The authors propose that popularity and friendship are linked to different forms of adjustment and emotional well-being. A central point of their model is that friendship functions as an important mediator between popularity and loneliness in early adolescence.

Popularity, Friendship, and Emotional Adjustment During Early Adolescence

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Early adolescence is one of the most challenging developmental periods of the life span. During this time, the nature of interpersonal relationships changes as youngsters begin to function in a vast array of new environments. As part of these changes, the establishment of healthy relations with peers and the development of a sense of emotional well-being become increasingly important. In this chapter, we bring these two aspects of early adolescent development together to show how peer relations and emotional well-being are interrelated during this developmental period. In particular, we present a model of the associations between relationships with peers and feelings of belongingness and loneliness during early adolescence.

Our first goal in this chapter is to describe the two aspects of peer relations that have received the most attention in the social-developmental literature. These two constructs are popularity and friendship. In this discussion, we point to the conceptual distinctions between these two domains of experience with peers and we propose that they may become increasingly distinct forms of experience during adolescence. We also discuss the reasons why it is important to study popularity and friendship simultaneously. Next, we indicate why popularity and friendship are expected to be related to different aspects of adjustment. In this discussion,
we draw on theory taken from the work of Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) and Robert Weiss (1974). We then evaluate our model with two samples of early adolescent boys and girls. Finally, we discuss our findings and point to future directions in this area of research.

Theoretical and Empirical Background:
Peer Relations and Adjustment

Our research on the association between aspects of peer relations and emotional adjustment is embedded within the larger literature regarding the links between peer relations and adjustment. The overriding premise of our research is that relations with peers influence development. Several researchers (for example, Sullivan, 1953) have argued that peer relations during early adolescence play an important, if not essential, role in the development of several aspects of competence and well-being. A particular point of this work is that relations with peers provide experiences that cannot be found in relations with parents. Specifically, whereas parent-child relationships are defined by a hierarchy of social "unequals," peer relationships consist of interaction among "equals." As a consequence, peer relationships give early adolescents important opportunities to experience acceptance, validation, and closeness. For these reasons, Sullivan argued that peer and friendship relations in early adolescence constitute a person's first true interpersonal relationships and make a profound contribution to an early adolescent's sense of well-being.

In conjunction with this theoretical literature, there is a great deal of empirical evidence that measures of peer relations are associated with measures of adjustment (see Kupersmidt, Coie, and Dodge, 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987). Indeed, numerous studies have shown that indices of adjustment can be significantly predicted from measures of peer relations. The general conclusion from this literature is that children and adolescents who do not establish good relations with peers are more likely than other children to show behavioral and emotional problems during adulthood. The obvious question raised by these observations is, "How do relations with peers affect development and adjustment in children and adolescents?" This question is the centerpiece of our research program.

What Are the Basic Dimensions of Peer Relations? When describing the effects of peer relations, many investigators have distinguished between children's and adolescents' general experiences within the peer group and their experiences on the dyadic level with particular peers (Bukowski and Hoza, 1989; Parker and Asher, in press). The experiences at the group level fall under the heading of popularity and can be further broken down into the dimensions of acceptance (that is, how much a child is liked by members of the peer group) and rejection (that is, how much a child is disliked by members of the peer group). In contrast, the experi-
ences at the level of the dyad fall within the domain of friendship. Two aspects of friendship have been studied: whether a person has a mutual friendship relation with a peer and the qualities of the friendship relation. That is, whereas popularity refers to a child's general experiences at the level of the group, friendship refers to dyadic experiences with specific peers. It is important to note that popularity is a unilateral construct in that it refers to the view of the group toward the individual, and friendship is a bilateral construct because it refers to the relationship between two persons.

Measuring Popularity and Friendship. Because popularity and friendship are distinct constructs, they present different measurement requirements. Moreover, each of the constructs is in itself a multidimensional phenomenon. As pointed out above, there are two fundamental dimensions of popularity, acceptance and rejection. Acceptance and rejection are typically measured with nomination procedures in which children or adolescents indicate which of their peers they regard as best friends and which peers they do not like to be with. The number of times that a child is chosen as a friend is used as an index of acceptance, whereas the number of times that the child is chosen as a disliked peer is used as the index of rejection. These variables are often combined to form two higher-order measures known as impact and preference. Impact is the sum of acceptance and rejection and is an index of a child's visibility in the group. Preference is the difference between acceptance and rejection and is a measure of a child's relative likeableness.

