307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 533

CHAPTER 15

Peers

DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGES IN PEER RELATIONS

Early Peer Exchanges and Play
The School Years and Adolescence

PEER GROUP DYNAMICS

Peer Group Formation
Dominance Hierarchies
Peer Pressure and Conformity

PEERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION

Peers as Models
Peers as Reinforcers

PEER POPULARITY AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

EXAMINING RESEARCH METHODS: *Using Questionnaires to Assess Peer Status*
Characteristics of Popular and Unpopular Children
ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT: *Social Withdrawal*
The Origins of Social Competence
RESEARCH APPLIED TO EDUCATION: *Helping the Victims of Aggression*
Training Social Skills

CHILDREN'S FRIENDSHIPS

Children's Patterns and Conceptions of Friendship
How Children Become Friends
The Functions of Friendship

CHAPTER RECAP

Summary of Developmental Themes
Summary of Topics

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 534

Key Themes in Peer Relations

- **Sociocultural Influence** How does the sociocultural context influence peer relations?
- **Child's Active Role** How does the child play an active role in peer relations?
- **Individual Differences** How prominent are individual differences in peer relations?
- **Interaction Among Domains** How do peer relations interact with other domains of development?

It was the start of the first day of school. Jan Nakamura, the third-grade teacher, surveyed her new charges as they played in the schoolyard before the bell rang. It was a familiar scene: the boys played a raucous game of kickball, cheering their teammates and urging victory. The girls gathered in small groups, talking with great animation about their summer experiences and their excitement about school. As always, certain children in both groups were the center of activity; they seemed to attract their agemates as a pot of honey draws bees. Other children seemed to fall into the background; few of their peers approached or spoke to them. Already Jan had a sense that third grade would be easier on some of these fresh new faces than others.

In many ways, Jan's intuitions were correct. She would find, as she learned to match names to faces in this year's class, that many of the playground stars made the transition to a new grade more easily than some of the less popular children. Research evidence suggests that the ability to have successful and rewarding interactions with peers during childhood can be the harbinger of successful later adjustment and that poor peer relations are often associated with a range of developmental problems. Boys and girls who have good peer relationships enjoy school more and are less likely to experience academic difficulties, drop out of school, or commit delinquent acts in later years than agemates who relate poorly with their peers (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Morison & Masten, 1991; Parker & Asher, 1987). Children who are accepted by their peers are also less likely to report feeling lonely, depressed, and socially anxious than children who are rejected (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Crick & Ladd, 1993). Of course, the quality of peer relations is not the only factor that predicts later developmental outcomes. Nevertheless, experiences with peers play a substantial role in the lives of most children and thus have become an important focus of developmental research.

What do child development theorists say about the role of peers? Social learning theorists believe peers exert a powerful influence on the child's socialization by means of modeling and reinforcement. Piaget (1932/1965) and Vygotsky (1978) have discussed the ways in which peer contacts alter the child's cognitions, which can, in turn, direct social behavior. Piaget contends that peer interactions prompt, or even coerce, the child to consider the viewpoints of others, thus broadening her social perspective-taking ability and diminishing her egocentrism. The result is a greater capacity for social exchange. Vygotsky maintains that contact with peers, especially those who are more skilled in a given domain, stretches the child's intellectual and social capacities. As a result of experiences with peers, the child internalizes new modes of thinking and social interaction and then produces them independently.

The number of studies examining peer relations in childhood and adolescence has skyrocketed in the last two decades, due in part to a recognition of the prevalence of peer experiences in children's lives and the power of peers as socializing agents. Because we humans are "social" beings, it is not surprising that our childhood experiences in social groups play such a large part in making us what we are.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 535

Developmental Changes in Peer Relations

Compared with any other human relationship, the special feature of peer relations is their egalitarian nature. In fact, strictly speaking, the term **peer** refers to a companion who is of approximately the same age and developmental level. Parent-child interactions are characterized by a distinct dominant-subordinate hierarchy that facilitates the child's socialization as parents use their authority to transmit information about social rules and behaviors. Peers, however, usually function as equals, and it is primarily among equals that children can forge such social skills as compromising, competing, and cooperating. Thus experiences with peers afford the child unique opportunities to construct social understanding and to develop social skills (Hartup, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

Relationships with peers also contribute to the child's developing sense of self. Peers provide the child with direct feedback (verbal and sometimes nonverbal) about how well he is doing in the academic, social, and emotional realms, information that can significantly influence his self-esteem. Peers provide a natural comparison against which the child can gauge his own accomplishments (Furman & Robbins, 1985): "Am I really a good athlete?" "How am I doing as a student?" A child can answer questions such as these by comparing his own abilities with those of his peers.

The way in which children relate to their peers undergoes significant developmental changes. At first, peers are simply interesting (or, at times, annoying) companions in play, but eventually they assume a larger and more crucial part in the child's social and emotional life. Children's peer networks start out small. But as children enter daycare and school, and as their cognitive, language, and social skills develop, their peer networks expand, and their relationships with a subset of those peers grow in intensity.

Early Peer Exchanges and Play

Infants show distinct reactions to peers even in the first few months of life. The sight of another baby often prompts a three-month-old to become generally aroused and active, a reaction that is very different from the ritualized greeting she usually reserves for her mother (Fogel, 1979) or the rapt and quiet attention she displays to her reflected image (Field, 1979). At six months, diffuse responses to peers give way to more specific signals, such as smiles, squeals, touching, and leaning in their direction (Hay, Nash, & Pedersen, 1983; Vandell, Wilson, & Buchanan, 1980). Older babies crawl toward one another and explore one another's facial features (Vandell & Mueller, 1980). Thus, from early on, infants recognize something special and interesting about strangers who resemble them in size and features. At the same time, most peer interactions during infancy are brief, lasting only a few seconds, and usually do not involve mutual exchanges of behaviors (Eckerman, Whatley, & Kutz, 1975; Vandell & Wilson, 1982).

In the second year, social exchanges with peers become longer and more coordinated. Two children will jointly manipulate toys and other objects, each child taking a turn playing and then offering the object to the playmate. Children also begin to play simple games together, such as hide-and-seek or tag, activities that require taking turns and switching roles (Howes, 1987a, 1987b). Later in toddlerhood, between ages two and three years, children engage in peer interactions more frequently. Instead of revolving around objects such as toys, these interactions contain many positive social and affiliative behaviors, such as giving attention, smiling, sharing, and cooperating (Bronson, 1981).

In her classic studies of children's play, Mildred Parten (1932) found that the peer relations of young children are characterized by three forms. In **solitary play,** children play alone with toys, apart from other children and without regard for what they are doing. One child might be stacking rings while another does a puzzle; neither notices or cares about the other's activities. In **parallel play,** children play independently

peer Companion of approximately the same age and developmental level.

solitary play Individual play, performed without regard for what others are doing.

parallel play Side-by-side, independent play that is not interactive.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 536

while alongside or close to other children. Several children might be gathered at a sandbox, one digging with a shovel, another making "pies," and still another dragging a truck through the sand. Even though they are in close proximity, one child's activities do not influence the play of the others. In **cooperative play,** children interact. They share toys, follow one another, and make mutual suggestions about what to do next. Although Parten believed that a stagelike developmental progression takes place from solitary to parallel and then cooperative play, other research suggests that all three types of play occur among preschoolers (Barnes, 1971; Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung, 1976). The type of play exhibited by preschoolers may depend on the socialization goals of parents and teachers. For example, in Korean American preschools, teachers encourage individual academic achievement and task persistence rather than social interaction with other children. Korean American preschoolers engage in significantly less cooperative play and more parallel play than Anglo American preschoolers do (Farver, Kim, & Lee, 1995).

KEY THEME
Sociocultural Influence

One of the most interesting forms of play seen in preschoolers is **social pretend play** (also called *sociodramatic play*), in which they invoke "make-believe" to change the functions of objects, create imaginary situations, and enact pretend roles, often with the cooperation of one or two peers (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983). Children use sticks and pots as band instruments, ride "magic carpets" together, and play "Mommy and Daddy." Growth in the child's cognitive, perspective-taking, and communication skills helps to explain these changes (Hartup, 1983; Howes, 1987a). To conceive of a stick as representing a flute, for example, the child must develop symbolic capabilities that allow him to let one object represent another. To play "Mommy," a young girl must relinquish her own perspective and appreciate another person's social role: what "mommies" do and how they speak to children. Finally, for complex and coordinated exchanges of pretend play to occur, such as when one child sets the table and prepares the food while the other cries like a baby, children must understand the rules of social dialogue and communication. When we watch three-year-olds engage in pretend play with one another, we are witnessing an intersection of their growing competence in several arenas: social, language, and cognitive skills (Howes, Unger, & Seidner, 1989).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

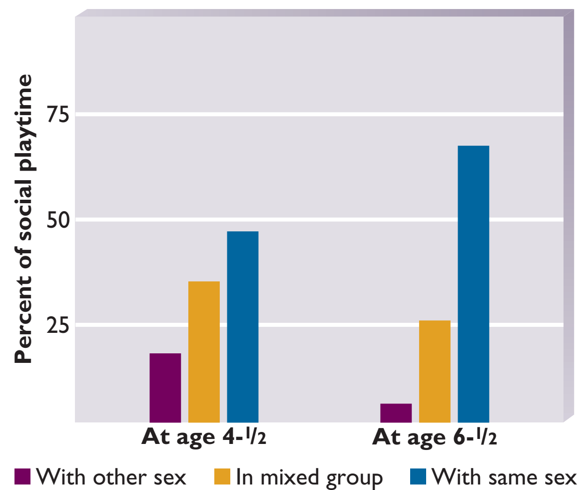
The tendency for three- and four-year-olds to engage in social pretend play has been observed among children from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Chinese, Korean American, and Irish American groups, suggesting that this form of play may be a universal developmental acquisition. It is interesting to note that this is the age at which children from different cultures acquire a "theory of mind" (see the

Preschoolers often show social pretend play in which they invoke "make believe" to create imaginary situations, change the functions of objects, or enact pretend roles. Social pretend play has been observed in children from diverse cultures.

cooperative play Interactive play in which children's actions are reciprocal.

social pretend play Play that makes use of imaginary and symbolic objects and social roles, often enacted among several children. Also called *sociodramatic play.*

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 537



Source: Adapted from Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987.

FIGURE 15.1
Changes in Time Spent with Same-Sex Friends During Early Childhood

The amount of time children spend with same-sex peers increases dramatically during early childhood, as this study of children's behavior during free play at school shows. At the same time, the proportion of time spent playing with opposite-sex peers decreases noticeably.

chapter titled "Cognition: Piaget and Vygotsky") and that children who engage in pretend play are advanced in theory-of-mind tasks (Dunn & Hughes, 2001). At the same time, the child's background culture influences the specific content of pretend play. Korean American children, for example, typically enact family and everyday themes (e.g., eating, sleeping, going places) in their play, whereas American children display themes of danger (e.g., crashes, injuries) and fantasy characters (Farver & Shin, 1997). Irish American children spend substantial time pretending with toys purchased by their families, whereas Chinese children rely more on social routines than on props (Haight et al., 1999). Thus cultural values and resources are often vividly reflected in children's play.

KEY THEME
Sociocultural Influence

The School Years and Adolescence

Elementary school-age children begin to participate more in group activities than in the dyads (two-person groups) that characterize earlier peer relations. As noted in the chapter titled "Gender," they show a clear preference for same-sex peers and, to a lesser extent, for children who are racially similar. In fact, as Figure 15.1 shows, the tendency to play with other children of the same sex begins in the preschool years and grows stronger throughout the elementary school years (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987). It's not that children dislike others of the opposite sex; they simply prefer to play with same-sex peers (Bukowski et al., 1993). They also prefer to associate with peers who have similar behavior styles; for example, aggressive children tend to "hang out" with other aggressive children (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). In general, quarrels and physical aggression with peers eventually wane, and prosocial behaviors such as sharing and helping others increase (Hartup, 1983).

A special form of play, called **rough-and-tumble play,** emerges around age two years and becomes more visible during the elementary school years, especially among boys. Children chase one another, pretend to fight, or sneak up and pounce on one another. Rough-and-tumble play differs from aggression in that children do not intend to hurt other players and in that it often occurs among children who like one another. Smiling and laughing typically accompany rough-and-tumble play, and children will frequently continue to play together after a bout, all signs that these interactions are friendly (Humphreys & Smith, 1987). Observations of children on school playgrounds during recess show that for some, episodes of rough-and-tumble play were routinely followed by organized games with rules. A playful chase, for example, often led to a game of tag. Thus rough-and-tumble play can provide a context for learning role exchange (e.g., "Now you chase *me*") and prosocial behaviors such as cooperation. On the other hand, especially among unpopular children, rough play

rough-and-tumble play
Active, physical play that carries no intent of imposing harm on another child.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 538

TABLE 15.1
How Do Adolescents Spend Their Free Time?

