The Social Tasks of Friendship

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October 31, 2011
Thanks very much to Deborah Barrett for the invitation to make this presentation here at the School of Social Work. It is an honor for me to be here. Thanks also to my first-year graduate student, Kate Parkinson, for her very helpful consultation in the preparation of this talk.

The work presented today was done over many years in collaboration with my graduate students, including my current senior doctoral student, Molly Stroud Weeks, and with two postdoctoral fellows at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Duke University. Collaborators’ names are indicated as the ideas and research are discussed. None of the work today would have happened without their wonderful collaboration and outstanding scholarship.
Relational Competence Interventions

Skills/Knowledge for Specific Social Tasks

Social Competence Related Processes (e.g., Goals, Interpretations, Beliefs, Values, Self-Efficacy, Representations of Relationships, Emotional Self-Regulation)

Acceptance

Friendship

Friendship Quality

Social Behavior
Social Competence Related Processes: Some Examples

1. Goals: The inherent ambiguity and complexity of social life
2. Interpretations: Behavior from others as “relationship statements”
3. Beliefs: Legitimacy of Aggression Beliefs, Friendship Beliefs, etc.
4. Values: Degree of valuing and investment in relationships
5. Expectations/Self-Efficacy: Confidence in one’s ability
7. Emotional Self-Regulation
Overview of Today’s Presentation

• Previous social skills interventions have been fairly successful at helping children who are rejected by their peers to become better liked, but have not demonstrated success in helping children form friendships.

• Interventions are needed in this area given the important functions served in children’s lives by friendship.

• Examining how children respond to key “social tasks of friendship” could help us understand what kinds of competencies children need in order to form (high quality) friendships.
Paying attention to the kinds of interpretations children make in social situations and the kind of goals children pursue will be important, since these processes, and not just social skills alone, may play an important role in children’s friendship success.
In the course of the presentation, I will also describe some of the assessment procedures we use in our research to measure important aspects of children’s social functioning. These include:

- sociometric measures of children’s level of peer acceptance and whether children have friends
- measures of the qualitative features of children’s friendships such as companionship, help and guidance, and degree of conflict in the friendship
- self-report measures of whether children are experiencing loneliness in their everyday life.
- assessments of the interpretations children make and the goals they pursue in response to key social tasks
Three Dimensions of Peer Adjustment

- Peer Acceptance/Rejection
- Having Friends
- Quality of Friendship
• **Peer Acceptance** refers to how much other members of a group like a particular person and want to spend time with him or her.
# Measuring Peer Acceptance: A Rating-Scale Sociometric Measure

How much do you like to play with this person at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>I don't like to</th>
<th>I like to a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louise Blue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Grey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Armon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Brandt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Curtis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Drexel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Ellis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Fox</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Higgins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Jones</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Leaper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Murray</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Friendship is a dyadic relationship with certain properties such as mutual attachment, commitment, and special concern for one another’s welfare.
Who are your best three friends in this class?

John Armon
Andrea Brandt
Sue Curtis
Sandra Drexel
Jeff Ellis
Bill Fox
Diane Higgins
Harry Jones
Jill Leaper
Steve Murray
Jo Anne Norman
Pam Riley
The Percentage of Low-, Average-, and High-Accepted Children Who Have a Best Friend

From Parker & Asher (1993)
N=881

From Rose & Asher (1999)
N=696
Friendship Quality refers to the specific features of a friendship such as the extent to which it provides companionship and recreation, help and guidance, emotional support, and shared intimacy. Friendship qualities also include how much conflict exists in the friendship and how easily conflict gets resolved.
Friendship Quality Questionnaire-Revised
(Parker & Asher, 1993)

Think about your friendship with Jamie.