Another means of measuring popularity is the rating scale. With this procedure, children indicate on a rating scale how much they like each of their peers. The mean of the ratings that a child or adolescent receives from peers is used as the index of popularity. Relative to nomination procedures, one drawback to the use of a mean received liking score is that it does not provide distinct indices of acceptance and rejection. Instead, the mean received liking score is probably best thought of as a construct equivalent of the preference score derived from nomination data. The important point, however, is that regardless of whether one uses a rating scale or a nomination technique, the essential feature of a popularity measure is that it represents the view of the group toward the individual.

Measures of friendship, in contrast, must reflect the properties of the relationship between two individuals. Two measures of friendship have been widely adopted. First, as an index of whether a child has a mutual friend, investigators determine whether the child makes a reciprocated friendship choice. That is, a child is regarded as having a mutual friend if he or she chooses as a best friend a peer who in turn chooses him or her as a best friend. One could adopt a very restrictive criterion whereby the reciprocated choice must be observed with the children's first friendship selection, or one could use a more liberal criterion such as accepting any
reciprocated choice regardless of whether it included first choices, second choices, and so on. The important point is that this index satisfies the definition of friendship in that it is dyadic (refers to the relationship between two people) and it refers to a child's relationship with a particular peer (a peer chosen as a best friend).

Second, investigators have recently gone beyond using just an index of whether a child has a friend by turning their attention to assessment of the qualities of these friendships. We (as well as others, for example, Parker and Asher, in press) have developed procedures for assessing the qualities of children's and adolescents' best friendships according to theoretically meaningful dimensions. In our scale (Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin, 1992), we assess five qualities of friendship: companionship, conflict, help and aid, security, and closeness. The strategy of friendship quality measures is to obtain an index of a child's impression of his or her relationship with a best friend. These measures are dyadic and bilateral in that they focus on the properties of the relationship between two individuals.

Association Between Popularity and Friendship. A final issue regarding the distinction between popularity and friendship is whether measures of these two constructs are empirically interrelated. Because popularity and friendship are distinct constructs, it is conceivable that a child who is popular may not have a mutual friend, and that a child who is unpopular may have a friendship relation. So it would seem that we should not expect measures of popularity and friendship to be related to each other. But there are other factors that would lead us to expect measures of popularity and friendship to be intercorrelated. Specifically, it is important to recognize that in order to have a mutual friend, a child must be liked by at least one other child. More important, children who are liked by many peers have more opportunities to form friendships than do children who are liked by few peers. Based on this logic, we can expect measures of popularity and friendship to show some level of interrelationship. Moreover, although popularity and friendship are conceptually distinct, both of these constructs are nevertheless related to liking. Accordingly, it is hard to imagine that there is no association between measures of popularity and measures of friendship.

In our research on this question of the link between measures of popularity and mutual friendship, we have found moderate levels of association (Bukowski, Newcomb, and Hoza, 1992). In four samples of school-age children and early adolescents, the correlation between measures of sociometric acceptance and measures of mutual friendship ranged between .38 and .49. Because each of these measures was derived from the same data (sociometric nominations), we were concerned that these correlations may have been artificially inflated. When we considered these same associations using a rating scale measure of popularity, the observed correlations were similar to those found with the nomination-based data.
Previous research indicated that popular children have more consistent friendship relations than do unpopular boys and girls. Specifically, Bukowski and Newcomb (1984) reported that friendship selections across a variety of intervals, ranging from one month to eighteen months, were more stable among popular children than among unpopular boys and girls. Taken together, these findings led to the conclusion that in spite of the conceptual distinctions between popularity and friendship, measures of these constructs are nevertheless interrelated.

