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The Complexities of Attachment, Peer Rejection and Gender Within a Middle School Dynamic - a Glimpse at Early Adolescents and Their Significant Relationships

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE COMPLEXITIES OF ATTACHMENT, PEER REJECTION AND GENDER

WITHIN A MIDDLE SCHOOL DYNAMIC

A GLIMPSE AT EARLY ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR

SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WORK

BY

BARBARA A. MESTLING

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2010

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This work would not have been possible without the secure base of my own attachments starting with my parents, Frank and Lucille Calderone who taught me the value of both family and achievement. Although no longer on this earth, they are still with me even now. My husband Tom and my own children Neal, Rita, and Julie respected and acknowledged my work even when it got in the way. Tom seemed to know when to encourage me to take a much needed break. My sister Louise Calderone, just a phone call away, was always a reassuring, guiding light.

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I am extremely grateful to the administration at my place of employment who allowed me to conduct this study. My co-workers there always offered words of

encouragement and never let on if they tired of hearing about my challenges. There are also other friends and colleagues who were always in the right place at the right time.

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To my husband Tom and my children, Neal, Rita, and Julie

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances:
if there is any reaction, both are transformed.

--Carl Jung

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ABSTRACT

This was a mixed method two phase explanatory study of attachment, peer rejection and gender in a non-clinical population. The purpose of the study was to illustrate the relationship between these variables with the assumption that there would be differences in attachment style between rejected and non-rejected students and further differences by gender. The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ) and the Children's Self-Experience Questionnaire-Self-Report (CSEQ-SR) were utilized to determine interview subjects. A Parent Demographic Form provided background, life experience and social functioning information. There were challenges in the use of both instruments for this study's purposes. Although there were more secure non-rejected students than rejected, there were also insecure students who were non-rejected. Overall there were few students of either gender indicated as rejected by the CSEQ-SR, but parent report indicated more rejected students, especially female. There were insufficient students in each attachment category to make a rejected and gender comparison. However, the study was useful for its detailed description of socialization-its risks and resilience, qualitative validation of gender differences in the incidence of relational aggression, and gender similarities in terms of caring family and community relationship as well as indications of parent-student anxiety within the experience.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Peer Rejection

It is difficult to estimate the number of youths who are rejected by their peers at school since some individuals remain silent and are never brought to the school social worker's attention. Active rejection in the form of overt bullying is more noticeable and may occur as often as twice an hour within the classroom (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). In fact five to fifteen percent of children report significant, on-going bullying (Mishna, 2003) and nationally more than two million school children may be involved in the process either as bully or victim (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). Given that the formation of selfhood and identity are influenced by interpersonal interactions and group membership (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Paul & Cillessen, 2007), peer rejection of any kind, is a significant concern. As a result, the development of positive peer relationships can be seen as contributing significantly to adolescent identity formation, especially during early adolescence (Paul & Cillessen, 2007). Youths who are rejected by their peers experience a significant threat to both their present and future development and their quality of life. In addition to possible threats to identity formation, as well as the loss of peer companionship, it is critical to note that mental health issues are more prevalent in rejected youths (Boulton, 1999; Donohue, 2000; Peskin, Torterlero, Markham, Addy, M.A., & Baumler, 2007) as are disruptions in academic progress (Best, 1983; Killian,

Fish, & Maniago, 2006) and attendance and attendance (Lopez & Dubois, 2005). The stress of peer rejection may be internalized (Peskin et al., 2007) and emerge as anxiety, depression or loneliness, or externalized through delinquency and anti-social behavior (Hecht, 1998; Tur-Kaspa, 2002) including gang membership (Bagwell, 2000). It has also been noted that conflictual interpersonal relationships in early adolescence are predictive of developmental maladjustment in late adolescence and adulthood (Hongling, 2002) as well as chronic psychiatric disturbance in adults (Golombeck, 1986), including substance use, internalizing, and conduct disorders (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005) as well as post-traumatic stress in some populations (Rivers, 2004). Indeed, it is apparent that the process of peer rejection significantly constricts a youth's social alternatives (Bagwell, 2000).