Reed Larson has compiled the results of forty-five studies of how adolescents in various cultures spend their work and free time hours per day. A portion of the results is shown here. You should note that several of the activities in the "free time" include opportunities to interact with peers. What do the data suggest about cross-cultural differences in how adolescents spend their time?

Activity	United States	Europe	East Asia
Household labor	20–40 min	20–40 min	10–20 min
Paid labor	40–60 min	10–20 min	1–10 min
Schoolwork	3.0–4.5 hr	4.0–5.5 hr	5.5–7.5 hr
Total work time	**4–6 hr**	**4.5–6.5 hr**	**6–8 hr**
TV viewing	1.5–2.5 hr	1.5–2.5 hr	1.5–2.5 hr
Talking	2–3 hr	Insufficient data	45–60 min
Sports	30–60 min	20–80 min	1–20 min
Structured voluntary activities	10–20 min	1.0–20 min	0–10 min
Total free time	**6.5–8.0 hr**	**5.5–7.5 hr**	**4.0–5.5 hr**

Source: Larson, 2001.

can end up in a real physical fight. The rough-and-tumble play of unpopular children escalated into aggression 28 percent of the time and was positively correlated with a measure of antisocial behavior (Pellegrini, 1988). In general, rough-and-tumble play seems to be a way for boys, especially, to establish their dominance and status (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

By the time they reach adolescence, children spend considerable free time with their peers, at least in the United States. In a review of forty-five studies of how adolescents in different countries spend their daily time (see Table 15.1), Reed Larson found that American youth have more unrestricted time than children in Europe or Asia and that much of this time is spent with friends (Larson, 2001). Although time spent with peers might provide important opportunities to develop social skills and supportive relationships, some research is beginning to indicate that the amount of unstructured time spent with peers without adult supervision is related to depression, conduct problems, and lower grades in school. On the other hand, free time spent with parents and other adults or participating in structured activities such as hobbies, sports, and extracurricular activities at school predicts better school success and fewer conduct problems (Mahoney, 2000; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

Peer relations during adolescence become more intense on one level and involve larger networks on another level. Adolescents form close, intimate friendships with a subset of their peers, often those who resemble themselves in certain traits, such as an orientation to academics (Iervolino et al., 2002). Many children also form **cliques,** groups of five to ten children, usually in the same class at school, who frequently interact together (Brown, 1989). Clique membership is frequently supplemented by identification with a **crowd,** a larger group of peers with a specific reputation, such as "jocks" or "brains." Members of crowds do not necessarily spend time together but share a label based on a stereotype. Interestingly, even though youngsters may see themselves as members of particular cliques, their membership in crowds is often identified or labeled by others (Brown, 1989). That is, a girl may not see herself as a "brain" but receive that label from peers who observe her academic achievements and studious behaviors. Membership in cliques and crowds in the middle and later school years reflects the child's growing need for group belonging at a time when he is orienting away from parents and other adults. At the same time, the values parents encourage can influence the crowds with which their adolescent children affiliate themselves. If a parent encourages achievement, for example, the child's academic success may place her in the group of "brains" (Brown et al., 1993). The norms of cliques and crowds can be powerful shapers of behavior; they often provide the adolescent with prescriptions on how to dress, act, and even what ambitions to have for

clique Peer group of five to ten children who frequently interact together.

crowd Large group of peers characterized by specific traits or reputation.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 539

the future. However, the degree to which the group has influence depends on how strongly the adolescent identifies with that group (Kiesner et al., 2002).

As adolescents approach young adulthood and feel more secure about their self-identities, they are less interested in cliques and crowds and become oriented once again toward relationships with individuals. In one study, third- through twelfth-graders were asked to list their closest friends in the entire school, as well as the people they spent time with (Shrum & Cheek, 1987). Analysis of the patterns of relationships among children showed a sharp decline toward later adolescence in the percentage of students who were members of cliques.

One other significant change in adolescence is that some peer relations begin to reflect interest in the opposite sex. The time spent with same-sex peers does not decline in adolescence, but time spent with an opposite-sex peer increases substantially during high school (Richards et al., 1998). As they grow older, and as they begin to spend increasing time with their romantic partners, adolescents spend less time with family members. Nonetheless, they still maintain close emotional ties with families, rating parents and romantic partners as their most influential relationships (Laursen & Williams, 1997).

The Development of Peer Relations chronology summarizes the major developmental changes in peer relations that we have discussed in this section.

Are Children's Lives Too Structured?
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FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What developmental outcomes usually accompany good peer relationships during childhood?
- What are the different forms of play exhibited by toddlers? What factors are related to the emergence of these different types of play?
- What are the characteristics of peer relationships during the elementary school years?
- What are the characteristics of peer relationships during adolescence?

Peer Group Dynamics

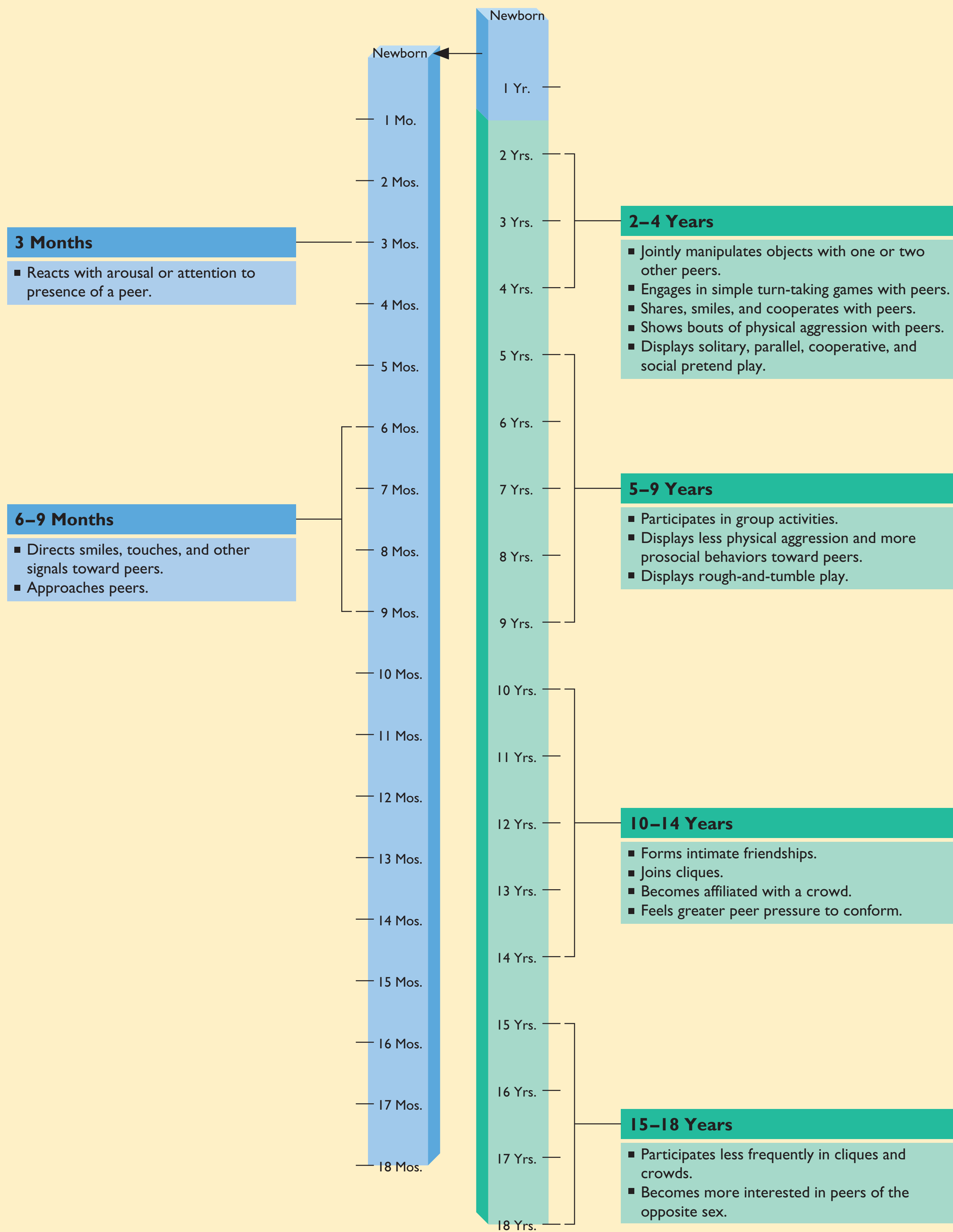
When we observe preschoolers or elementary school children, we see that they often associate in groups. Peer groups, however, become especially visible and significant during the middle school and early secondary school years (Crockett, Losoff, & Petersen, 1984). Adolescents frequently "hang out" in groups, desire to be members of the most popular groups, and look to the peer group for standards of appearance, conduct, and attitudes. Parents may find that their son or daughter *must* have a certain haircut or *must* buy a particular video game, only to discover that everyone else in the child's circle of friends has the same "look" or library of games. The social dynamics of large groups often differ from the dynamics of two-person groups, or dyads; the power exerted by the group in shaping how the child acts and thinks can be enormous.

Peer Group Formation

How do peer groups form in the first place? Undoubtedly, they coalesce on the basis of children's shared interests, backgrounds, or activities. Children associate with other members of their classroom, soccer team, or school band, for example. Other variables, such as socioeconomic status or ethnic and racial group membership, can also contribute. Youngsters often join with others of similar social class or ethnic/racial background (Clasen & Brown, 1985; Larkin, 1979). As we have seen in the chapter titled "Gender" and in this chapter, gender is another powerful variable;

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 540

CHRONOLOGY: *Development of Peer Relations*



This chart describes the sequence of peer relations based on the findings of research. Children often show individual differences in the exact ages at which they display the various developmental achievements outlined here.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 541

During adolescence, peer groups form on the basis of shared interests or common activities. Mixed-sex interactions are more likely to occur than in the earlier years of childhood.

groups, for the most part, tend to be of the same sex throughout childhood and early adolescence.

A particularly enlightening description of how peer groups form and operate can be found in a classic experiment called the Robber's Cave Study, named after the state park in Oklahoma where it took place. Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues invited twenty-two fifth-grade boys who did not know one another to participate in a summer camp program (Sherif et al., 1961). The boys were divided into two groups housed in separate parts of the state park. Initially, each group participated in its own program of typical camp activities—hiking, crafts, structured games—and was unaware of the existence of the other group. In this initial period of the experiment, each group began to develop a unique identity, and individual members performed distinct roles in relation to this group identity. One group became "tough"; the boys swore, acted rough, and ridiculed those who were "sissies." Members of the other group were polite and considerate. As group solidarity grew, members decided to name themselves, the former calling themselves the Rattlers and the latter the Eagles.

The experimenters found that when they deliberately structured certain situations to encourage cooperation, group identities could be further strengthened. One day, for example, each group returned to the campsite only to find that the staff had not prepared dinner; only the uncooked ingredients were available. The boys quickly took over, dividing up the tasks so that some cooked, others prepared drinks, and so forth. Some boys assumed a leadership role, directing the suppertime activities, and others followed their directives. It was quite apparent that the boys had a strong sense of identity with the group and that the group had a clear structure. In other words, for both the Rattlers and the Eagles, there was strong intragroup cooperation and identity.

Another change in circumstances made the group identities even more pronounced. The camp counselors arranged for the Rattlers and Eagles to meet and organized a series of competitions for them, including games such as baseball and tug-of-war. The effects of losing in these competitions were dramatic. The losing group became very disharmonious and conflict ridden. Members accused one another of causing the loss, and some boys who had previously enjoyed status and prestige were demoted in standing if they had contributed to the group's humiliation.

After these initial conflicts, however, group identity became stronger than ever. The effects of competition on behavior *between* the groups were even more pronounced. The Rattlers and Eagles verbally antagonized each other and retaliated for a loss in the day's competition by raiding each other's campsites and stealing

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 542

possessions such as comic books and clothing. Each episode forged intragroup identity but also increased intergroup hostility.

In the last phase of this social experiment, the counselors attempted to lessen the bad feelings between the Rattlers and the Eagles by having them share meals or watch movies together. Instead of promoting harmony between the groups, however, this tactic produced continuing hostilities, punctuated with fights and verbal assaults. In contrast, when the experimenters created situations in which the two groups had to work together to achieve some common goal, antagonisms between them began to crumble. One hot day, for example, when the counselors "discovered" that the water pipeline for the campsites was broken, boys from both Rattlers and Eagles began to search together for the broken pipes. On another occasion, the food delivery truck broke down; again, the boys all worked together to restart the engine. The acrimonious behavior between the two groups diminished, and boys from the two groups actually began to form friendships with one another.