Given the association between the measures of popularity and friendship, separate examination of each construct presents obvious confounds. For example, effects associated with popularity may actually be due to the fact that highly popular children are more likely to have mutual friends than are less popular children. To avoid this problem, investigators must simultaneously consider the effects of popularity and those of friendship. Only in this way can the unique and combined effects of these variables be adequately examined.

Popularity and Friendship in Adolescence

We next consider whether the association between peer relationships and adjustment changes with age.

Age Changes in Popularity and Friendship. According to theory, research, and children's comments about their peer relations, the relative importance of popularity and friendship changes across the childhood and adolescent years. The major change across these periods is an increase in the importance of interaction at the level of the dyad. For example, Sullivan (1953) proposed that for school-age children general acceptance by peers and inclusion in the "group" are of greatest concern. Exclusion from the group, he argued, can be devastating to a child's sense of well-being. At a later age, during preadolescence and early adolescence, the emphasis on peer relations shifts to dyadic experiences and relations with best friends. Sullivan believed that during early adolescence, friendship, rather than popularity, is centrally important to the development of a positive sense of well-being and adjustment. The particular qualities of friendship that he emphasized were closeness and security.

This increased emphasis on closeness and intimacy in friendship relations is also apparent in children's and early adolescents' descriptions of their friendships and discussions of the concept of friendship. Beginning with Bigelow (1977), many investigators have found that as children grow older, they attach increasing importance to the dyadic features of peer relations (Berndt, 1986; Bukowski, Newcomb, and Hoza, 1987; Furman and Bierman, 1984). Whereas young children typically say that play and companionship are the essential features of friendship relations, preadolescence and early adolescents emphasize the role of intimacy, loyalty,
trust, and closeness in relations with friends. This age-related trend appears to match the developmental shift described by Sullivan.

Research on the link between intimacy and outcome also suggests an age-related increase in the importance of friendship. Buhrmester (1990), for example, has shown that intimacy is more closely associated with feelings of affective well-being during adolescence than in prior developmental periods. These findings support the view that close friendship relations take on a new importance during early adolescence.

Friendship as a Mediator Between Popularity and Adjustment. Although the research discussed in the previous section seems to support the conclusion that popularity becomes less important for adjustment during adolescence, while friendship becomes more important, it is still difficult to argue that popularity is unrelated to adjustment in early adolescence. To the extent that popularity and friendship are conceptually and empirically linked, it is unreasonable to conclude that one of these phenomena is related to adjustment whereas the other is not.

There are at least four ways in which popularity and friendship may be related to adjustment. First, popularity and friendship may both be directly and uniquely related to adjustment. Second, popularity may be indirectly linked to adjustment via the association with friendship. That is, friendship may mediate the link between popularity and adjustment. Third, and the converse of the second alternative, popularity may be directly linked to adjustment, mediating the association between friendship and adjustment. Fourth, popularity and friendship may be associated with different aspects of adjustment. Each of these options is depicted in Figure 2.1.

The increased importance of friendship during adolescence argues against the third option stated above. Indeed, given the likely link between popularity and friendship and the increased importance of friendship during adolescence, we would expect popularity to be linked to adjustment via its association with friendship rather than the other way around. Moreover, that popular children are more likely to have friends than are unpopular children argues against the first option. Accordingly, we would expect (1) popularity to be linked to adjustment by means of the mediating effect of friendship and, perhaps, (2) popularity and friendship to be related to different forms of adjustment. Clearly, in order to understand how popularity and friendship are linked to adjustment, investigators need to examine both the direct and the indirect (mediated) associations among these variables. In the next section, we discuss the possibility that popularity and friendship are linked to different aspects of adjustment.

**Popularity, Friendship, and Adjustment**

In this section we address the question of whether popularity and friendship have similar effects on adjustment during early adolescence.
Figure 2.1. Four Ways in Which Popularity and Friendship May Relate to Adjustment

Popularity and friendship are both directly and uniquely related to adjustment.

Popularity is related to adjustment via an association with friendship.

Friendship is related to adjustment via an association with popularity.

Popularity and friendship are linked to different aspects of adjustment.