1. Jamie and I live really close to each other.
   Not at all true  A little true  Somewhat true  Pretty true  Really true
   0………………….1………………………2………..…………3……..……………….4

2. Jamie and I always sit together at lunch.
   Not at all true  A little true  Somewhat true  Pretty true  Really true
   0………………….1………………………2………..…………3……..……………….4

3. Jamie and I get mad at each other a lot.
   Not at all true  A little true  Somewhat true  Pretty true  Really true
   0………………….1………………………2………..…………3……..……………….4

4. Jamie tells me I’m good at things.
   Not at all true  A little true  Somewhat true  Pretty true  Really true
   0………………….1………………………2………..…………3……..……………….4
Friendship Qualities

- Companionship and Recreation (e.g., “Jamie and I do fun things together a lot.”)
- Validation and Caring (e.g., “Jamie and I make each other feel special and important.”)
- Help and Guidance (e.g., “When I’m having trouble figuring out something, I usually ask Jamie for help and advice.”)
- Intimate Exchange (e.g., “When I’m mad about something that happened to me, I can always talk to Jamie about it.”)
- Conflict and Betrayal (e.g., “Jamie and I argue a lot.” “I can think of some times when Jamie has said mean things about me to other kids.”)
- Conflict Resolution (e.g., “Jamie and I always get over our arguments really quickly.”)
## Friendship Quality Subscales: Internal Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Companionship and Recreation</td>
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<td>Validation and Caring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help and Guidance</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate Exchange</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict and Betrayal</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Back to the beginning... an intervention that significantly improved children’s level of peer acceptance, but did not significantly affect friendship
Coaching Children in Social Skills for Friendship Making
(Oden & Asher, 1977)*

Features of Coaching

- **Assumption is that children can benefit from direct instruction in social interaction concepts or principles.**

- **The concepts that are taught are selected on the basis of prior research concerning the types of behavior that lead to acceptance versus rejection.**

- **Children receive instruction in one-to-one or small group contexts and the adult “coach” talks with children in an interested and responsive manner.**

*Coaching manual available upon request*
Features of Coaching (Cont.)

- Children are coached in game-playing contexts because of the importance of activity-based relationships to children and because social interaction during game playing involves complex goal coordination and a variety of social skills.

- Children are provided with opportunities to put the coached concepts into practice by playing with classmates. They also are given opportunities to review the concepts following each practice session.

- Every attempt is made to avoid labeling or stigmatizing children.
General Concepts Coached
Oden & Asher (1977)

- Participation
  - Get involved
  - Get started
  - Pay attention to the game or activity
  - Try and do your best

- Cooperation
  - Take turns
  - Share the game or materials
  - Make a suggestion if you have a problem with a game
  - Give an alternative if you disagree about the rules
General Concepts Coached (Cont.)

- Communication
  - Talk with the other person
  - Say things about the game or yourself
  - Ask a question about the game
  - Ask a question about the other person
  - Listen when the other person talks
  - Look at the other person to see how he/she’s doing

- Validation-Support (Friendly-Fun-and-Nice)
  - Give some attention to the other person
  - Say something nice when the other person does well
  - Give a smile sometimes
  - Have fun in the game
  - Offer some help or suggestions
  - Give some encouragement
Significant improvement in acceptance status of rejected children. On follow-up, there was continued improvement in peer acceptance.
Average Play Sociometric Ratings For Groups Across Time

Oden & Asher (1977)
Although children who were coached did show some increase in number of friends, the effect of the coaching intervention on friendship was not statistically significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Group</td>
<td>.64 (.81)</td>
<td>1.09 (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pairing Group</td>
<td>.82 (.64)</td>
<td>.91 (.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>.91 (1.04)</td>
<td>1.09 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=11 children in each group

(Oden & Asher 1977)
Average Play Sociometric Ratings For Groups Across Time

Ladd (1981)
Peer acceptance gains found in 11 of 15 studies

Friendship was assessed in only three of these studies. None found gains in friendship on a limited friendship nomination measure.

Note: This research is reviewed by Asher, Parker, and Walker (1996)
So, these studies improved children’s level of peer acceptance, but did not affect their degree of participation in friendship.