Although there is agreement within the literature about the negative impact of peer rejection upon young adolescents the terminology utilized to describe this phenomenon varies. References to negative peer interactions may describe shunning, social ostracism or isolation, neglect, peer rejection, peer victimization, or bullying. When one takes into account the active and passive components of the rejection process as well as a tendency for the overlap of some of the above behaviors, the complexity regarding definition increases. Presently, peer rejection will be viewed as a condition wherein the youth perceives her or himself as being either left out of the friendship or peer group, or as treated negatively by peers (Please see also Definition of Terms).

It should be noted that peer rejected youths frequently become stigmatized. Although sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) does not specifically focus upon cliques or peer groups, his description of stigma as an enduring quality ascribed to an individual is

useful. Social stigma can be viewed as an attribute that is “deeply discrediting” to one’s social identity causing it to become “spoiled” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Thus some youths are rejected for merely being different. Highly gifted youths may become rejected (Malik & Furman, 1993) and approximately 75% of youths with a learning disability experience rejection or social isolation (Margalit, Turkaspa, & Most, 1999). However, rejected students may also be aggressive (Margalit et al., 1999; Merton, 1996; Steinberg, 1996), submissive (Margalit et al., 1999; Merton, 1996; Steinberg, 1996) withdrawn, or a combination of these characteristics (Harrist, 1997; Steinberg, 1996) as well as lacking in social and cognitive skills (Merton, 1996; Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Santinello, 2008). Rejected youths may show disruptive, off-task behaviors along with low school achievement (Malik & Furman, 1993). A circular process may develop within which a youth who is a member of a minority group, is handicapped in some manner, or who shows high anxiety, or lowered self-concept, may face social rejection and respond with aggression or withdrawal, which will further increase rejection (London, Downey, & Bonica, 2007; St. John, 1975).

Overall within a community setting such as a school, exclusionary behavior is a frequent occurrence and can appear rational within the and clique context (Thorkildsen, 2002). It would appear that within the milieu, “shared sensitivities and biases”(Bruner, 1986, p. 478) combine to impact the social setting. Indeed a crowd of early adolescents can ruthlessly reject anyone who appears different, and through a process of social construction, influence others to view “what exists” as being a product of “what is thought” (Bruner, 1986, p. 478) thereby creating and justifying together a negative status

for the other. Within its most destructive context, exclusion involves behavior which “places individuals or groups outside boundaries in which moral values, rules, and consideration of fairness apply” and an assumption is made that victims are undeserving of ethical treatment (Thorkildsen, 2002, p. 34). Cliques frequently become “experiments” in inclusion and exclusion (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990, p.10). Indeed, youths may become desensitized to the harmful effects of rejection or exclusion if this practice is accepted by peers (Thorkildsen, 2002) and tolerated by adults.

Gender dynamics add to the process and manifestation of peer rejection. Rejecting behaviors performed by boys typically coalesce around more direct and open actions such as physical aggression, obvious teasing or other overt behaviors (Phelps, 2001). Although some research cites a recent increase in serious physical aggression on the part of girls (Garbarino, 2006; Underwood, 2003), they generally utilize more indirect behaviors such as social isolation and peer exclusion (Bosworth, 1999) frequently referred to as relational or social aggression (Underwood, 2003). The complex dynamic of ‘cyber-bullying’ may also be involved wherein threats and intimidation are delivered through e-mail or Web-based programs (Horne, Stoddard, & Bell, 2007). Gender differences also emerge relative to reactions to and impact of bullying as well and girls appear more greatly affected by rejecting behaviors in terms of the development of mental health symptoms than boys (Bond, 2001), and are perhaps thus more likely than boys to either withdraw from the bullying situation or defend the victims (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Gilligan sees this as girls’ tendency to react more to problems of connection than of separation/individuation (Gilligan et al., 1990). In fact, some authors describe boys and

girls as having totally different cultures within their peer groups, although recently the dual cultures approach has been called into question (Thorne, 1994; Underwood, 2003). At the very least gender is “present in the background” (C. Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 516) (see Peer Rejection, Gender, and Culture).