Differential Links to Adjustment. To understand the contributions of popularity and friendship to development and adjustment, investigators must recognize that popularity and friendship are very different experiences. To explain the differences between the developmental significance of popularity and that of friendship, Furman and Robbins (1985) adopted the notion of "provisions," originally proposed by Weiss (1974). Provisions are the opportunities or experiences that may be available within a social or personal relationship. Furman and Robbins reasoned that popularity and friendship offer children and adolescents similar and different experiences. In particular, they reasoned that popularity offers experiences for a sense of
inclusion, whereas friendship provides opportunities for loyalty, affection, and intimacy. They proposed that popularity and friendship share four provisions: help, nurturance, companionship, and enhancement of self-worth. They concluded that both popularity and friendship are important, but the two are not interchangeable.

The central point of Furman and Robbins's (1985) work is that popularity and friendship are likely to make different contributions to development. That is, although they share some provisions, popularity and friendship provide opportunities for distinct experiences.

Our position resembles an idea previously expressed by Weiss (1974). Weiss argued that different outcomes result from problems at the level of the group and the level of the dyad. Specifically, according to Weiss, when individuals are not integrated into a peer group structure, they experience feelings of social isolation; whereas when they lack an emotional closeness or exchange with chosen peers or friends, they experience feelings of “emotional loneliness.” We propose that popularity, because it provides opportunities for companionship, affects early adolescents' perceptions that they “fit in” or that they are “part of the group”; whereas friendship, which provides opportunities for affectively laden experiences such as security and closeness, is related to affective aspects of adjustment, such as loneliness.

**Links Among Aspects of Adjustment.** A further point of our perspective is that different aspects of adjustment are interrelated. Outcome measures in many studies of peer relations are typically regarded as end points of a process. It is conceivable, however, that there is a dynamic set of associations among measures of adjustment. For example, Harter (1983) has proposed viewing the various aspects of the self-concept not as distinct end points but rather as elements of a hierarchy. In her view, perceptions of competence derive from experience and in turn influence feelings of general self-worth.

We propose a similar hierarchical model of the associations between perceptions of belongingness and feelings of loneliness. Instead of thinking of perceptions of belongingness and feelings of loneliness as separate or independent outcomes of popularity and friendship, we regard belongingness as an antecedent to feelings of loneliness. From our perspective, feelings of loneliness derive from two sources: deficiencies in relationships at the level of the dyad and perceptions of not belonging.

**Multiple-Pathways Model of the Links Among Popularity, Friendship, and Adjustment in Early Adolescence**

Our approach to the study of popularity, friendship, and adjustment is predicated on the following proposals: (1) Because popularity and friendship are conceptually and empirically linked to each other, they must be
studied simultaneously. (2) Popularity and friendship are associated with different aspects of adjustment, namely, perceptions of belonging and feelings of loneliness, respectively. (3) During adolescence, friendship mediates the relationship between popularity and adjustment. And (4) aspects of adjustment are interrelated. The major methodological requirement of this perspective is that these measures and their interrelationships must be studied as a whole system. That is, all of the links that we identify among these measures must be examined together, including the indirect links among variables. This kind of model is not amenable to the most well known statistical tests, such as analysis of variance and multiple regression. Nevertheless, it is perfectly suited for path analysis.

Path analysis is an ideal procedure for examining our model because it produces an index of the adequacy of the whole model, indicates the strength of each individual path in the model, and assesses the direct and the indirect links among variables. The index of overall adequacy indicates whether the model provides an accurate representation of associations among variables in the model. The strengths of the particular paths in the model indicate how strongly the linked variables are associated to each other and whether each association is greater than a chance level. For the model to be accepted, coefficients for the specified links or paths must be statistically significant.

The specific model examined is depicted in Figure 2.2. In this figure, the dark arrows represent direct associations between variables: (1) Popularity (sociometric preference) is directly associated with both of the friendship measures and with perceptions of social belongingness. (2) Mutual friendship is directly linked to friendship quality, and both measures of friendship are directly associated with feelings of loneliness. (3) Social belongingness is directly linked to feelings of loneliness. Implicit in this view is the notion that popularity is related to loneliness through indirect pathways, one via mutual friendship and the other via perceptions of belongingness and inclusion.