Few studies of the formation and function of peer groups match the scope of the Robber's Cave Study. However, a more recent series of studies sheds further light on the factors that promote peer group identity. Rebecca Bigler and her colleagues (Bigler, Jones, & Lobliner, 1997) divided children in each of several summer school classrooms into a "blue" group and a "yellow" group. For some children, their assignment to a group was based on a biological characteristic, whether their hair color was light or dark. For others, assignment to a group was random. Teachers in both groups were instructed to emphasize group membership with verbal comments and by other overt actions such as seating children and having them line up for recess according to their groups. Children in all the groups also wore T-shirts denoting the color of the group they were in. The researchers also included a control group in which children wore either yellow or blue T-shirts but did not experience emphasis on the groups from their teachers. At the end of four weeks, children were asked a series of questions evaluating their attitudes toward their own group (the in-group) and the other group (the out-group). Children in the experimental conditions showed a strong tendency to ascribe positive traits to *all* members of the in-group and *none* of the members of the out-group. The control group, in contrast, did not show this pattern. Thus, when adults actively use obvious perceptual categories to describe children's groups, children exhibit strong favoritism toward their own group and bias against the out-group. In-group favoritism does not operate in all circumstances, however. In a subsequent study, Bigler and her colleagues manipulated the status of the "yellow" and "blue" groups by featuring photographs of past winners of athletic and academic competitions on posters placed around the classrooms. They purposely showed more "winners" from the yellow group. Under these conditions, children in the low-status group, the "blue" group, did not show a bias toward their own group, whereas children in the high-status group did (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001). These studies, together with the Robbers Cave study, reveal important information about the factors that influence peer group dynamics. They provide clues, in particular, about the strategies that either promote or break down animosities among children's groups, findings that have implications for interventions aimed at reducing gender or racial and ethnic biases.

Dominance Hierarchies

KEY THEME
Individual Differences

The scene: a standard laboratory playroom on a university campus. Six elementary school boys, strangers to one another, are brought together to play for forty-five minutes, five days in a row. Beginning the first day, researchers discover, the boys establish dominance hierarchies, distinct levels of social power in the relationships among group members. Some boys initiate more activity, verbally persuade the other group members to act a certain way, or use aggression to get their way. Others play a more submissive role, giving in to the actions of the dominant boys. Based on the frequencies with which they display these behaviors, each boy can be rated as most or least dominant or somewhere in between (Pettit et al., 1990).

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 543

As laboratory studies and field experiments such as the Robber's Cave Study show, the dominance relations among members of the peer group form quickly and remain stable over a period of months or even longer (Strayer & Strayer, 1976). Especially among younger children, dominance is established through physical power and aggression; the most powerful children are those who physically coerce or threaten the other members of the group into compliance. The basis of dominance changes, however, as group members get to know one another. When preschoolers are observed over the period of a school year, for example, their aggression is highly correlated with dominance in the beginning of the year but is unrelated to dominance by the end of the year (LaFreniere & Charlesworth, 1983). As children approach adolescence, the basis for dominance shifts from physical power to characteristics such as intelligence, creativity, and interpersonal skill (Pettit et al., 1990; Savin-Williams, 1980).

KEY THEME
Child's Active Role

What function do dominance hierarchies serve in the social behavior of children? First, groups can more easily meet their objectives when certain individuals within the group assume a leadership role. Ethologists have long observed that many species of animals, especially primates, have clear lines of power that probably enhance the obtaining of food, protection against natural enemies, and control of reproduction. Among children, dominance hierarchies can serve to get games going on the playground or accomplish school projects that require group efforts. Second, dominance hierarchies make social relationships more predictable for members of the group. Each individual has a specific role, whether as leader or follower, and the behaviors associated with those roles are often clearly defined (Savin-Williams, 1979). Finally, dominance hierarchies are thought to control aggression among members of the group. Usually, once the most dominant members of the group have emerged, few other members resort to aggression. In one naturalistic observation of preschool children's free play, only 20 percent of the interactions among children were classified as counterattacks to aggression (Strayer & Strayer, 1976).

SEE FOR YOURSELF
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Risky Behaviors in Adolescents

Peer Pressure and Conformity

One of the most widely accepted beliefs about peer groups is that they control the behavior of children, sometimes more than parents and other adults would like. And in fact, peer pressure *is* a very real phenomenon. When seventh- through twelfth-graders were asked to rate how much pressure they felt from agemates in several domains, they did report pressure, and the greatest pressure was to simply be involved with peers: spend time with them, go to parties, and otherwise associate with them (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Clasen & Brown, 1985). They also felt pressure to excel and to complete their education. Contrary to popular opinion, however, they reported the least peer pressure to engage in misconduct, such as smoking, drinking, or having sexual relations. Older adolescents, however, felt more pressure to engage in misconduct than younger adolescents.

How willing are children to conform to these peer pressures? Again, when researchers ask them, children give different answers depending on their age (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Gavin & Furman, 1989). Relative to other ages, vulnerability to peer pressure peaks in early adolescence, usually between the sixth and ninth grades (see Figure 15.2). Note in Figure 15.2, though, that in terms of actual conformity scores, most children would not succumb to peer pressure; their average ratings are in the middle of the rating scale and correspond to a neutral response (Berndt, 1999). By late adolescence the influence of peers on conformity declines even further.

For some children, though, the peer group plays an important part in influencing behaviors and choices. By virtue of their style of parenting, parents may be responsible for adolescents' tendencies to seek out the peer group. When parents of adolescents are unresponsive to their children and maintain their power and restrictiveness, their children tend to be more noticeably oriented to their peer group (Bogenschneider et al., 1998; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993). Adolescents who develop an extreme orientation to their peer group, to the extent that they will ignore parents and schoolwork in order to remain popular, are more likely to become involved with

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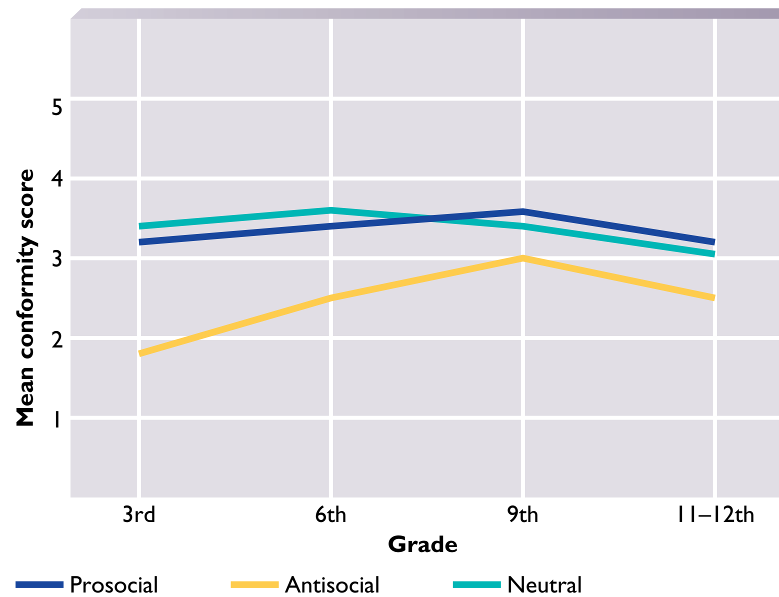
FIGURE 15.2
Developmental Changes in Conformity to Peer Pressure

Conformity to peer pressure, whether it involves prosocial, antisocial, or neutral behavior, peaks in early adolescence, then declines. The higher numbers in this graph represent greater willingness to conform.



Source: Adapted from Berndt, 1979.

alcohol and drug use, to skip classes, and to demonstrate other problem behaviors (Fuligni et al., 2001).

Researchers now believe that studying "peer pressure" as a general phenomenon is not as revealing as examining the roles that *specific* peers play in the child's development. For example, some friends may be more influential than others, and their influence may be greater in some domains than in others, such as aggression as opposed to school achievement. In addition, a child's vulnerability to peer influences probably depends to some degree on his level of emotional and cognitive development (Berndt, 1999; Hartup, 1999). Thus a full understanding of peer influences will have to take these complexities into account.

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What do research findings reveal about the factors that promote the formation of peer group identities?
- What do research findings reveal about the factors that can lessen hostilities between groups of peers?
- How do dominance hierarchies form in children's peer groups? What functions do they serve?
- When does conformity to peer pressure reach its peak? What factors are related to a stronger orientation to the peer group?

Peers as Agents of Socialization

Like parents, teachers, and the media, peers are the child's source of information about the "do's and don'ts" of the social world. Because children have such extensive social relations with their peers, there are few more potent sources of feedback on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Peers socialize their agemates in two main ways: as models and as reinforcers. In their behaviors, peers also reflect the values of the larger society.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 545

Peers as Models

According to social learning theory, the greater the similarity between a model and an observer, the more likely it is that the observer will imitate the model's behavior (Bandura, 1969). Peers therefore are prime candidates for prompting imitation in children. Although peer imitation declines by middle childhood, it occurs quite frequently in the early years. In one study, the number of imitative acts occurring in the free play of preschoolers averaged 14.82 per hour (Abramovitch & Grusec, 1978).

There is ample evidence that a host of social behaviors can be transmitted through peer modeling. Display of aggression is a prime example. When children observe a peer acting aggressively with toys, they spontaneously perform similar aggressive acts (Hicks, 1965). On the opposite end of the spectrum, models can promote sharing and other altruistic acts in child observers (Elliott & Vasta, 1970; Hartup & Coates, 1967). Peer models can also influence gender-role behaviors. Most children are reluctant to play with toys meant for the opposite sex. Yet if a peer model displays cross-sex play, children's tendency to follow suit increases (Kobasigawa, 1968; Wolf, 1973).

A powerful variable influencing imitation is the model's competence as perceived by the child observer, especially when new skills or behaviors are involved. Children prefer older, friendly models who are similar to themselves in background and interests (Brody & Stoneman, 1981; Hartup & Coates, 1967; Rosekrans, 1967). Especially in the realm of social behaviors, children may imitate competent peer models over adult models because they see the behaviors selected by peers as more appropriate for themselves.

Peers as Reinforcers

Peers not only model certain behaviors but also actively reinforce their friends' behaviors. Peers communicate clear signals about the social behaviors they prefer and those they won't tolerate, messages that may either maintain or inhibit the child's behaviors. Consider the case of sex-typed behaviors. Researchers observed the reactions of peers as preschool-age children engaged in sex-appropriate or inappropriate play in their nursery schools (Lamb & Roopnarine, 1979). They found that boys who engaged in male-typed activities such as playing ball or chase received more praise and approval (mostly from other boys) than girls did when they attempted these same behaviors. Similarly, peers more frequently reinforced girls than boys who played with dolls or kitchen items or assumed female character roles. Peers controlled behavior through punishment, too, although it was reserved largely for cross-sex activities.

In the same way, peer reactions can regulate the frequency of other social behaviors, such as aggression. In their observations of aggression among preschoolers, Gerald Patterson and his colleagues noted that about three-fourths of the aggressive behaviors that took place were reinforced by victims' compliance or submission (Patterson, Littman, & Bricker, 1967). The consequence was that aggressors maintained their combative styles of interaction. If a peer responded with counteraggression, however, the perpetrator was less likely to repeat the action with that child, choosing either another victim or another behavior. Thus peers powerfully affect one another by means of their positive and negative reactions.

Peer Popularity and Social Competence

Parents, teachers, and others who have the opportunity to observe children over time usually notice the two extreme ends of the sociability spectrum: Some children seem to be at the center of many activities, from school projects to playground games, whereas others are ridiculed or ignored. Frequently the patterns of peer acceptance that become established in the early school years persist for years afterward, along with the psychological rewards or disappointments that accompany them. Psychologists have uncovered several factors related to peer acceptance and popularity and have applied this knowledge to helping children at the unpopular extreme of the spectrum.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 546

EXAMINING RESEARCH METHODS

Using Questionnaires to Assess Peer Status

Given the relationship between peer acceptance and later development described at the start of this chapter, the task of identifying children with problems in this domain is all the more important. One way that psychologists have assessed the quality of peer relations is to administer questionnaires to children, asking about the social standing of their agemates.

Peer assessments frequently consist of a **sociometric nomination** measure in which children are asked to name a specified number of peers (usually between three and five) who fit a certain criterion. For example, children might be asked to "name three classmates you especially like (or dislike)" or "list three peers you would like to walk home from school with." The number of positive or negative nominations the child receives from other children serves as a measure of his popularity. Alternatively, children are sometimes asked to rate each peer in the class or group on a **sociometric rating scale,** a series of items such as "How much do you like to be with this person at school?" The target child's average rating by the other children is the index of peer acceptance.