The development of peer rejection along with its interaction with gender can be viewed as a dynamic process involving internal and external factors, which ultimately coalesce around the person in environment. The family forms the substrate within which attachment takes place. Stress upon the family system is likely to negatively impact attachment quality between parent and child, which affects the child’s capacity for peer relationships (Cui, 2002) due perhaps in part, to difficulties with self-regulation. The school and peer group or clique form the daily context for this process of peer rejection. The development of peer rejection along with its interaction with gender must be viewed as a dynamic process involving internal and external factors, which ultimately coalesce around the person in environment. s can be viewed as “microcosms of society” (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995, p. 157) in terms of the reflection of cultural gender values and societal stratification. Indeed the structure of cliques within the setting appears reminiscent of that of capitalistic society itself relative to the cliques’ inherent hierarchical power structures, and rules of acceptance. Although within this discussion, it is important to view gender as a socio-cultural construction (Chodorow, 1989; Risman, 1998; Thorne, 1994), it is equally important to remember that this takes place at the interactional (C. Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) level and is ultimately processed within the individual (Risman, 1998).

However, since not all youths, male or female, who are aggressive, submissive or different in some way, become rejected, other factors must be involved (D. Nelson, Crick, & Grotpeler, 1999). These include not only the previously mentioned contextual factors, but also the responses of the particular youth to rejection. Some youths negatively misinterpret interactions (Peets, Hodges, Kikas, & Salmivali, 2007), others adapt to group norms, and still others ‘overshoot’ and develop exaggerated forms of group behavior (Merton, 1996) which may or may not help their status. Attachment theory, including the concept of the internal working model may be a link to the process of peer rejection since it points to the possibility of interactional styles which may be more or less adaptive within the peer group. Mentalization or reflective functioning (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004; Siegal, 1999) is also involved here, as a means by which one youth can understand the mind of another and thus predict and react to the other’s behavior. Surrounding that linkage is the family system which cradles and interacts with attachment and reflective functioning, and involves both cognitive and affective factors.

Significance of the Study

Why study peer rejection? The quotations below offer a glimpse into the painful world of the rejected youth:

Why do they hate me? I just don’t understand?... All those kids around me are so immature!...I’m independent...I count only on myself!: I don’t want to be hurt again; there are two girls who won’t call me anymore... I’m not trying anymore... I don’t need any more friends...but still, it **is** kind of lonely sometimes. (Laura, age 13)

I don't know how to make friends. No matter what I do, no one seems to like me. Maybe I'll just stop trying. (Ronny, age 12)

As has been noted, youths such as these, who are rejected by their peers experience constriction in their social opportunities (Bagwell, 2002) which can produce a negative impact at least upon the social aspects of the youth's identity (Ellemers et al., 2002) thus impacting their potential for growth in this area. Peer rejection also has an adverse effect upon school achievement by lowering grade point average and increasing absences (Lopez & Dubois, 2005) thus further dampening a youth's future prospects.

In addition to the offering of assistance to clients in need including the above demoralized youth, the NASW Code of Ethics indicates client self-determination as a valid social work precept (NASW, 1999). Bartlett's (1970) description of self-determination as a basic social work value is a broad but elegantly simple statement that "it is good for every individual to realize his potential for growth as fully as possible" (p. 64). A focus upon the youth's attachment style and reflective functioning would allow the worker to assist the student in developing more positive and secure ways of self-regulating as well as the ability to understand and relate to peers, thus empowering the youth through self-awareness and secure base experiences with the worker and with other school staff.