Research on friendship and the quality of children’s friendships indicates that these aspects of their social lives with peers need our attention.
The Powerful Experiences of Early Friendships

- Freud and Dann’s (1951) report that three-year-old children who were brought from a concentration camp in Germany to reside at a country home in England, “had no other wish than to be together and became upset when they were separated from each other, even for short moments.”

- Ispa’s (1981) finding that two-year-old Russian children in the presence of a friend exhibited a level of comfort that was similar to the level of comfort they displayed when they were in the presence of a familiar, loving, adult caretaker.

- Park’s (1992) finding that, according to their mothers, over two-thirds of three- to five-year-old children exhibited sadness or loneliness following a friend moving away.

- Matt (4 years old) to his best friend Jessica (5 years old): “Jessca, if we had been born the same day, we could play together every single day until we die.”
Friendship Provisions and Challenges

Provisions of Friendship:
- Companionship and recreation
- Help and guidance
- Validation and support
- Closeness and intimacy
- Reliable alliance
- Acquisition of skills

Challenges of Friendship:
- Dealing with conflict and power imbalances
- Managing jealousy
- Coping with friendship transgressions
“Me and Lamar makes each other laugh and we play kick soccer.”

“Me and Alexis act like we’re cousins. We play a lot together. She comes over my house a lot. Alexis comes and talks with me when I’m sad. She says we are best friends. I help her with her homework. She helps me with my homework. And we play a lot together.”

“I fight with Michelle too much and I feel really bad about it but I can’t stop. I’m afraid she wouldn’t like me any more.”

“Angie is very special to me. If we get in a fight we always say sorry. And if she says she would play with me, she plays with me.”

“She has another friend in our class named Charlene. Charlene always plays with Cindy. Me and Charlene don’t always get along so I don’t get to do much with Cindy because Charlene won’t let me.”
“Tammy is really forgiving. She understands when I pick partners other than her.”

“He is my very best friend because he tells me things and I tell him things. He shows me a basketball move and I show him too, and he never makes me sad.”

“Me and Diana can count on trusting one another. Yesterday me and Diana talked about how our parents got a divorce and how the world is going to end.”

“My friend is really nice. Once my nose was bleeding around a gallon every 30 minutes and he helped me.”

“Jessica has problems at home and with her religion and when something happens she always comes to me and talks about it. We’ve been through a lot together.”
“We love to be weird. We’re never weird when the other is not there.”

“Me and Tiff share our deepest darkest secrets and we talk about boys, when we grow up, and shopping.”

“Someone bullied me and Carl stuck up for me and the kid hardly does it any more.”

“Becky always talks behind my back. It hurts my feelings. I will tell Becky something and she tells her other friends. And she always calls me and pranks me. And sometimes she can’t keep a secret. And lies to me. Sometimes she isn’t a great friend. But sometimes she’s a fine friend!”

“Paul is not a critic.”
Does participation in friendship and having higher quality friendships help children feel less lonely?
However, first, let’s ask whether children understand what loneliness means and whether loneliness can be reliably assessed in children.
Children’s Concept of Loneliness

Even very young children have a basic understanding of what loneliness means.

Do you know what “being lonely” means?

Uh-hum. Like if you’re uhm, a Martian, and you don’t eh, eh, uh, and you only live on one planet and... nobody’s um, with ya, on that planet.

(Cassidy & Asher, 1992)
When interviewed, 93% of kindergarteners and first graders demonstrated a basic understanding of loneliness by referring to both aloneness and sadness (Cassidy & Asher, 1992).

By the way, young children are not existentialists! Only 11% of these children thought that you could be lonely when with others.
# Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire

(Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984)