KEY THEME
Individual Differences

Peer nomination measures, in turn, are used to classify children's *peer status*. *Popular* children receive many more positive ("like") than negative ("dislike") nominations. *Rejected* children, in contrast, receive few positive but many negative nominations. *Neglected* children receive low numbers of nominations in either category; although they lack friends, they are not actively disliked (Asher & Dodge, 1986). *Controversial* children receive high numbers of both positive and negative nominations. They have a high degree of "social impact" because they are active and visible, but they are generally not preferred as social partners (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Finally, *average* children do not receive extreme scores on peer nomination measures. Figure 15.3 summarizes these categories of peer status.

The use of sociometric questionnaires, although important to research on peer relations, raises some interesting questions. First, do researchers and children agree on the connotations of popularity? In one study, fourth- and fifth-graders were shown photographs of three children; one was described as popular, one was described as unpopular, and one was presented as neutral. Children were asked to imagine several different social encounters with each of the children (e.g., meeting in the lunch room) and to rate how positive and negative these interactions would be. Children were also asked to rate how much they liked each target child. The results showed that although unpopular targets were liked less than the other two targets, popular children were not liked any more than neutral targets (LaFontana & Cillessen, 1998). Other researchers have found that popular peers, as defined by children, are viewed as more aggressive, dominant, and "stuck up" than popular children as defined by sociometric measures (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Thus researchers' and children's notions of popularity may not have exactly the same meaning. What are some of the circumstances in which each type of information might be useful?

Second, most sociometric measures assess an individual child's one-on-one relationships with a few children. However, as the Robbers Cave study so vividly demonstrated, much of children's experience with peers is in the context of larger groups. Because understanding children's leadership, dominance, and status requires an examination of their functioning in a broader social network, researchers are now calling for new approaches that capture the complexities of children's peer networks (Cairns, Xie, & Leung, 1998). One such approach involves creating *composite social maps* of children's peer group relations. In order to create one, several children are asked to report with whom various *other* children associate; these reports are tallied up and diagrammed (see Figure 15.4 for an example) (Kinder-

sociometric nomination Peer assessment measure in which children are asked to name a specific number of peers who fit a certain criterion, such as "peers you would like to walk home with."

sociometric rating scale Peer assessment measure in which children rate peers on a number of social dimensions.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 547

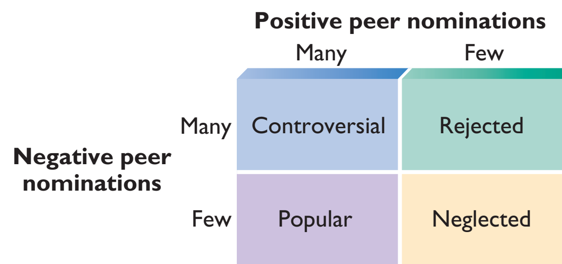
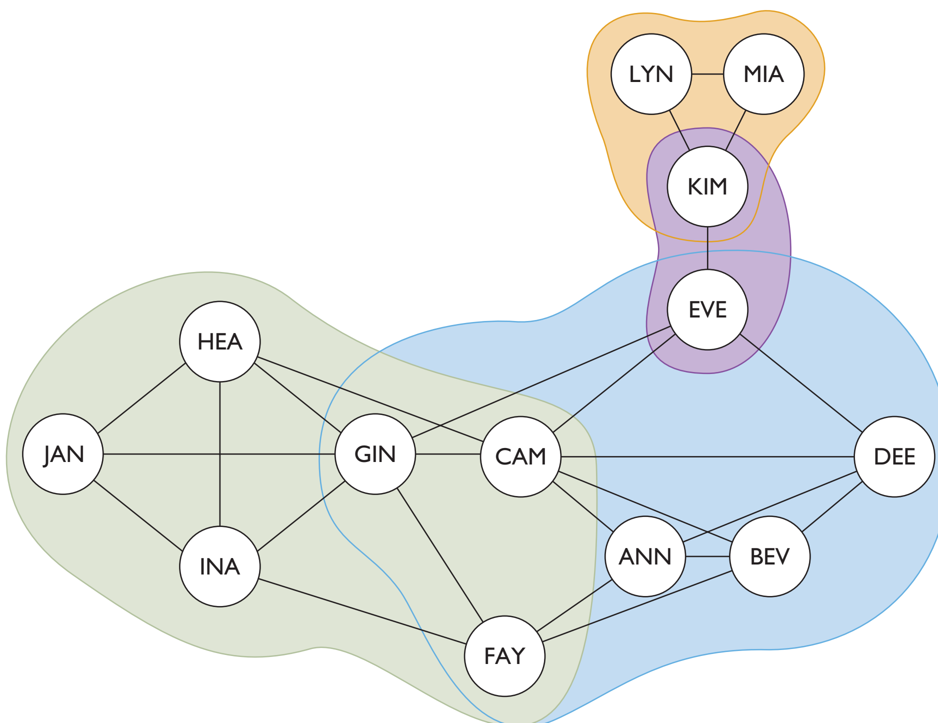


FIGURE 15.3
Classifications of Peer Status

The number of positive and negative peer nominations received determines whether a child's peer status is classified as controversial, rejected, neglected, or popular. Average children receive less extreme scores on peer nomination measures.

mann, 1998). What types of questions might researchers begin to study once they have identified these broader peer networks?

The issues raised here suggest a very important point regarding the use of questionnaires in research—the nature of the questions themselves matters a great deal. Perhaps that fact seems obvious, but researchers need to be aware of how subtle changes in wording may have important ramifications for the information they collect. Thus asking a child to name a peer she would like to walk home with may be tapping a different underlying construct than asking who is popular and what a popular person is like. Similarly, asking children whom they prefer to "hang out" with might yield different kinds of information than asking peers to report on who "hangs out" with whom.



Source: Kindermann, 1998.

FIGURE 15.4
A Composite Social Map

Illustrated here is a composite social map for girls in a fourth-grade classroom. Children are asked to report on the social affiliations of others in their classroom, and their responses are tallied and diagrammed. The map shows four peer groups of various sizes in this particular classroom, some of them with overlapping members.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 548

Characteristics of Popular and Unpopular Children

KEY THEME
Individual Differences

What exactly is it about unpopular children that makes them so unappealing to their agemates and places them so consistently in an undesirable status? This is a particularly important question for those attempting to intervene in these children's "at-risk" circumstances. Peer popularity, as defined by sociometric measures, is related to a number of variables, some of which lie within the child's control and some of which, unfortunately, do not.

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

- **Physical Attractiveness** When asked to rate photographs of unfamiliar children, both preschool- and elementary school-age children believe children with attractive faces are more friendly, intelligent, and socially competent than unattractive children (Dion & Berscheid, 1974; Langlois & Stephan, 1981). Correlations between children's ratings of peers' attractiveness and sociometric measures of peer acceptance typically range between +0.35 and +0.50, indicating a moderately strong relationship between these two variables (Cavior & Dokecki, 1973; Lerner & Lerner, 1977). Body type makes a difference too. For example, boys with broad shoulders and large muscles are the most popular, and short, chubby boys are the least popular (Staffieri, 1967). The reasons for these stereotypic beliefs are unknown, but they can lead to self-fulfilling behaviors in children who have been labeled (Hartup, 1983). For example, a child who receives peer attention because of attractiveness may have numerous opportunities to develop the social skills that lead to even greater peer acceptance. Finally, as we saw in "Brain, Motor Skill, and Physical Development," boys who mature early and girls who mature later during adolescence are more likely to be accepted by peers.

KEY THEME
Sociocultural Influence

- **Motor Skills** Another factor related to peer acceptance is the child's proficiency in motor activities. Both boys and girls who are coordinated, strong, and skilled in activities such as throwing a ball are rated as more popular by peers and as more socially competent by their teachers and parents (Hops & Finch, 1985). It may be that the value our society places on athletic prowess is reflected in children's preferences in playmates. Alternatively, motor skill may facilitate the manipulation of objects and game playing that constitute the majority of children's shared activities. Those who are talented in this arena will naturally have more peer contacts and eventually be better liked.

KEY THEME
Child's Active Role

- **Social Skills** One of the most important factors in peer acceptance is the constellation of social behaviors displayed by popular and unpopular children. Researchers who have observed the overt activities of accepted and unaccepted peers have learned that each presents a distinct behavioral profile. In general, popular children engage in prosocial, cooperative, and normative behaviors and show a high degree of social skill. In contrast, about 50 percent of rejected children are aggressive (Bierman, Smoot, & Aumiller, 1993) and about 20 percent are highly socially withdrawn (Volling et al., 1993). Both of these types of rejected children, as well as neglected children, display socially inappropriate behaviors for which they receive little social reinforcement (Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Pettit et al., 1996).

For example, when Gary Ladd (1983) observed third- and fourth-grade students during recess, he noted several differences in the behavioral styles of popular and rejected children. Popular children spent more time in cooperative play, social conversation, and other positive social interactions with peers than their rejected counterparts. Rejected children, on the other hand, spent more time engaging in antagonistic behaviors such as arguing and playing in a rough-and-tumble fashion, or playing or standing alone at a distance from peers.

According to the results of another study that examined the peer-directed behaviors of first- and third-grade boys, neglected and controversial children display still other clusters of behaviors (Coie & Dodge, 1988). Neglected boys were the least aggressive of any group observed. They tended to engage in isolated activities and had low visibility with peers. Controversial boys were intellectually, athletically, or so-

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 549

Children who lack social skills may be rejected or neglected by their peers. In contrast, popular children display prosocial behaviors and a wide range of social knowledge.

cially talented and very active, but they were sometimes prone to anger and rule violations. The mixture of their positive and negative social behaviors thus elicited a similarly mixed reaction from their classmates. Thus children may be unpopular with their peers for a number of reasons, ranging from social withdrawal to outright aggression.

The social competence of popular children becomes markedly apparent when they are asked to enter a group of unfamiliar children who are already at play. Kenneth Dodge and his colleagues observed as individual kindergartners entered a room where two other children they did not know were already playing with blocks (Dodge et al., 1983). Popular, rejected, and neglected children used different tactics to gain entry into the group, with popular children generally the most successful. Rejected children tended to disrupt the group's ongoing activity by pushing the blocks off the table or making intrusive statements, usually about themselves (e.g., "I have a baby brother"). In return, their peer hosts responded negatively to them. Neglected children were not disruptive but employed another ineffective strategy. Instead of making some verbal or nonverbal attempt to join the group, these children passively watched as their peers played—and they were ignored. Popular children seemed to know exactly what to do. Rather than calling attention to themselves or disrupting the group's activities, they made statements about their peers or what they were doing, such as "That looks like a fun game you are playing." These diplomatic verbalizations paved the way for their smooth integration into the group.

Popular children are particularly effective at maintaining cohesive social interactions with their peers. When Betty Black and Nancy Hazen (1990) observed the social entry behaviors of preschool-age children, they found that disliked children made significantly more irrelevant comments when they spoke with peers. The following segment illustrates how such a conversation might go:

> *Mary:* We're being witches here, and I am the mean witch.
> *Sandy:* My mom is taking me to get shoes today. (p. 387)

In contrast, children who were liked tended to maintain organized, thematically coherent conversations with their peers.

Emotion Regulation Research is increasingly pointing to a link between children's ability to regulate their own emotions and the reactions they receive from peers. For example, in one recent study, peers reported that children they had categorized as

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 550

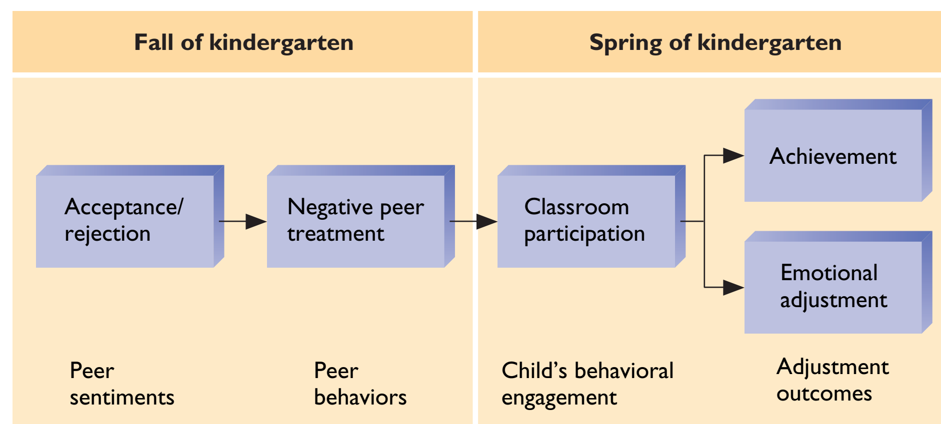
rejected were irritable and inattentive in their behaviors. Peers saw them as complaining and getting upset when things went wrong and as being easily distracted (Pope & Bierman, 1999). In fact, rejected children do tend to express more anger, both in their facial expressions and their verbalizations, in contexts such as losing a game (Hubbard, 2001). Or they may show inappropriate happiness as they behave aggressively with their peers (Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover, 2000). Observations of preschool- and kindergarten-age children also show that there is a relationship between the ability to inhibit undesirable behaviors and social competence with peers. Children who are able to control their behaviors (e.g., who are attentive and follow directions) tend to express fewer negative emotions and generally have more positive interactions with their classmates (Fabes et al., 1999). This pattern of findings has been observed in varying cultures, such as Indonesia, for example (Eisenberg, Picada, & Liew, 2001).