This is not to indicate, however, any minimizing of environmental effects the student might experience and it is meant to assist rather than blame the individual. In fact, a bullied or rejected youth, in many ways can be viewed as oppressed, and in need of a more just situation, a dynamic which is also congruent with social work's mission.

Possible gender dynamics also need to be understood by the worker in order to develop focused and appropriate interventions at all levels. Later, literature will be reviewed which will support these contentions. At this point, detailed information will be given relative to the theory, practice, policy, and methodological implications of this study.

Theory

Although there is a significant body of research relative to attachment and attachment-related issues within infancy and early childhood, and there appears to be a growing body of research encompassing adult attachment issues, there is somewhat less for adolescence, especially early adolescence. In addition, the application of attachment theory to early adolescent peer relationships as well as to the possibility of gender differences within this realm further reduces the present pool of knowledge. It will also be seen within the discussion of methodology, that the measurement of adolescent attachment itself is complex and can be problematic. It is the desire of this researcher to further expand knowledge in these areas.

Practice

Per this writer's experience, the daily work of the school social worker frequently includes requests for social work services aimed at assisting students who are shunned, excluded, or victimized by peers in some way. Students involved in these types of situations frequently become distressed and have difficulty focusing upon academic concerns. Given that school social workers regard students as unique individuals with inherent value along with the right to maximize their educational opportunities (R. Constable, Massat, & McDonald, 2006) a thorough clinical understanding of the potential

interaction of a student's attachment style with the process of peer rejection as well as knowledge of possible gender impact could point in the direction of specific clinical or programmatic interventions. It has also been this writer's experience that these early adolescent experiences are frequently trivialized or normalized to an excessive degree by school staff. Additionally, research from a person in environment perspective could serve as a teaching tool for the school social worker in interactions with school personnel.

It has been proposed that a secure attachment promotes ego-identity status achievement by allowing the adolescent a secure base from which to explore his or her environment (Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002). As noted previously, the school social worker may need to become this secure base in order to assist the adolescent in developing more secure relationships. In addition to promoting attachment within the therapeutic relationship, the social worker, for example, might focus upon anxiety-reduction techniques with an anxious/ pre-occupied student, or upon the development of empathy, warmth, and enhanced reflective functioning in a more dismissing student. The worker might also need to take into account the possibility that attachment style may predict adolescent response to group intervention relative to self-disclosure, responsiveness to others, and productive behavior within the group (Sheckman & Dvir, 2006). Any gender differences emerging from this study will be useful information for the school social worker to utilize in the planning of girls or boys groups focused upon friendship building and environmental exploration. In fact, it has been shown that anxious-ambivalent girls emerge as a "trouble group", especially vulnerable to

socialization pressures and gender role norms (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998, p. 1393).

Attachment style can also provide a helpful, albeit partial explanatory base for early adolescent behavior relative to peers, which can be useful for the school social worker's consultative work with school staff. For example, preoccupied, anxious-ambivalent adolescents may experience higher levels of anxiety, hostility, and depression while avoidant, (similar to dismissing) adolescents may show less social competence when compared with more secure adolescents (Cooper et al., 1998). In this way, both teacher and worker can collaborate on appropriate, sensitive approaches to students.

Policy

The rejected youth's school environment is quite significant. If a student does not feel physically and emotionally safe within the school, effective education will not take place (McDonald, 2002). Recent court decisions including *Davis vs. Monroe County Board of Education, 1996* and *Nabozny vs. Podlesny, 1996*, strongly indicate that school personnel must respond to harmful conditions, including peer harassment, or face legal liability (McDonald et al., 2002). School social workers must be prepared to not only serve as a secure base with an individual client, but must assist the surrounding school system with the task of becoming a "substitute 'secure base'" of attachment (Ornstein & Moses, 2002, p. 2).