A two-step procedure was used to assess direct and indirect links. First, the overall quality of the model was assessed with only the indirect paths among the variables of interest included, the direct links excluded. For example, the direct link between popularity and loneliness was not included in the model. In the second step, the direct links were included. (In Figure 2.2, these additional paths are indicated by gray arrows.) If the overall quality of the model is better when the new paths are included, then we conclude that this direct link is important (for example, that popularity and loneliness are linked directly). If the model does not improve, then we conclude that the association between the measures was indirect and that the direct link was not important (for example, that the association between popularity and loneliness is mediated by friendship and perceptions of belongingness). Three additional direct paths were included in our
Figure 2.2. Path Analysis Model of Links Between Measures of Popularity and Friendship and Measures of Social Belongingness and Loneliness

Note: All hypothesized associations in the model are represented by dark arrows. These paths are all statistically significant. The direct links, represented by gray arrows (coefficients in parentheses), are not statistically significant.

model: a link between popularity and loneliness, a link between mutual friendship and belongingness, and a link between friendship quality and belongingness.

Evaluation of the Multiple-Pathways Model

We evaluated our proposed model with a sample of 169 early adolescent boys and girls who were in grades five and six in a middle school located in the northern New England area of the United States. As part of their participation in a larger longitudinal study, these subjects completed a questionnaire on popularity, friendship and friendship quality, and loneliness and satisfaction with peer relations. Based on these data, we developed measures of popularity, mutual friendship, friendship quality, perceptions of belongingness, and feelings of loneliness. For popularity, we used a measure of sociometric preference. As noted earlier, this score is an
index of a child's relative likableness in the peer group. The score is the difference between the number of times a child is chosen as a friend and the number of times the child is chosen as a disliked peer.

The mutual friendship measure indicated whether a child had a reciprocated friend. To meet the criterion of mutual friendship, a child had to be either the first or the second choice for best friend of each of the children that he or she had chosen as a first or second best friend. Approximately half of the children in the sample met this criterion.

Friendship quality was measured with our Friendship Qualities Scale, a self-report questionnaire that we designed to assess children's impressions of their relationships with their best friends in terms of five dimensions: companionship, help or support, conflict, security, and closeness. In the current study, we focused on two of these subscales—security and closeness—because they most closely approximate the relationship provisions that have been identified as unique to friendship (Furman and Robbins, 1985). The items and reliability of these two subscales are shown in Table 2.1. The security subscale consists of items indicating that in times of need the child can rely on and trust his or her friend, and that if there were a quarrel or a fight or some other form of negative event in the friendship relation, the friendship would be strong enough to transcend.

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<th>Table 2.1. Items in Two Subscales of the Friendship Qualities Scale</th>
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<td><strong>Subscale (Cronbach's alpha)</strong></td>
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<td>Security (.73)</td>
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<td>Closeness (.79)</td>
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this problem. The items in the closeness scale focus on the sense of affection or "specialness" that the child experiences with his or her friend and the strength of the child's attachment to the friend.

To complete these two measures, subjects were asked to identify their best friends and to rate each item on a 5-point scale according to how well it described their relationships with these friends. These ratings were coded so that higher scores indicated greater levels of the quality measured.

The children in our sample also completed a scale designed by Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw (1984) to measure loneliness and social dissatisfaction. Using the subjects' ratings of the items in this scale, we tallied two scores: loneliness and social belongingness. The loneliness score was the mean of a subject's ratings of the two items in this scale that referred most directly to feelings of loneliness: "I feel alone" and "I feel lonely." The social belongingness scale included items that referred to children's feelings of inclusion and isolation: "I have lots of friends in my class," "I don't have anyone to play with," "I am well liked by the kids in my class," and "I don't have any friends in my class." The subjects rated each of these items on a 5-point scale, higher ratings indicating greater levels of loneliness and isolation from the peer group. These two scores were internally consistent (alpha = .68 and .77, for the loneliness and the social belongingness scores, respectively).