## Primary Items

- It’s easy for me to make new friends at school.
- I have nobody to talk to.
- I’m good at working with other children.
- It’s hard for me to make friends.
- I have lots of friends.
- I feel alone.
- I can find a friend when I need one.
- It’s hard to get other kids to play with.
- I don’t have anyone to play with.
- I get along with other kids.
- I feel left out of things.
- There’s nobody I can go to when I need help.
- I don’t get along with other children.
- I’m lonely.
- I’m well-liked by kids in my class.
- I don’t have any friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>That’s always true about me</th>
<th>That’s true about me most of the time</th>
<th>That’s sometimes true about me</th>
<th>That’s hardly ever true about me</th>
<th>That’s not true at all about me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
I like to read.
I watch TV a lot.
I like school.
I play sports a lot.
I like science.
I like music.
I like to draw and paint.
I like playing board games a lot.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Coefficient Alpha</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asher, Hymel, &amp; Renshaw (1984)</td>
<td>Third through fifth grade</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher &amp; Wheeler (1985)</td>
<td>Third through fifth grade</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkhurst &amp; Asher (1992)</td>
<td>Seventh and eight grade in middle school</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy &amp; Asher (1992)</td>
<td>Kindergarten and first grade</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams &amp; Asher (1992)</td>
<td>Students with mild mental retardation (8-13 years of age)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Items on the Loneliness in Contexts Questionnaire
Asher, Gorman, Weeks, Gabriel, & Guerra (in preparation)

Classroom
Do you feel sad and alone in your classroom?
Is the classroom a lonely place for you?
Are you lonely in your classroom?

Lunchroom
Do you feel sad and alone in the lunchroom?
Is the lunchroom a lonely place for you?
Are you lonely in the lunchroom?

Physical Education
Do you feel sad and alone in P.E.?
Is P.E. a lonely place for you?
Are you lonely in P.E.?

Playground
Do you feel sad and alone on the playground?
Is the playground a lonely place for you?
Are you lonely on the playground?
Filler Items
Do you like to do math at school?
Do you like to read at school?
Do you like to play sports at school?
Do you like going on field trips with your class?
Do you like to draw and paint at school?
Do you like having parties in your classroom at school?
Do you like going to the library at school?
Do you like music class at school?
Do you like making reports to the class?
Do you like to work on group projects at school?
Do you like reading books at school?
Do you like to play games at school?
Do you like doing homework?
Do you like to write stories at school?
Do you like school assemblies?
Loneliness in Context Measure: Internal Reliability

Classroom = .82

Lunchroom = .85

Playground = .86

Physical Education = .85

Total Score = .94
Mean Loneliness Score of Children in Four Contexts

Asher, Gorman, Gabriel, Guerra, & Weeks (in preparation)
Loneliness of Low-, Average-, and High-Accepted Children With and Without Friends

(Parker & Asher, 1993)
Friendship Quality and Loneliness

- Having lower quality friendships on each friendship feature predicts to loneliness, controlling for level of peer acceptance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Beta&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>R² change</th>
<th>F (1, 456)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validation and caring</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>34.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict and betrayal</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>12.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionship and recreation</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>32.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help and guidance</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>26.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate exchange</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>14.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>38.77**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Controlling for gender, sociometric rating, and gender by sociometric rating interaction.

* p<.001  ** P<.0001

Parker and Asher (1993)
In Summary: Acceptance, Friendship, and Friendship Quality are Independent Predictors of Peer Adjustment and Loneliness
New Loneliness in Context Measure
(Asher, Weeks, & McDonald in preparation)

Class is a lonely place for me.
I am lonely in the evening.
My place of residence is a lonely place for me.
My free time is a lonely time for me.
I feel sad and alone on weekends.
I am lonely with other people.
I feel sad and alone at social events.
I am lonely during meal times.
I feel sad and alone when I am studying.
Bed time is a lonely time for me.

All items are answered on a scale of 1(never) to 5(always).
\[ \alpha = .91 \]
Loneliness, Friendship Quality, and Friendship Beliefs in College Students

What Factors Affect Loneliness in College?