It can be seen that if left without adequate assistance or appropriate understanding, peer-rejected youths may develop definable symptoms which will lead them in the direction of either mental health or special education referral, thus increasing

the load on chronically overburdened systems. If students are rejected within the confines of their school environment, they may gravitate towards antisocial peer groups as a method of belonging, thus impacting the community. In addition, school policy such as 'zero tolerance' rigidly applied to rejected students showing disciplinary infractions may increase alienation. Further understanding of the dynamics of peer rejection, gender and attachment will serve to enhance school administrators' understanding and further inform their programmatic and disciplinary decision-making. Teachers can receive staff development training aimed at methods of reducing peer rejection and at meeting student attachment needs.

Social Issues and Action

Although the aim of this study has been to examine the predominantly internal and relational factors of attachment style relative to rejected youths, there are additional aspects to consider. It should be noted that although particular attachment styles may correlate more with peer rejection than others, this should not be used to justify the maltreatment of any individual or group of students. In fact, especially relative to the gender aspects of this process, that observations and recommendations will be made relative to current implied societal mandates for social interaction. For example, it has been noted that relational aggression, the process of manipulating or damaging relationships in order to gain control, is more prevalent within groups of girls (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Discussion will need to be made as to the relative contribution of attachment style and societal expectations regarding female or male anger expression

and behavior related to peers. School or community level interventions will need to be considered.

Methodological Contributions

The instruments which were utilized are relatively new. Their use within this study with this particular population has ideally helped to develop them further. Qualitative questions were original and developed with the needs of adolescent students in mind. A detailed discussion of methodological issues will emerge later in this document.

Definition of Terms

Attachment Style - is defined as the habitual behaviors and related emotions and cognitions relative to close relationships. This will be divided into secure attachment and insecure attachment. Insecure attachment will be further subdivided into dismissing or preoccupied attachment styles. Dismissing individuals will be defined as those who avoid reliance on close relationships and preoccupied individuals will be defined as those who show anxious dependent behaviors within close relationships. Secure individuals are those who show behaviors indicative of mutual dependence within close relationships. Although these are based upon generally accepted definitions of attachment styles and have been operationalized through adolescent-oriented attachment self-report scales as well as confirming/disconfirming interviews, the potential impact of adolescent dependence-independence strivings have also been taken into account during data analysis. This writer is currently unaware of any definitions of attachment security that

are specific to adolescence, although some authors have noted a tendency for the dismissing style to occur somewhat more frequently in an adolescent population (Ammaniti, 2000). The reader is referred to **Attachment in Adolescence** within this paper for a discussion of these issues.

Peer Rejected Youth - is defined as any student between the ages 11 and 14 years who indicates either being left out of the peer group, or as being treated negatively by peers, either physically or emotionally as measured by rating scale, confirming/disconfirming interview, and parent questionnaire. As will be seen, operationalizing this definition was not clear cut and variation was seen between peer and parent perceptions.

Gender - is defined as the social/cultural categories of male or female as indicated by school registration records and as confirmed by parent indication on the Parent Questionnaire.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAME

Introduction

The following will summarize current literature on attachment, peer rejection, and gender. Theoretical bases to be covered include a summary of critical aspects of attachment theory and their link to mentalization, and affect regulation. Special focus will be given to the complexities of adolescent attachment within the family system. This will include the impact of adolescent development and peer group dynamics. The process of peer rejection, and attachment including gender aspects and cultural links will be explored. The possible impact of trauma upon attachment and peer relationships will be considered and noted. Social work aspects of these processes will be described especially as related to the practice context of the school. School policy will be integrated as well. Finally a discussion will be offered of measurement related to a study of these phenomena within the early adolescent population.