Observations of popular children show that they display a range of socioemotional skills that their more unpopular agemates often lack. But does their skill actually cause their popularity, or do children develop reputations that precipitate subsequent successful or maladaptive patterns of social interaction? A child who is initially rejected because of his appearance, for example, may develop an aggressive style in retaliation. Gary Ladd and his associates examined this question more closely by observing preschool children in the playground during three six-week intervals at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year (Ladd, Price, & Hart, 1988). Episodes of cooperative play, arguments, and other positive and negative forms of interaction were recorded. In addition, children's sociometric status was assessed at each of these three points in time. The results showed that children who engaged in more cooperative play at the beginning of the school year made gains in peer acceptance by the end of the school year, whereas children who frequently argued showed a decline in acceptance by the middle of the school year. These results are consistent with the idea that children's behaviors precede their social status.

Perhaps of most concern is the finding that once children are rejected by peers, they are on a trajectory that oftentimes leads to lower school achievement and emotional problems. In another study, Ladd observed children both in the fall and spring of their kindergarten year, noting their peer status, peer interactions, classroom participation, and emotional adjustment over the school year. The data fit the model depicted in Figure 15.5. Rejected children were subjected to more negative treatment from peers (e.g., exclusion from peer activities, victimization) and participated less in classroom activities, which in turn predicted lower achievement and emotional

FIGURE 15.5
The Impact of Peer Rejection

Peer rejection is associated with negative consequences among children, including emotional and academic problems. To study more closely the dynamics of this process, Eric Buhs and Gary Ladd (2001) monitored kindergarten children's peer status, peer interactions, classroom participation, and eventual adjustment over the school year. They found that the results of the study generally supported a model like that depicted here.



Source: Buhs & Ladd, 2001.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 551

difficulties (Buhs & Ladd, 2001). Given the developmental pathway that many rejected children follow, finding ways to help them negotiate their social world, especially as they begin school, seems all the more important.

Atypical Development

Social Withdrawal

Some children are "loners." They have few or no friends, and they end up playing or doing their schoolwork on their own, even if surrounded by other children. Along with aggression, social withdrawal is considered by many child development experts to be one of the two most important indicators of a behavior problem (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Withdrawn children are prone to express anxiety, loneliness, negative conceptions of themselves, and depression (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Rubin, Hymel, & Mills, 1989). Moreover, lack of social contact is a feature of several clinical categories of psychopathology (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993).

Children may have limited interactions with their peers for a number of reasons. Some children may simply prefer to play by themselves, curling up with a book or becoming involved with an interesting toy. This pattern is usually noted in the preschool and early school years and is not necessarily an indication that the child is at risk for abnormal development. If this pattern persists, however, peers may react negatively and outrightly reject the child (Rubin, 1993). A second pattern is that of the shy child, who is nervous about being in new environments or with strangers but generally desires social interactions. This characteristic may stem from a biologically based temperament that results in the child's wariness and inhibition (Kagan, Snidman, & Arcus, 1993). Early negative experiences due to a shy temperament can escalate into more severe social withdrawal as the childhood years progress. A third category is children who desire social interactions but, because of their inept social skills, are avoided by their peers. These children may react with aggression, which further contributes to their isolation (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993).

Researchers are just beginning to understand some of the factors, aside from biological temperament, that may contribute to social withdrawal in children. For example, Rosemary Mills and Kenneth Rubin (1993) found that mothers of four-year-olds who were withdrawn were highly controlling and directive when attempting to teach their children how to interact with peers. They also expressed more anger, disappointment, and guilt about their children's behaviors than mothers of aggressive and "average" children. The reactions of peers may make a difference too. First-grade children do not seem to think about social withdrawal as a liability when asked to rate the likability of children described in vignettes. By age ten, though, social withdrawal was viewed as an abnormal behavior (Younger, Gentile, & Burgess, 1993). Interestingly, even in China, where adults value shyness as a personality trait, children shift from positive to negative evaluations of shy children at around age twelve (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995). These studies, along with the different patterns of social withdrawal described here, suggest the complex nature of this style of social functioning.

Despite these complexities, it is important that researchers continue to examine the nature of social withdrawal in childhood because of its potential lingering impact even well into adulthood. Kenneth Rubin gives one example in a letter he received from a fifty-one-year-old individual who had read about his research:

> *I recall one instance in my third year of grade school and my teacher approached me after recess with the enquiry "have you no one to play with—I have noticed you standing by yourself at recess for several days now." I recalled replying and LYING—"yes I've friends." The teacher was observant and I give her credit for this, however, I wish, oh how I wish, something had been done about my isolation at the tender age of 7 or 8. It has been a long, lonely road.* (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993, p. 4)

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 552

The Origins of Social Competence

What factors are responsible for the skilled social behaviors of some children and the seeming social ineptness of others? Researchers draw their answers from a number of perspectives, from the early attachment relationships children form with their caregivers to capabilities in processing the subtle cues that form such an integral part of social interactions.

Attachment Relationships As we saw in the chapter titled "Emotion," infants who are securely attached to their caregivers are predisposed to have positive peer relations in toddlerhood (Waters, Wippman, & Sroufe, 1979). A plausible hypothesis is that in their relationships with caregivers, children have the opportunity to learn and practice a variety of social skills, such as turn taking, compromise, and effective communication. Once honed and refined, these abilities can later be employed with peers and other individuals in the child's life. Attachment also teaches children about emotional ties: how to recognize affection and how to show it. This knowledge about the central ingredients of relationships and the "internal working models" they construct regarding relationships may assist children as they expand their social worlds (Hay, 1985; Sroufe, 1983). Longitudinal studies confirm that children and adolescents who have more positive relationships with peers tended to have secure attachments with their parents during infancy and toddlerhood (Booth et al., 1995; Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992). Other researchers have noted that seven- to twelve-year-olds who reported positive relationships with their mothers also had positive cognitions about relationships with peers. For example, those who characterized their mothers as being indifferent made similar judgments about interactions with peers (Rudolph, Hammen, & Burge, 1995). On the other hand, adolescents who have a close, involved relationship with their parents also feel close and secure with their friends (Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

Parental Influences Parents play an influential role in the relationships their children form with peers. Broadly speaking, parents who exhibit an authoritative style (see the chapter titled "The Family")—that is, are responsive, are nurturant, and provide verbal explanations—tend to have children who are popular and who display prosocial behaviors with peers. In contrast, children of authoritarian, power-assertive parents are more likely to be classified as rejected (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Hart et al., 1992; Pettit et al., 1996).

Parents serve as important models of social competence for their children; they may also provide explicit instruction on appropriate ways to behave in social situations. In one study, mothers of popular and unpopular preschoolers were observed as they introduced their children to a pair of peers busily playing with blocks. Mothers of unpopular children tended to disrupt the ongoing play and use their authority to incorporate their own child into the group. In many ways, their behaviors resembled those of the unpopular children we discussed earlier. In contrast, mothers of popular children encouraged them to become involved in play without intervening in the activity of the host peers. Moreover, in a subsequent interview, these mothers displayed greater knowledge of how to encourage their children to make friends, resolve conflicts, and display other positive social behaviors (Finnie & Russell, 1988). Others have noted that compared with parents of less popular children, parents of popular and socially competent children are generally less disagreeable and demanding and express less negative affect when they play with their children (Isley et al., 1999; Putallaz, 1987). In addition, both mothers and fathers of unpopular children have been found to shift conversations to irrelevant topics, speak while someone else is talking, and ignore their children's requests. Perhaps not surprisingly, their children showed similar ineffective communication styles (Black & Logan, 1995).

Finally, parents can influence children's social competence on another level: by managing their children's social activities. Parents vary in the extent to which they

Parents influence peer-group relations by structuring the kinds of opportunities children have to socialize with age-mates. They also serve as models of social competence and may provide instruction on how to behave in social situations.

create opportunities for their children to interact with peers, experiences that provide the context for the emergence of social skills. Some parents seek out play groups for their preschoolers, enroll them in nursery school, or periodically get together with friends who have children. When parents deliberately arrange peer contacts for their preschoolers, their children have a greater variety of playmates and a larger number of consistent play partners, display more prosocial behaviors at preschool, and have higher sociometric status (at least among boys) than when parents do not make such efforts (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Ladd & Hart, 1992). Opportunities to interact with peers provide the child with a natural arena to discover those behaviors that generate positive responses from peers and those that do not.

● **Daycare** When children have more experiences with peers because they are enrolled in daycare (as many children do in today's society), they show greater social competence than children reared solely at home by their parents. Carollee Howes (1987a) conducted an extensive longitudinal study of the peer relationships of one- to six-year-olds who were enrolled in child care programs. Among her findings was the discovery that popular or average-status children had entered child care at earlier ages (about ten to nineteen months on average) than rejected children (about thirty to thirty-three months). Early experience was not the sole important factor, however. Howes found that the stability of the peer group was significant as well. Toddlers who had spent a year or more *with the same peers* were more socially competent in that they showed more cooperative forms of play. These children were also rated by teachers as having fewer difficulties than children who had moved to a different group. Evidently, experiences with peers indeed provide an excellent context for mastering social skills, especially if there is sustained contact with familiar agemates.

● **Social-Cognitive Development** The studies of peer group entry strategies described earlier vividly illustrate that the social competence of children includes an array of intertwined cognitive and behavioral skills. An information-processing model of social competence formulated by Nicki Crick and Kenneth Dodge (see Figure 15.6) suggests more precisely how cognitions and behaviors are related and where problems in social functioning might occur (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

According to the model, the first step in processing social information is to focus on the correct cues. For example, suppose a boy initiates a conversation with a peer. It is more important for the child to encode the peer's facial expression ("Is that a

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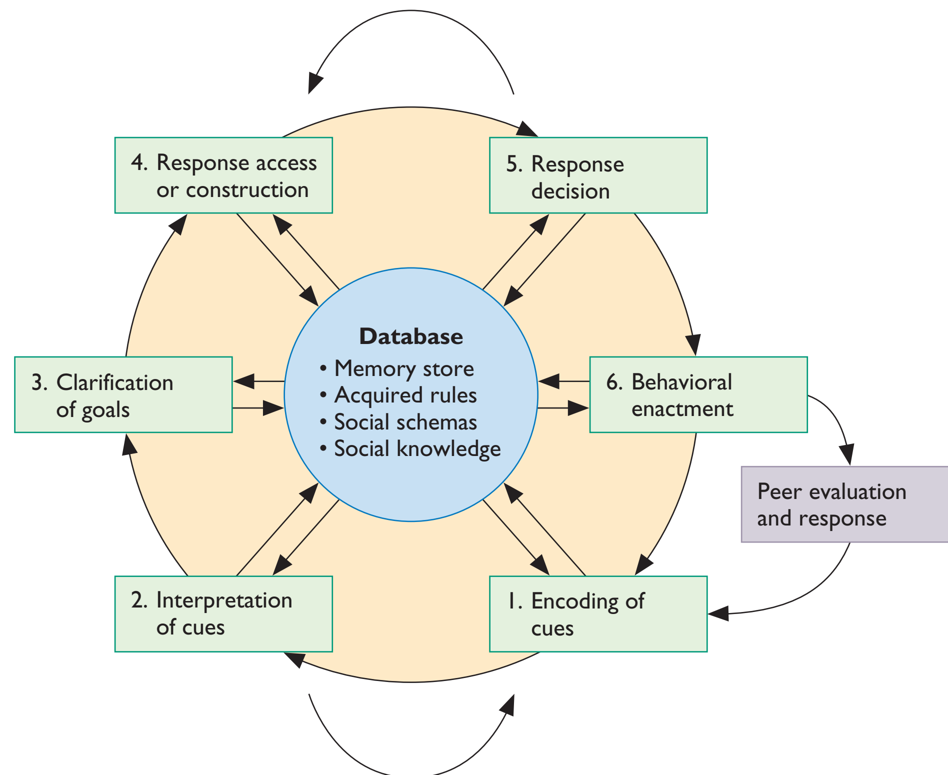
FIGURE 15.6
Social Competence: An Information-Processing Model

Crick and Dodge (1994) have proposed a six-step model of social competence based on the child's growing social information-processing skills. The process begins when the child is able to correctly encode and then interpret a social cue. Next, the child generates a set of social goals and possible responses to achieve them. Finally, the child evaluates those responses and enacts the behavior he or she internally selected. Children low in social competence may have difficulties at any step in this model.



Source: Adapted from Crick & Dodge, 1994.