- Having best friends
- Having made life-long friends
- Having high quality friendships
- Holding adaptive beliefs about friendship
Are there tasks of friendship that are distinct from tasks that are involved in being well-liked or gaining overall acceptance by peers?
An Incomplete List of Social Tasks
(Asher & McDonald, 2008)

- Entering a Group
- Ambiguous Provocation
- Managing Conflict
- Negotiating Rules
- Maintaining Interaction
- Listening
- Communicating Contingently
- Terminating Interaction
- Coping with Rejection
- Coping with Public Failure
- Generating “Fun” Ideas
- Sharing Resources/Belongings
- Making Requests
- Responding to Requests
- Retrieving Belongings
- Dealing with Losing
- Self-Disclosure
- Eliciting Disclosure
- Apologizing
- Expressing Appreciation
An Incomplete List of Social Tasks (Cont.)

- Coping with Public Success
- Sticking up for a Friend
- Asking for Help
- Helping
- Comforting
- Coping with Teasing
- Expressing Affection
- Getting Even
- Complimenting
- Persuading
- Keeping Secrets
- Forgiving
- Refusing a Dare
- Defending Self
- Avoiding Dangerous Peer Contexts
- Getting Picked for Teams/Activities
- Coping with False Accusations
- Responding to Cheating/Unfairness
- Achieving Equity/Fairness
- Resisting Distraction by Others
My biggest weakness? I have no respect for authority. Also, I set fire to things.

Alan doesn't interview very well.
The Social Tasks of Friendship
(Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996)

- Initiating outside of school contact
- Being an enjoyable companion
- Helping friend
- Reliable partner
- Managing conflict
- Friendship in the larger peer group context
- Self-disclosure
- Expressing affection
- Coping with friendship transgressions
- Appreciating spirit of equality
The Task of Managing Conflicts of Interest in a Friendship
(Rose and Asher, 1999)

- 710 fourth- and fifth-grade children

- Rating-scale sociometric measure to assess peer acceptance

- Reciprocally nominated friends were identified from each nomination question: all best friends, three best friends, very best friends

- Modified version of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire; the focal child for their report was the very best reciprocated friend they had, as assessed from the friendship nomination measures

- 30 vignettes, each of which focused on some form of conflict within a friendship; for each vignette children rated their strategies and goals, with the assessments separated in time and with order counterbalanced
Hypothetical Situations Representing Conflicts of Interests Within a Friendship

- Exclusivity/Dealing with Friendship in a Larger Social Context
- Helping/Self-Sacrifice
- Maintaining Spirit of Equality
- Being a Reliable Partner
- Managing Disagreement Over Resources
You are looking forward to playing with just your friend at recess, but your friend asks some other children to play with the two of you.
• Children rated a variety of goals (i.e., what they would be trying to accomplish in the situation).

• Children also rated a variety of behavioral strategies that they would enact in the situation.
Goals After Cluster Analysis

- Relationship Maintaining Goal
  (trying to stay friends; trying to be fair; trying to keep from getting upset)

- Instrumental/Control Goal
  (trying to meet one’s own needs; trying to keep from being pushed around by the friend)

- Revenge Goal
  (trying to get back at the friend)
Strategies After Cluster Analysis

- Accommodation/Compromise Strategy
- Self-Interest Assertion Strategy
- Hostile Strategy
  (e.g., leaving, being verbally aggressive, threatening to terminate the friendship)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Coefficient Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation/Compromise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Assertion</td>
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<td>Hostile</td>
<td>.98</td>
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<td>Instrumental/Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>.96</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Maintaining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental/Control</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Indexes of Friendship Adjustment

- Number of Best Friends

- Positive Friendship Quality
  - intimate exchange
  - validation and caring
  - help and guidance
  - companionship and recreation
  - conflict resolution

- Friendship Conflict
## Summary of Hierarchical Regressions of Goals and Strategies on Number of Best Friends, Positive Friendship Quality, and Friendship Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of Best Friends</th>
<th>Positive Friendship Quality</th>
<th>Friendship Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\Delta R_2$</td>
<td>$B_a$</td>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Maintaining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental-Control</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>14.77****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
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<td>2.56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Assertion</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>6.79**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a: After controlling for gender, acceptance, grade, and the Gender x Acceptance, Gender x Grade, Acceptance x Grade, and Gender x Acceptance x Grade interaction terms in the regression equation.