Aspects of Attachment

Attachment Theory and Peer Rejection

Researchers have noted that rejection /social isolation begins early, at least in elementary school (Donohue, 2000) and possibly during early childhood (Corsaro & Eder, 1990). Peer rejected individuals may react in ways that enhance their rejection (Adler & Adler, 1995) and this may continue from early childhood to adolescence

(Corsaro & Eder, 1990). It is here that individual factors come into focus, in that youths rejected by their peers show “low rates of prosocial and cooperative behavior and high levels of anxiety, withdrawal, and hostile isolation” (Bierman, Smoot, & Aumiller in Merton, 1996, p. 5). Since rejected youths typically show deficits in social and cognitive skills (Donahue, 2000) they often have difficulty defining and interpreting a situation (Merton, 1996). As a result, social skills training is frequently recommended (Thompson & Bundy, 1996). Aggressive youths are much more likely to show “hostile attributional bias” (D. Nelson et al., 1999, p. 19) when interpreting a possibly benign social scenario.

How do youths develop these qualities, affects, and biases? Why do some early adolescents have more difficulty forming satisfying peer relationships? At this point, in order to further describe the possible relationship between peer rejection and attachment, a more detailed discussion of the process of attachment needs to take place.

Overview of Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is an ethological approach to the development of the human personality (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). It purports to explain an “attachment behavioral system” which develops by the age of seven months between infants and caregivers in order to ensure survival of the infant within its environment (Main, 1996, p. 237). A “sensitive phase” is described wherein the infant, up until the age of 18-24 months has the opportunity to attach to the primary caregiver, in order to develop a “secure base” from which the infant may explore his or her environment (Main, 1996, p. 238). Ainsworth, who developed the “secure base” concept posits it as a situation

wherein the infant may retreat to his or her primary attachment figure for safety, security, and to be “recharged” (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995, p. 7).

According to Bowlby (1973), “working models” (p. 203) develop which contain mental representations of both attachment figures and the self. This includes an idea of who one’s attachment figures are, where they may be found, and how they may be expected to respond, as well as a prediction regarding their accessibility. In addition, this internal working model contains a view of the self’s susceptibility to fear in “potentially alarming situations” as well as an appraisal relative to whether the self is judged to be worthy of a helpful attachment response (Bowlby, 1973, p. 202). It can be seen that this process is “affectively charged” (Hewlett, 2000) and “complementary and mutually confirming” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 203), offering a perspective regarding the self, others, and the processes of interaction. Thus a broad framework develops which has potential for impact upon one’s self-concept as well as upon ongoing and future relationships.

Security is an elemental concept in any discussion of attachment theory. The Latin root of security, *sine cura* describes a state of being “without care” or “without anxiety” (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991, p. 334) and models of attachment within the literature divide attachment styles into either secure or insecure modes. However, multiple efforts have been made to further delineate and describe attachment styles. Although the overall categorization of attachment can be reduced to these two modes, in order to more clearly explain the possible impact of internal working models upon peer rejection, the attachment models of Ainsworth, Main and Bartholomew will be described. Later Furman will be added.

Ainsworth	Main	Bartholomew/Scharfe	Furman
Strange Situation	AAI	RSQ A-RSQ	BSQ
Secure	Secure	Secure	Secure
Avoidant	Dismissing	Dismissing	Dismissing
Anxious-ambivalent	Preoccupied	Preoccupied	Preoccupied
	Unresolved-Disorganized	Fearful (Elements of avoidance and anxious-ambivalence) (Fields,1998)	

Figure 1. Attachment Patterns and Measures

Drawing upon Bowlby's work, Ainsworth delineated three attachment patterns: 1) secure, 2) avoidant, or anxious-avoidant, and 3) ambivalent or anxious-resistant. A fourth pattern was later added by Main and Solomon, that of 4) disorganized/disoriented (Fields, 1998; Ornstein & Moses, 2002). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) originally delineated the following four categories which were reiterated and further described by Fields (1998): 1) Secure, wherein individuals possess positive models of both self and others, 2) Dismissing, within which individuals possess a positive model of the self combined with a negative view of others, 3) Preoccupied, a situation wherein individuals display a negative self model coupled with a positive other model, and 4) Fearful, a situation within which individuals possess negative models of both self and others. Fields has further described Bartholomew's dismissing category as conceptually similar to Ainsworth's avoidant group with the preoccupied category being similar to the

Ainsworth anxious-ambivalent group. Fields went on to describe fearful individuals as possessing characteristics of both avoidant and anxious-ambivalent traits.