As indicated in Figure 2.2 by the dark arrows, seven paths were included in our model: popularity was linked to mutual friendship, friendship quality, and social belongingness; mutual friendship was linked to friendship quality and loneliness; and friendship quality and belongingness were linked to loneliness. We evaluated this model with Bentler's (1989) structural equations program. Our findings indicated that the model worked very well: The observed goodness-of-fit index was .91 and the chi-square value was 8.08, indicating that our model matched the data well. The path coefficients also indicated that both mutual friendship and friendship quality were linked to loneliness, and that popularity was linked to belongingness. When the model was reevaluated with direct paths between the popularity measure and the loneliness measure, the mutual friendship measure and the social belongingness measure, and the friendship quality measure and the social belongingness measure, the overall quality of the model did not improve. The coefficients for these additional paths were not statistically significant. This pattern of findings supports the argument that popularity is linked to loneliness not directly but rather indirectly via mutual friendship and feelings of belongingness.

Popularity, Friendship, and Adjustment: New Directions

Investigators who have studied the associations between peer relations and adjustment have typically focused on either a single aspect of the peer
system (for example, popularity or friendship) or the additive contribution of a few variables. Although these efforts have contributed to the development of a new area of research, the researchers have failed to recognize the complex interrelatedness of constructs within the domain of peer relations. Moreover, they have not distinguished among the experiences provided by different aspects of relations with peers and thus have failed to recognize the importance of these distinctions to an understanding of how peer relations affect particular domains of adjustment.

Our approach to the study of peer relations avoids these shortcomings in four ways. First, based on what we know about the interrelatedness of popularity and friendship (and the interrelatedness of the measures used to represent these constructs), we have studied popularity and friendship simultaneously so as to avoid the confounds that result when they are studied separately.

Second, we have proposed that because popularity and friendship are different experiences, they are likely to affect different aspects of adjustment. So we have made specific hypotheses about which aspects of adjustment are linked to particular types of experience with peers. By deriving these hypotheses directly from theory about the nature of peer relations, we have been able to develop a comprehensive model of how peer relations contribute to development.

Third, both theory and research support the argument that friendship relations become increasingly important as individuals enter early adolescence. Accordingly, we have placed friendship relations at the center of our model of peer relations and adjustment. In particular, we have proposed that friendship relations are important mediators between experience at the level of the group and adjustment during early adolescence. That is, popularity and friendship are not separate pathways to affective adjustment, but friendship is the pathway by which popularity is linked to emotional adjustment. We have also proposed that popularity directly affects children's feelings of inclusion and belongingness, which in turn affect emotional well-being.

Fourth, we have considered the direct and indirect associations between measures of peer relations and measures of adjustment. Instead of looking at simple associations between measures of peer relations and measures of adjustment, we have examined how they function together. One exciting feature of this approach is the opportunity to consider the processes that link particular aspects of peer relations to adjustment. For example, our study demonstrated that friendship mediates the link between popularity and loneliness. By determining how particular variables act as mediators, we were able to identify which constructs from the peer system are directly linked to the development of affective well-being. This information not only contributes to our understanding of social and personality development but also suggests effective strategies to help early adolescents who are lonely or who lack a sense of emotional well-being.
Our findings clarify two other points as well. First, the results suggest that although children who are unpopular may not feel included in the peer group, they may nevertheless be protected from feelings of loneliness by a close and secure relationship with a best friend. In other words, the friendship relation may act as a buffer to protect unpopular children from loneliness. Second, it is important to note that mutual friendship is linked to loneliness directly and indirectly via friendship quality. That is, early adolescents who do not have a mutual friend are at risk for loneliness because they lack this kind of relationship and because nonreciprocated friendships are less likely to provide experiences for closeness and security.

Conclusion

There is a large literature demonstrating that relations with peers play an important role in social development. The goal of our research program was to identify the particular means by which peer relations and adjustment are linked during early adolescence. Our approach was predicated on the proposal that popularity and friendship constitute different forms of experience for early adolescent boys and girls, and the belief that popularity and friendship are conceptually and empirically related constructs and hence must be studied together in a unified model. By pursuing this research direction, investigators are likely to illuminate how particular domains of peer relations affect emotional adjustment during early adolescence.

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