$p<.05$. **$p<.01$. ***$p<.001$. ****$p<.0001$. 
Six percent of the children had Revenge goal scores of 4.0 or higher, averaging across the 30 hypothetical situations. So they were highly revenge oriented even though the person was described in the vignette as a friend and the conflict was not a major one.

Further inspection indicated that many of these children had exceptionally poor friendship adjustment. For example, only about 50% of these children had a best friend compared with 80% of the rest of the sample.
What leads children to endorse revenge goals in the context of a fairly minor conflict of interest with a friend?

Our hypothesis is that children who endorse revenge goals in conflicts of interest situations interpret the other person’s actions as indicative of rejection or as indicative of being disrespected.
Interpretations in Response to Conflict of Interest Situations

- Rejection (i.e., “This person doesn’t like me”)
- Disrespect (i.e., “This person does not respect me”)
- Judgment of wrongdoing (i.e., “This person’s behavior is wrong”)
- Disassociation (i.e., “This person doesn’t want to be with me”)
- Whether the conflict was resolvable (i.e., “This person and I can easily make-up”)
- Whether the act by the other was unintentional (i.e., “This person did not mean to hurt me”)
- Whether a friendship with the offender was unviable (i.e., “This person and I could never be friends”)
- Whether the participant attributed the situation to be “my fault” (i.e., “What happened was my fault”), and
- Whether the conflict was appraised as not worthy of being upset about (i.e., “What this person did is not worth getting upset about”)

McDonald and Asher (in preparation)
Our recent research (McDonald & Asher, *Social Development*, in press; McDonald & Asher, in preparation) indicates that the following interpretations are positively correlated with endorsing revenge goals in conflict of interest situations:

- An interpretation that the other person is rejecting you
- An interpretation that the other person doesn’t care about your wants and needs
- An interpretation that the other person doesn’t respect you
The Tasks of Giving and Receiving Help
Rose and Asher (2004)

- 511 fifth-grade children
- Children reported on their strategies and goals on a help-giving task (six vignettes)
- Children reported on their strategies and goals on a help-seeking task (six vignettes)
- Children responded to a rating-scale measure of sociometric acceptance, a friendship nomination measure, and the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993)
- Predicted to friendship adjustment controlling for acceptance (friendship adjustment was indexed by number of friends, positive friendship quality, and friendship conflict)
One day your best friend has to make a presentation in front of the class, and when he gets up in front of the class he seems to forget what he was going to say and he does very poorly at making the presentation. All during his presentation, you see a couple of kids whispering and laughing at him. You see him looking at the kids who are whispering and laughing at him. When he is going back to his seat after the presentation, they keep laughing and talking and start pointing at him.
The teacher is passing around cookies to all of the students but she accidentally forgets to give you some. You try to get her attention, but she doesn’t see you and sends the class outside for recess. The students who sit near you start making fun of you and say that the teacher doesn’t like you.
Goals Assessed in Help-Giving Situation

- Providing Emotional Comfort (e.g., “I’d be trying to help my friend feel better after what happened.”)
- Expressing Caring (e.g., “I’d be trying to let my friend know that I care about him.”)
- Problem Solving Assistance (e.g., “I’d be trying to keep my friend from having problems with other kids laughing at him.”)
- Respecting Privacy (e.g., “I’d be trying to stay out of my friend’s personal business.”)
- Staying Neutral (e.g., “I’d be trying not to get involved in what happened between my friend and the other kids.”)
- Assigning Responsibility (e.g., “I’d be trying to make my friend see his part in causing the problem.”)
Strategies Assessed in Help-Giving Situation