KEY THEME
Child's Active Role

smile or a sneer?") than the color of her clothing. Second, the child must meaningfully interpret the social cues based on his past experiences. Most children would interpret a scowl on a peer's face as a sign of hostility and a smile as a mark of friendliness. In the third step of processing, the child selects a goal for the situation, such as retaliating against an aggressor or making a friend. Fourth, the child generates one or more potential behavioral responses. If he perceives the peer as hostile, he may contemplate avoiding her or matching her hostility. If he reads her signals as friendly, he may consider smiling back or beginning to talk. Fifth, the child evaluates the potential consequences of each possible behavior. Hostility and aggression could lead to physical harm whereas avoidance might not, and hence avoidance might be preferable. Finally, the child enacts the chosen response verbally or physically, monitors the outcome of his behavior, and, if necessary, modifies it, engaging in the six-step cycle over again. This model thus includes a number of steps at which things can go wrong to disrupt a smooth, mutually rewarding social interaction.

Studies of peer relations suggest that popular children are more skillful than unpopular (and, in particular, rejected) children at several steps in the model. First, they are better able to encode and decipher social information correctly. In one study, elementary school children were asked to label the emotions depicted in sets of pictures. For example, one was a series of faces depicting anger, happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise, and fear. Rejected children were less able than popular children to correctly identify the emotions represented in these stimuli (Monfries & Kafer, 1987).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

Second, some rejected children tend to make incorrect attributions about the behaviors of peers. In one experiment, researchers asked children to view videotaped episodes of an actor destroying a second actor's toy with either hostile, prosocial, accidental, or ambiguous intent. Both rejected and neglected children tended to attribute hostile intentions to the actor's actions, even when the acts were accidental or prosocial. Popular children were more often correct in their judgments (Dodge, Murphy, & Buchsbaum, 1984). Numerous studies have confirmed

that aggressive children in particular tend to make more hostile attributions about the intentions of others than nonaggressive children (Orobio de Castro et al., 2002). The tendency to hold negative beliefs about peers is linked to two factors: prior negative experiences with parents and past low social acceptance from peers (MacKinnon-Lewis, Rabiner, & Starnes, 1999). As a result of these mistaken attributions, aggressive children often retaliate with further negative behavior. Children who exhibit this style of overattributing hostile intent are called *reactive-aggressive* (Crick & Dodge, 1996).

Third, some rejected children tend to suggest inappropriate strategies to resolve social problems and have difficulty devising alternative paths to attain their social goals (Rubin & Krasnor, 1986). Researchers typically assess social problem-solving skills by presenting children with hypothetical social dilemmas and examining their proposed solutions. Researchers in one study asked kindergartners to react to a series of dilemmas in which, for example, one child takes away another's toy. Unpopular children were much more likely than popular children to recommend an aggressive solution, such as "Punch him" or "She could beat her up." A preference for aggressive solutions to problems is typical of children who are *proactive aggressive* (Crick & Dodge, 1996). In addition, when Kenneth Rubin and Linda Krasnor observed children's strategies for handling social problems in naturalistic settings, they noted that rejected children were rigid in their attempts (Rubin & Krasnor, 1986). If, for example, a rejected child failed to convince another child to give him an object, he simply repeated the same unsuccessful behavior. Popular children often tried a different approach to attaining their goal, indicating a broader and more flexible repertoire of social problem-solving skills.

Popular children thus possess social knowledge that leads to successful interactions with their peers and also behave in ways that manifest this expertise. They know what strategies are needed to make friends (e.g., ask others their names, invite them to do things) and can describe prosocial behaviors that tend to foster peer relationships (e.g., be generous, keep promises) (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993). They also recognize that the achievement of their social goals may require time and work and adjust their behaviors according to the sometimes subtle demands of the situation (Asher, 1983). Rejected children, on the other hand, have a more limited awareness of how to solve social problems, believing particularly in the effectiveness of aggression. Unfortunately, their antagonistic actions frequently lead to a spiral of continuing rejection. As they become disassociated from more socially skilled, popular peers, they have fewer opportunities to learn the basics of successful social interaction from them. Moreover, the child who receives consistently negative feedback from peers would probably be hard pressed to be positive, cooperative, and friendly. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that aggression tends to remain a fairly stable trait, at least in the early school years (Ladd & Burgess, 1999). Neglected children have their own special problems. Rubin and Krasnor (1986) believe children in this special category do not display social cognitive deficits but insecurities and anxieties about the consequences of their social actions. What they need is more self-confidence in their abilities to interact with and be accepted by their peers.

RESEARCH APPLIED TO EDUCATION

Helping the Victims of Aggression

Jan's attention was drawn to the loud shouts of a circle of boys at the back of the playground. As she approached, she saw two boys in the middle of the circle, one waving clenched fists and yelling at the other. Quickly she stepped in and broke up the fight, fortunately before anyone got hurt. She recognized the older of the two boys; he was a fourth-grader who had a reputation for being a "bully." The other child was a small, frightened-looking second-grader who was on the verge of tears. Jan knew she would have some talking to do to both of them and probably to their parents as well.

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One way to help children who are the victims of bullies is to encourage their physical development so that they do not send cues suggesting "weakness" to potential aggressors. Building the victim's confidence by encouraging special abilities and talents can also be beneficial.

Researchers have documented many of the characteristics of children who are rejected, particularly those who are aggressive with their peers. But what about children who are the victims of aggression? About 9 percent of children are chronic targets of peer aggression, a pattern that can begin as early as kindergarten age. Being a victim is associated with poorer school adjustment, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, and depression (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Egan & Perry, 1998; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Olweus, 1993a). Given these characteristics of victims, is there anything parents (and perhaps teachers) can do to stop this negative cycle?

Dan Olweus has studied the problem of bullies and victims among children in grades one through nine in Norway and Sweden. He has found that victims are often anxious, sensitive, and quiet children who react to bullying by crying and giving in. Often they are physically weaker than most children their age and generally have few friends. Olweus believes this pattern of passive characteristics signals to other children that they are unlikely to retaliate against aggression (Olweus, 1993a). Other researchers, including those who have studied children from varying cultures such as China, have confirmed that chronic victims tend to be unassertive and submissive when they are with their peers (Schwartz, Chang, Farver, 2001; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). A major intervention program to deal with the problems of bullying was launched in Norway over a three-year period. The program involved about twenty-five hundred students from forty-two elementary and junior high schools, as well as their parents and teachers. Advice to the parents of chronic victims included the following:

1. *Help the child to develop self-confidence by encouraging special talents or abilities he displays.* Children who gain confidence are more likely to be assertive and refuse to tolerate the behaviors of bullies.

2. *Encourage the child to undertake some form of physical training or participate in sports.* By doing so he will feel less anxiety about his body and send out "signals" of strength rather than weakness to potential aggressors.

3. *Help the child get to know a friendly student in the class who has similar interests or is also looking for a friend.* A relationship with another peer can help with feelings of loneliness and depression.

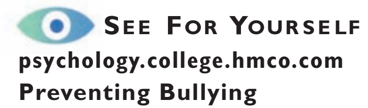
4. *Encourage the child's attempts to become involved with people or activities outside the family.* This suggestion is especially helpful if the family tends to attempt to protect the child every time he is attacked.

This advice was combined with several other programmatic changes involving the school, including teachers' institution of class rules against bullying, better supervision of lunch and recess, talks with the parents of bullies, and promotion of more

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 557

positive classroom experiences and cooperative learning (Olweus, 1993b). The results showed a 50 percent reduction in the number of children being bullied (and in those acting as bullies as well). In addition, the incidence of other antisocial behavior such as thefts and vandalism was reduced, and the social climate of the classroom became more positive. A key to the program's success was the involvement of *all* children in the program (not just bullies and victims), greater supervision of children during the school day, and good communication between teachers and parents (Olweus, 1994, 1997).

A small proportion of victims of bullying are aggressive themselves (Olweus, 1978; Schwartz et al., 1993). Many of these children come from homes in which they are treated harshly by parents, in some cases even abused (Schwartz et al., 1997). For this subgroup of victims, intervention strategies may have to take a different course than for children who fit the more prevalent pattern of being chronically passive and submissive.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Preventing Bullying

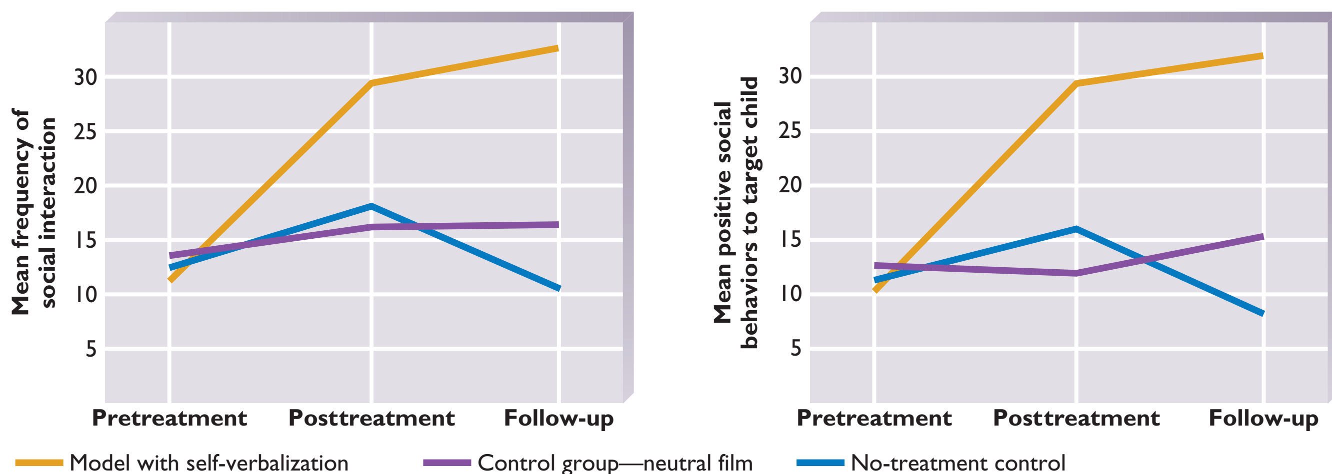
Training Social Skills

Can children be taught the elements of socially skilled behavior and thereby gain greater acceptance from their peers? Answering this question is important in light of findings that the longer children experience rejection from peers, the more likely they are to have academic, social, and psychological problems (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994). Several forms of intervention, usually employed in schools and clinical settings, have produced improvements in children's interpersonal strategies.

● **Modeling** One effective training technique is *modeling*, that is, exposing children to live or recorded models displaying desirable behaviors. For example, one research team presented a group of socially withdrawn preschoolers with short videotapes depicting young children engaging in social behaviors accompanied by a narration of their thoughts (Jakibchuk & Smeriglio, 1976). The soundtrack included the following self-directed statements as the model approached a group of peers: "Those children over there are playing together. . . . I would like to play with them. But I'm afraid. I don't know what to do or say. . . . This is hard. But I'll try. . . . I'm close to them. I did it. Good for me. . . ." Compared with their baseline behaviors, withdrawn children who watched these videotapes for four days increased the number of their social interactions and in turn were the objects of more positive social behaviors from others. Figure 15.7 shows dramatic results when children who received this treatment were compared with children who received no intervention at

FIGURE 15.7
Training Social Skills

In an experiment that evaluated the effects of several treatment strategies with socially withdrawn preschoolers, researchers found that children who observed a model approach a group of peers while verbalizing his thoughts later increased their number of social interactions compared with the pretreatment (or baseline) period. These children also experienced more positive social behaviors from others. The graphs show both measures for this treatment group compared with a group that saw a neutral film and with a no-treatment control group. These last two groups were included to ensure that any gains in social behavior were not the result of simple contact with the experimenters or exposure to a film per se.



Source: Adapted from Jakibchuk & Smeriglio, 1976.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 558

all or who saw a film on another subject. From the perspective of social learning theory, by identifying with the model, observing how the model acted, and noting the positive consequences of the model's behavior, children were able to expand their repertoire of social behaviors and increase their likelihood of performing those behaviors.

• **Reinforcement** A second type of intervention uses social or material *reinforcement* to shape socially skilled behaviors and increase their frequency, a technique of operant conditioning (see the chapter titled "Basic Learning and Perception"). Suppose a withdrawn child merely looks at a group of peers playing on the opposite side of the room. The teacher or parent immediately reacts with a "Good!" or a pat on the head. Next, the young child might take a few steps in the direction of the group. Again, the adult promptly delivers a reinforcer. The teacher or parent rewards each successive approximation to the target behavior—in this case, joining the group—until the child has actually entered the group. In general, direct reinforcement of social behaviors is a very effective technique, especially for increasing their frequency (Schneider & Byrne, 1985).

