like*	*Like Very Much*
1	2	3	4	5	6

1._____   1 2 3 4 5 6

2._____   1 2 3 4 5 6

3._____   1 2 3 4 5 6

Etc.

Appendix D

Kerns Security Scale

1. Some kids find it easy to trust their mom (dad)   BUT   Other kids are not sure if they can trust their mom (dad).

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

2. Some kids feel like their mom (dad) butts in a lot when they are trying to do things   BUT   Other kids feel like their mom (dad) lets them do things on their own.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

3. Some kids find it easy to count on their mom (dad) for help   BUT   Other kids think it's hard to count on their mom (dad).

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

4. Some kids think their mom (dad) spends enough time with them   BUT   Other kids think their mom (dad) does not spend enough time with them.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

5. Some kids do not really like telling their mom (dad) what they are thinking or feeling   BUT   Other kids do like telling their mom (dad) what they are thinking or feeling.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

6. Some kids do not really need their mom (dad) for much   BUT   Other kids need their mom (dad) for a lot of things.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

7. Some kids wish they were closer to their mom (dad)   BUT   Other kids are happy with how close they are to their mom (dad).

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

8. Some kids worry that their mom (dad) does not really love them   BUT   Other kids are <u>really</u> sure that their mom (dad) loves them.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

9. Some kids feel like their mom (dad) really understands them   BUT   Other kids feel like their mom (dad) does not really understand them.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

10. Some kids are really sure their mom (dad) would not leave them   BUT   Other kids sometimes wonder if their mom (dad) might leave them.

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

11. Some kids worry that their mom (dad) might not be there when they need her (him)   BUT   Other kids are sure their mom (dad) will be there when they need her (him).

Really True for me	Sort of True for		Sort of True for me	Really True for me

12. Some kids think their mom (dad) does   BUT   Other kids do think their mom
    not listen to them   (dad) listens to them.

Really	Sort of		Sort of	Really
True	True		True	True
for me	for		for me	for me

13. Some kids go to their mom (dad) when   BUT   Other kids do not go to their
    they are upset   mom (dad) when they are
                                                      upset.

Really	Sort of		Sort of	Really
True	True		True	True
for me	for		for me	for me

14. Some kids wish their mom (dad) would help   BUT   Other kids think their mom
    them more with their problems   (dad)helps them enough.

Really	Sort of		Sort of	Really
True	True		True	True
for me	for		for me	for me

15. Some kids feel better when their mom (dad)   BUT   Other kids do not feel better
    is around   when their mom dad is around.

Really	Sort of		Sort of	Really
True	True		True	True
for me	for		for me	for me

Dependability: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 15

Availability: 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14

Appendix E

Relationship Quality Questionnaire

Participant's Name:_____ 23456 BG   Today's Date:___/___/___

Teacher's Name:_____   Date of Birth:___/___/___

Age:___

Instruction: Use the numbers below to describe how important your friend (friend's name) is to you. Try to think of your friend as they are right now and not as you want them to be. Use the numbers below to tell me. Remember, this is about friend (friend's name) so make sure to think about them when you answer the questions.

Not at all True	Rarely True	A Little True	Somewhat True	Pretty True	Really True
0	1	2	3	4	5

1.____makes me feel good about my ideas.......................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

2.____and I make up easily when we fight........................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

3.____and I argue a lot... 0 1 2 3 4 5

4.____helps me so that I can get done quicker...................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

5.____and I always sit together at lunch............................. 0 1 2 3 4 5

6.____and I always tell each other our problems.................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

7.____likes me more than anybody else in class.................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

8.____tells me I'm good at things.................................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

9.____gets over our argument really quickly........................ 0 1 2 3 4 5

10.____and I help each other with school work a lot................. 0 1 2 3 4 5

11.____and I always pick each other as partners for things......... 0 1 2 3 4 5

12.____and I talk about things that make us sad..................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

13.____and I make each other feel important and special........... 0 1 2 3 4 5

14.____plays mostly with me on the playground..................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix E

15.____and I talk about how to get over being mad at each other.... ......0 1 2 3 4 5

16.____gets mad a lot.. 0 1 2 3 4 5

17.____gives me advise with figuring things out.......................... 0 1 2 3 4 5

18.____and I fight a lot... 0 1 2 3 4 5

19.____and I always play together at recess............................. 0 1 2 3 4 5

20. I talk to ____when I am mad about something that happens to me...0 1 2 3 4 5

21. I like____more than I like other kids................................ 0 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix F

Reliability Coefficients for the Modified Relationship

Quality Questionnaires

Dimension	Friend	Best Friend
Caring	0.7211	0.7017
Helping	0.7281	0.6488
Companionship	0.7429	0.5160
Intimacy	0.6891	0.6875
Exclusivity	0.7811	0.7300
Conflict Resolution	0.7346	0.6686
Betrayal	0.7906	0.5951
All Items	0.8833	0.8539