- Initiating Discussion (e.g., “I’d ask my friend if he wanted to talk about what happened with the other kids laughing at him.”)
- Expressing Sympathy (e.g., “I’d tell my friend I was sorry he was having a problem.”)
- Offering Reassurance (e.g., “I’d tell my friend not to feel bad about what happened with the other kids laughing at him because things like that happen to everyone.”)
- Advice Giving (e.g., “I’d give my friend ideas about how to keep the other kids from laughing at him.”)
- Offering Distraction (e.g., “I’d ask my friend if he wanted to play a game or do something fun with me.”)
- Behavioral Denial (e.g., “I’d act like the other kids laughing at my friend never happened.”)
- Avoidance (e.g., “I’d stay away from my friend.”)
- Dismissing (e.g., “I’d tell my friend not to be a baby by making a big deal over what happened with the other kids laughing at him.”)
- Blaming (e.g., “I’d tell my friend that the other kids laughing at him was his own fault.”)
Goals Assessed in Help-Seeking Situation

- Seeking Emotional Comfort (e.g., “I’d try to feel better after what happened.”)
- Problem Solving (e.g., “I’d be trying to keep from having problems with other kids teasing me.”)
- Maintaining Privacy (e.g., “I’d be trying to keep my feelings to myself.”)
- Excluding Friend (e.g., “I’d be trying to keep my friend out of my personal business.”)
- Self-Presentation (e.g., “I’d be trying not to look dumb or silly in front of my friend.”)
Strategies Assessed in Help-Seeking Situation

- Self-Disclosure (e.g., “I’d like to talk with my friend about what happened with the other kids teasing me.”)
- Advice Seeking (e.g., “I’d ask my friend to help me figure out how I could keep the other kids from teasing me.”)
- Seeking Distraction (e.g., “I’d ask my friend if he wanted to play a game or do something fun with me.”)
- Behavioral Denial (e.g., “I’d act like the other kids teasing me never happened.”)
- Withdrawal (e.g., “I’d tell my friend that I want to be by myself.”)
- Hostile Refusal (e.g., “I’d tell my friend that it was none of his business.”)
In the potential giving support context, the goal of assigning responsibility to the friend and the strategies of avoidance and blaming predicted to the number of friends children had.

In the potential support seeking context, the goal of excluding the friend and the strategy of maintaining privacy predicted to the number of friends children had.
The Task of Coping with Friendship Transgressions
MacEvoy and Asher (in press)

- 270 fourth- and fifth-grade children participated in the study
- Children responded to 16 hypothetical vignettes depicting transgressions in four categories: Betrayal, Lack of Validation/emotional Support, Lack of Instrumental Help, and Unreliable Partner.
- In response to each vignette, children rated how angry, sad, and hurt, they would be as well as their goals, strategies, and interpretations.
- They also rated the severity of the transgressions, how much they would be thinking about the transgressions one week later, and how they would feel about themselves one week following the transgression.
Hypothetical Situations Representing Coping with Friendship Transgressions

- Betrayal
- Unreliable Partner
- Lack of instrumental help
- Lack of validation/emotional support
Vignette: Friendship Task of Coping with a Friendship Transgression

On Friday you told your friend a really private secret that you don’t want anybody else to know about. When you get to school on Monday, though, you find out that your friend told a bunch of other kids in your class about your secret.
Goals in Response to Transgressions of Friendship Expectations Situation

- Revenge Goals (goal of trying to get even)

- Control Goals (goal of trying to get the friend to stop pushing you around)

- Relationship Maintenance Goals (goals of trying to stay friends, trying to figure out why the transgression occurred, and trying to keep oneself from getting upset)
Interpretations in Response to Transgressions of Friendship Expectations Situation

- Neutral interpretation
- Control interpretation (interpretation that the friend was trying to push you around)
- Devalued interpretation (interpretation that friend doesn’t care about the friendship and the interpretation that the friend doesn’t respect or value you)
Major Findings

- Girls appear to be more sensitive to transgressions of core friendship expectations than boys. They made more negative interpretations of the friend’s behavior, experienced more sadness and anger, and said they would be thinking more about what happened a week later.
- Girls endorsed revenge goals and aggressive strategies as much as boys did.
- These findings contrast sharply with gender-related findings in the conflicts-of-interest situation in our previous research. They point to the importance of studying social competence in relation to specific tasks of friendship.
Thanks!!

Thank you for inviting me and for your participation!

Happy Halloween!