Sometimes the operant approach is combined with other techniques, such as modeling. In one investigation, withdrawn nursery school children received social reinforcement whenever they interacted with their peers. Those who also saw a model demonstrating social interactions showed the greatest gains in the amount of time spent with peers (O'Connor, 1972).

• **Coaching** The most popular training technique has been *coaching,* or direct instruction in displaying an assortment of social behaviors. In this approach, a verbal presentation of the "right" and "wrong" ways to act is frequently accompanied by discussion about why certain techniques work and by opportunities for children to *role-play,* or act out the desirable behaviors. The goal is to expand children's knowledge of socially desirable behaviors and develop social problem-solving skills. For example, in one social skills training program, elementary school children learn how to join a conversation:

> *Teacher:* Chances are that if you don't know how to start talking with another person or join in when others are talking, you won't be a part of many conversations. . . . For example, pretend that some of your classmates are talking about a TV show that you happened to see last night and you want to get in on the conversation. . . . What you might do is walk over to the group and, when there is a slight pause in the talking, say something like, "Are you talking about 'Star Trek'? I saw that and really liked it a lot too." At this point you have joined the conversation.
>
> Next, you want to make sure that you participate in what's going on. You should listen and add comments to what is being said. . . . Can you give me different examples of how you can now add to or take part in a conversation or what else you would say? (Michelson et al., 1983, pp. 116–117)

Karen Bierman (1986) has added still another component to a social skills training program based on coaching: conducting the intervention as a cooperative activity among both popular and unpopular peers. Each target child in her group of preadolescents met with two socially accepted classmates for ten half-hour sessions to produce a film together but also to receive coaching on expressing feelings, asking questions, and displaying leadership. This two-pronged approach led to greater improvements in conversational skills than social skills training alone, possibly because peers could observe firsthand the positive changes occurring in initially unskilled children and could reinforce them immediately.

Children as young as four years can profit from training programs that explicitly teach social skills. George Spivack and Myrna Shure (1974) provided preschoolers and kindergartners with several months of instruction on how to solve social problems. Sit-

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uations such as the following were presented: "This girl wants that boy to get his wagon out of the way so she can ride by." Children were asked to generate solutions to the problems and then asked to evaluate the solutions' merits. Children were also taught other skills, such as how to evaluate the emotional expressions of others and how to cope with their own feelings of frustration. At the end of the program, the participants showed significant gains in their ability to solve social problems. Moreover, aggressive children showed fewer disruptive and more prosocial behaviors and withdrawn children became more socially active, even one year after the formal instruction ended. One factor to notice is the emphasis this program had on emotion knowledge and emotion management. Recent research suggests that emotion knowledge is indeed a key predictor of social skills and peer acceptance (Mostow et al., 2002).

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What methods do researchers use to assess children's peer status?
- What are some of the characteristics displayed by popular children? What are some of the specific elements of their socioemotional behaviors?
- What are some of the influences on the development of children's social competence?
- How do popular and rejected children differ in the ways they process social information?
- What are some techniques for promoting children's social skills?

Children's Friendships

Certain peer relations are special. They are marked by shared thoughts and experiences, trust, intimacy, and joy in the other's company. Children's relationships with friends differ from those with other peers. Friends express more emotion and loyalty toward each other, see each other more frequently, and both cooperate and disagree more than mere acquaintances do (Bigelow, Tesson, & Lewko, 1992; Hartup & Sancilio, 1986; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Even though childhood friendships may not endure, their impact on social and emotional development can rival that of the family and may provide a needed buffer when children feel psychological strains. Friendships are also an important source of cognitive and social support (Hartup, 1996).

Children's Patterns and Conceptions of Friendship

About 80 percent of three- to four-year-olds spend a substantial amount of time with at least one peer who is a "strong associate" or friend. Most preschoolers observed in their nursery school classrooms spend at least 30 percent of their time with one other peer, usually someone of the same sex (Hinde et al., 1985). For the three-year-old, however, the concept of *friend* does not encompass the full range of psychological complexities that it does for the older child. At this age, the term is virtually synonymous with *playmate*.

Preschoolers' activities with friends usually consist of games, object sharing, and pretend sequences (e.g., "You be the baby and I'll be the Mommy"). Conversations between friends often contain a good deal of social comparison, a search for differences as well as similarities. Preschool children are fascinated not so much by the specific *things* they have in common as by the fact that they *have* things in common. Hence the following typical conversation recorded by Jeffrey Parker and John Gottman (1989):

Child A: We both have chalk in our hands.
Child B: Right!

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 560

Preschoolers try to avoid disagreements and negative affect in their interactions with friends more so than older children do (Gottman & Parkhurst, 1980). Preschoolers especially value friends who give them positive feedback, prefer to play with them over other children, and engage in low levels of conflict with them (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996).

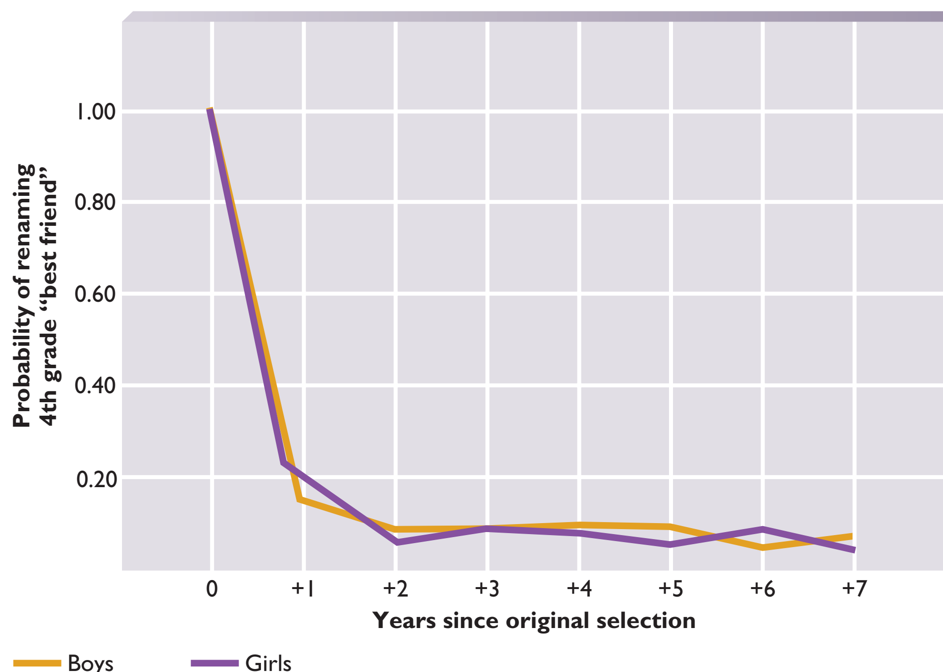
In the middle school years (roughly ages eight through twelve), children are very concerned with being accepted by their peers and avoiding the insecurity peer rejection brings; both factors motivate friendship formation. Most friends are of the same age and sex, although relationships with younger and older children occasionally occur as well. Cross-sex friendships are rare, however, constituting only about 5 percent of the mutual friendships reported in one study of more than seven hundred third- and fourth-graders (Kovacs, Parker, & Hoffman, 1996). Researchers in another study even found their fifth-grade participants to be openly resistant to the idea that they might have a friend of the opposite sex (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). By the time children approach preadolescence, the time they spend with same-sex friends surpasses the time they spend with either parent.

KEY THEME
Individual Differences

Friendship partners may change, though, over the childhood years. As part of a comprehensive longitudinal study of the social development of children beginning in fourth grade, Robert and Beverly Cairns (1994) asked children to name their best friends each year through eleventh grade. Figure 15.8 shows that the friend named in fourth grade was unlikely to be named again in successive years. Friendships can even shift within a time span of a few weeks. When Robert Cairns and his colleagues observed the nature of fourth- and seventh-graders' friendships, they found that children who mutually nominated each other as friends the first time they were interviewed usually did not name each other as close friends three weeks later (Cairns et al., 1995). However, the tendency for children to have new mutual friends at different points in time may depend on the characteristics of the child. In another project, children who switched friends more frequently over the four weeks of a summer camp session tended to be perceived by other children as playful, humorous, and "gossipy," but also as aggressive, unreliable, and untrustworthy; that is,

FIGURE 15.8
Changes in Best Friends

In a longitudinal study of best friends, Cairns and Cairns (1994) found that children named as best friends in fourth grade were seldom renamed as best friends in successive years. Friendships may therefore be less stable than generally thought. On the other hand, other research suggests that the stability of friendships over time may depend on the specific personality characteristics of individual children.



Source: Cairns & Cairns, 1994.

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they had qualities that probably both attracted and disappointed friends (Parker & Seal, 1996).

In middle childhood, friendship interactions typically include conflicts as well as cooperation (Hartup et al., 1993), and gossip becomes a predominant format for communication, as the following episode between two girls illustrates:

E: Oh, see, um, you know that tub she gave us for the spider?
M: Yeah.
E: She acts like she owns the whole thing.
M: The whole spider.
E: I know. (Parker & Gottman, 1989, p. 114)

Parker and Gottman (1989) believe gossip allows children to sample the attitudes and beliefs of their agemates without taking the risk of revealing their own views. Because gossip involves the sharing of "privileged" information, it also solidifies the child's membership in the friendship circle.

During this age period, the internal psychological aspects of friendship grow in importance. When sixth-graders are asked, "How do you know that someone is your best friend?," they respond with statements such as "I can talk to her about my problems" or "He'll keep a secret if you tell him." In other words, intimacy and trust as well as loyalty, generosity, and helpfulness become integrated into the child's understanding of friendship (Berndt, 1981). Girls in particular speak of the value they place on intimacy in friendship relations. Girls cite the importance of sharing confidences and private feelings with friends far more frequently than boys do and find that their same-sex friendships provide more support than boys find in their friendships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Jones & Dembo, 1989). This tendency, however, may stem in part from their stereotyped knowledge that female relationships are *supposed* to be close (Bukowski & Kramer, 1986).

Sex differences in concepts of friendship are accompanied by heightened differences in the structure of boys' and girls' friendship networks during the middle school years. Boys' friendships are usually *extensive;* their circle of friends is larger, and play is frequently enacted in groups. For boys, friendship is oriented around shared activities, especially sports (Erwin, 1985). In contrast, girls' friendships tend to be *intensive*. Girls have smaller networks of friends, but they engage in more intensive affective communication and self-disclosure. Girls usually play with only one other girl and may even be reluctant to include a third girl in the relationship. Girls also become more distressed over the breakup of a friendship (Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987; Waldrop & Halverson, 1975). It may be that these sex differences in friendship patterns are derived from the games children play. Boys are encouraged to play group games and team sports, such as baseball, which involve a number of children and do not promote intimacy and close interaction. Girls' games, such as "house" and "dolls," involve smaller groups and provide an ideal environment for the exchange of thoughts and emotions. Another possibility is that sex differences in friendships are due to larger socialization forces that foster sensitivity to others and affective sharing in girls and autonomy and emotional reserve in boys (Winstead, 1986).

By adolescence, the importance of close friendship is firmly solidified. Adolescents from diverse cultures such as China and Iceland claim strong loyalty to their close friends (Keller et al., 1998). In our culture, adolescents say they value the ability to share thoughts and feelings with friends and expect mutual understanding and self-disclosure in friendships (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Furman & Bierman, 1984). They share problems, solutions to those problems, and private feelings with friends. These qualities fit the needs of individuals who are struggling to define who they are and who they will become. A sample exchange between two adolescent friends drawn from Parker and Gottman's (1989) research illustrates these themes:

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 562

Boys and girls differ in the patterns of their friendships and the types of activities they engage in with friends. Boys tend to have larger networks of friends, and they tend to participate in shared activities with them. Girls' networks, on the other hand, are smaller and center on affective communication and self-disclosure.

A: I don't know. Gosh,
I have no idea what I want to do. And it really doesn't bother me that much that I don't have my future planned. [laughs]
B: [laughs]
A: [laughs] Like it bothers my Dad a lot, but it doesn't bother me.
B: Just tell your dad what I always tell my Dad: "Dad, I *am*."
A: [laughs] Exactly!
B: "And whatever happens tomorrow, I *still* will be!"

Adolescents continue to prefer same-sex friends, although the frequency of boy-girl interactions increases. At this age, similarities in attitudes about academics, dating, drinking, smoking, and drug use influence whether children become friends (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Epstein, 1983; Tolson & Urberg, 1993). Adolescent friendships become more selective with age; teenagers have fewer mutual friends than younger children do, but mutual friends comprise a greater proportion of their total network of friends. The tendency for girls to have smaller friendship networks than boys, observed earlier in childhood, disappears (Urberg et al., 1995). Adolescents also say that the time they spend with their friends is the most enjoyable part of their day (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Friendship is thus a key element in the social and emotional life of the older child.

How Children Become Friends

How do two previously unacquainted children form a friendship? What behaviors must occur to produce an affiliative bond between these two peers? A time-intensive investigation by John Gottman (1983) provides a fascinating glimpse into the process of friendship formation among children who initially met as strangers. Gottman's method involved tape-recording the conversations of eighteen unfamiliar dyads ages three to nine years as they played in their homes for three sessions. Even in this short time, friendships among some of the pairs began to emerge. In all cases, each member of the pair was within one year of the age of the other. Some were same-sex pairs, others opposite-sex. The behaviors of the child whose home it was (the host child) and the visiting child (the guest) were coded separately; the sequences of behaviors these children displayed—that is, how one child's behavior influenced the other's—were also analyzed.

Children who "hit it off" in the first play session showed several distinct patterns of interaction. First, they were successful in exchanging information, as in the following conversation one pair had:

A: Hey, you know what?
B: No, what?
A: Sometime you can come to my house.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 563

Children who became friends made efforts to establish a common ground by finding activities they could share or by identifying similarities and differences between them.

In addition, any conflicts that occurred as they played were successfully resolved, either by one member of the dyad explaining the reason for the disagreement or by one child complying with the other child's demands, as long as they were not excessive or unreasonable. Alternatively, as activities escalated from simply coloring side by side ("I'm coloring mine green") to one child issuing a command ("Use blue. That'd be nice"), children who became friends tempered potential conflict by de-escalating the intensity of play (in this case, going back to side-by-side coloring) or using another element of play that was "safe"—namely, information exchange (e.g., "I don't have a blue crayon. Do you?"). In contrast, children who did not become friends often persisted in escalating their play until the situation was no longer amicable. Children who became friends thus modulated their interactions to preserve a positive atmosphere. Over time, other social processes also came into play; clear communication and self-disclosure (the revelation of one's feelings) were among these.

Generally speaking, children become friends with agemates who resemble themselves on a number of dimensions. Young children and their friends often share similar play styles and language skills (Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Rubin et al., 1994). Among older children, friends are similar in temperament, popularity, and the tendency to behave prosocially or aggressively (Haselager et al., 1998). By becoming friends with like-minded agemates, children select contexts in which some of their own initial tendencies—their aggression or prosocial behavior, for example—may become even more accentuated. In fact, friends become more similar to one another as their relationship continues (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Bagwell, 1999).

KEY THEME
Child's Active Role

The Functions of Friendship

By virtue of their special qualities, friendships contribute to the child's development in ways that differ from other, more transient peer interactions. Friendships involve a distinct sense of mutual reciprocity between peers and a significant affective investment from each child (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Thus they provide a fertile ground for the child's social and emotional development.

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

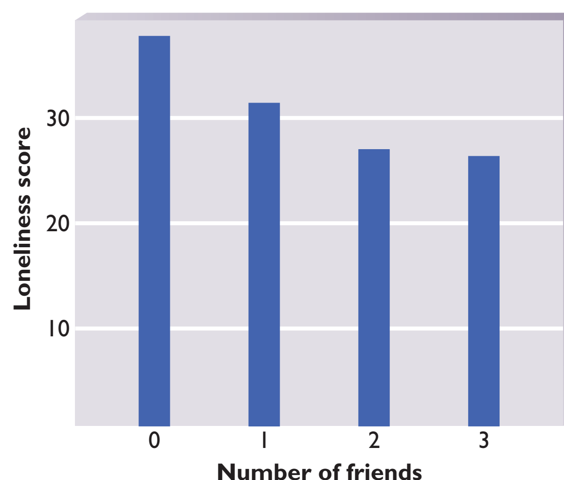
Because friendships include the sharing of affection and emotional support, especially among older children, they may play a vital role in protecting children from anxiety and stress, particularly when there are problems in the family. For example, boys seem to adjust better to the practical and psychological consequences of divorce when they have friends (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Likewise, when children come from harsh, punitive home environments, they are at risk for becoming the victims of peer aggression and for behaving aggressively and defiantly; however, this risk is diminished for children who have friends (Criss et al., 2002; Schwartz et al., 2000). Children who have close and intimate friendships have higher levels of self-esteem, experience less anxiety and depression, and are more sociable in general than those with few close friends (Buhrmester, 1990; Mannarino, 1978). Because many studies of friendship are correlational, the direction of influence is not always clear. That is, less anxious children may be more capable of forming intimate friendships, or the reverse may be true: Friendships may make them less anxious. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to hypothesize that friends provide an important source of social support for and feedback about one's competence and self-worth. In fact, as Figure 15.9 shows, having even just one "best friend" can mean less loneliness for the child (Parker & Asher, 1993; Renshaw & Brown, 1993).

Interactions with friends also provide a context for the development of certain social skills, such as cooperation, competition, and conflict resolution. In one study, researchers observed teams of four- and five-year-olds playing a game in which cooperation led to both partners winning, whereas competition led to losses for both (Matsumoto et al., 1986). Teachers independently rated the degree of friendship for each pair of children. The results showed that the greater the degree of friendship,

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 564

FIGURE 15.9
Friendship as a Buffer Against Loneliness

Having even one "best friend" can significantly lower children's reports of loneliness. In this study, third- through sixth-graders filled out a questionnaire assessing their feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction partway through the school year. A high score indicated greater feelings of loneliness. Children who had a reciprocal relationship with at least one friend had significantly lower loneliness scores than children who had no such relationship.



Source: Renshaw & Brown, 1993.

the more the children cooperated to win the game. Because of their investment in friendships, when children have conflicts with friends they frequently seek to negotiate and resolve those conflicts rather than letting the argument escalate or terminating the friendship (Fonzi et al., 1997; Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). In observing four-year-olds in nursery school over a period of several weeks, Willard Hartup and his colleagues noted instances of spontaneous conflict in which one child attempted to influence another but met with resistance (Hartup et al., 1988). They found that when conflicts occurred between friends, children were more likely to either negotiate and bargain or physically turn away from the situation. When conflicts occurred between nonfriends, children were more likely to stand firm and insist on their original goal.

Finally, the relationship styles cultivated in friendships may extend to relations with others later in life. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) believed the capacity for intimacy nurtured by same-sex friendships in childhood provides the foundation for intimacy in more mature adult relationships. The failure to acquire this capacity in the formative years of childhood may impair a person's later functioning as a romantic partner, spouse, or parent. Recent studies confirm that there is a correlation between relational styles used with friends and romantic partners (Furman, 1999). For example, adolescents who perceive their friendships as supportive also tend to see their romantic relationships as supportive (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000).

Although friends can have exceedingly positive benefits for development, research has revealed that friendships may not always be emotionally supportive. Among rejected children, for example, interactions with their friends tend to be more negative than among other children (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Friends can also be a factor in deviant behavior, especially among children who are predisposed to have conduct problems themselves. Thomas Dishion and his colleagues (Dishion, Patterson, & Griesler, 1994) observed that ten-year-old aggressive boys who had been rejected by most of their peers often became friends with other aggressive boys. Over time, they conversed more about deviant behavior such as substance abuse and delinquency, a form of talk that deviant peers typically reward each other for (Dishion et al., 1996). By age fourteen, association with antisocial friends was found to contribute statistically to the tendency to engage in deviant behaviors. These findings suggest that breaking the cycle of antisocial behavior may require more than intervening in an individual child's pattern of behaviors; monitoring his or her friendship networks may be just as important. Adolescence is an especially vulnerable time for the negative influences of antisocial friends (Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999). In addi-

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 565

tion, association with deviant friends is especially likely when parents fail to be nurturant and involved and to monitor their adolescents' behaviors (Ary et al., 1999; Scaramella et al., 2002).

Our knowledge of the impact of friendships on child development is relatively incomplete compared to other influences. However, this area of research is likely to grow considering the accumulating evidence that "the company they keep" has important repercussions for the pathways of development (Hartup, 1996).

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What are the qualities of children's friendships during the preschool, middle childhood, and adolescent years?
- What factors influence the formation of children's friendships?
- How do friendships contribute to the child's social and emotional development?

CHAPTER RECAP

Summary of Developmental Themes

Sociocultural Influence ***How does the sociocultural context influence peer relations?***

As more children in our society enter daycare, they also have more extensive experiences with peers than previous generations. In general, children who spend more time with peers show advances in social development and often tend to prefer cooperation to competition. Culture can also influence childrens' play styles and the standards that shape peer acceptance. For example, our society highly values athletic capabilities and social skill, and consequently children who are proficient in these domains typically enjoy more peer popularity.

Child's Active Role ***How does the child play an active role in peer relations?***

On one level, many of the physical qualities the child possesses influence the reactions of peers. Physical attractiveness, body build, motor skill, and rate of maturation all engender different responses from other children. On another level, the child's social and emotional skills clearly affect how peers react. Children who can accurately read the emotions of others, gauge the consequences of their own behaviors on others, and employ the strategies that facilitate effective social interactions are more popular with their peers. Similarly, children who are aggressive and display physical power often rise to the top of peer group dominance hierarchies but may become unpopular with peers, as evidenced when those peers are asked to name children they like or prefer to associate with.

Individual Differences ***How prominent are individual differences in peer relations?***

Children vary in the extent to which they are accepted by their peers. Some children are popular, whereas others are rejected, neglected, or controversial. A child's popularity may be linked to aspects of physical appearance, motor skills, and social skills. Children may also show individual differences in their tendency to keep the same friends over time.

Interaction Among Domains ***How do peer relations interact with other domains of development?***

First, healthy relations with peers are associated with a number of successful developmental outcomes in other arenas. Popular children do well in school, have high levels of self-esteem, and suffer fewer emotional difficulties, such as depression, than unpopular children. Second, the ability to interact successfully with peers is related to attainments in several other developmental domains. Children who are reared in a positive emotional environment and are skillful in deciphering emotional cues tend to be more socially competent with peers. The formation of early emotional attachments and growth in social knowledge may also play a role. The child's emerging cognitive capabilities, especially perspective-taking skills, allow the child to think about the reactions and expectations of others and to anticipate the consequences of his or her own behaviors. Successful peer interaction is thus both a product of and a contributor to the child's emotional, cognitive, and social achievements.

307673_ch_15.qxd pp3 2/27/03 2:46 PM Page 566

Summary of Topics

- Good peer relationships during childhood are related to academic success, fewer problem behaviors, and healthy socio-emotional adjustment.

Developmental Changes in Peer Relations

- Infants show a direct interest in peers through visual attention, smiles, and touches.
- By age two, children show coordinated social interactions with peers.
- Preschoolers typically engage in three forms of play: *solitary play*, *parallel play*, and *cooperative play*. They also engage in *social pretend play*, a form of play that is linked to advances in cognition, language, and social understanding.
- Peer groups assume greater importance for children during the school years, when they associate in same-sex groups and groups based on other similarities.
- *Rough-and-tumble play* is often observed, especially among boys, and may function as a way to establish dominance.
- Adolescents form larger groups called *cliques* and *crowds*, but they also form more intense relationships with friends. Toward the end of adolescence, romantic relationships start to become important.

Peer Group Dynamics

- Children typically show strong identity with the peer groups they join, especially when groups compete against one another. Intergroup hostilities can be reduced by having groups work together on some common goal.
- Peer groups show in-group favoritism when their group is highly defined and when their group has high status.
- Peer groups quickly form dominance hierarchies, organized structures in which some children become leaders and some become followers. Dominance hierarchies seem to serve adaptive social functions, such as controlling aggression.
- Susceptibility to peer pressure heightens during early adolescence but declines as young adulthood approaches. For some children, extreme orientation to the peer group is associated with deviant behaviors.

Peers as Agents of Socialization

- Peers can serve as important models for social behaviors, such as aggression and sex-typed behaviors.
- Peers actively reinforce children's behaviors through their positive and negative reactions.

Peer Popularity and Social Competence

- Peer acceptance is typically measured through assessment devices such as *sociometric nominations*, *sociometric rating scales*, or composite social maps.
- The child's peer status is related to his or her physical attractiveness, motor skills, social skills, and emotion regulation. Popular children engage in prosocial behaviors, know how to enter peer groups, and effectively maintain cohesive social interactions.
- Social competence has its roots in the child's earliest attachment relationships but is also influenced by parental styles of social interaction, as well as by opportunities to interact with peers, as is afforded in daycare.
- Socially competent children are skilled at perceiving social cues and have good social problem-solving ability.
- Modeling, reinforcement, and coaching are some of the techniques used to enhance social skills in children who display problem behaviors such as aggression and social withdrawal.

Children's Friendships

- Preschoolers view friends as peers to play with, but with development, children come to value friends for their psychological qualities. Children approaching adolescence, for example, see friends as providers of intimacy and trust.
- Children form friendships by keeping social interactions positive in tone, exchanging information, and at later ages, through self-disclosure.
- Friendships provide a context for developing skills such as cooperation and conflict resolution and may help the child learn the benefits of intimacy in relationships. Friendships can also provide a context for the development of problem behaviors.