Mary Main (1996) added the following descriptive structure as revealed by these excerpts from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI):

- 1.) *Secure-Autonomous* - speaker “appears to value attachment while being objective regarding any particular relationship or experience”
- 2.) *Dismissing* - normalized positive descriptions of parents are “contradicted or unsupported by specific memories” and negative past experiences are minimized
- 3.) *Preoccupied* - much affect is shown; individual may be “confused and passive or fearful and overwhelmed.”
- 4.) *Unresolved-Disorganized* - a “striking lapse (or lapses) in monitoring of reasoning or discourse” shown during discussions of past loss or abuse. Ex: may speak of deceased as if physically alive; may abruptly become silent.
(Main, 1996, p. 238)

More recently there has been a move towards conceptualizing insecure attachment under two basic dimensions. Fields (1998) characterized these themes as anxiety and avoidance, wherein avoidance exemplifies discomfort with closeness and anxiety is interpreted as fear of abandonment. However, Bartholomew (1991) has narrowed insecure attachment to the dimensions of dependence and avoidance. For purposes of this study, anxiety and dependence will be considered as existing within the same dimension.

Next, the role of information processing and defense will be considered relative to attachment relationships.

Bartholomew Model (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)

Model of Self (Dependence)

<u>Model of Other</u> (Avoidance)	Positive (low)	<u>Secure</u> Comfortable with Intimacy and autonomy	<u>Preoccupied</u> Preoccupied with Relationships
	Negative (high)	<u>Dismissing</u> Dismissing of Intimacy	<u>Fearful</u> Fearful of Intimacy Socially avoidant

**Model for Used for
Study**

<u>Secure</u> Positive model of self and other Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy	<u>Preoccupied</u> Negative Model of self Positive model of other High anxiety and dependence	<u>Dismissing</u> Positive model of self Negative model of other Dismissing of intimacy
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Bartholomew's dismissing category is conceptually similar to Ainsworth's avoidant category and the preoccupied category is similar to Ainsworth's anxious-ambivalent (Fields, 1998). Following this logic, Furman's BSQ, which was used in this study, covered conceptual ground similar to Ainsworth's categories. However, the fearful and the unresolved-disorganized categories were not specifically represented; those individuals were by default, subsumed into one of Furman's three categories.

Figure 2. Dimensions of Attachment

Attachment, Information Processing and Defense

Within the world of attachment-related defense and information processing, one is dealing with intricate combinations of cognition and affect. Early life events are organized into categories and schemas (Beck, 1985; K. Nelson, 1986) some of which are consciously inaccessible (Nelson, 1986) and highly defended (Granvold, 1999). Mental representations then develop which affect an individual's thought processes (Nelson, 1986) and cognitivists focus upon the role of one's interpretation of events in the determination of psychological distress (Kuehlwein, 1998). Bowlby (1988) appears to highlight the ethological and evolutionary aspects of not only cognitions but also strong affects such as anger and anxiety, in that a child's reactions to separation, unmet needs or outright abandonment, alert parents to the child's survival imperatives. Since attachment needs remain important throughout life (Bowlby, 1980), it is conceivable that basic and sometimes intense emotions and representations may be aroused by difficulties with later attachments in adolescence or adulthood, and individuals need, throughout life, to develop ways of coping and adapting.

Adaptation to our immediate environment is an important process. (Bowlby, 1980) highlighted the role of information processing and cognition in the management of incoming stimuli. It would appear, according to Bowlby, that these neurological processes are complex, rapid, and outside of the individual's awareness. Within this process selected information is compared with and moved into long term memory. In order that an individual not be overloaded by information, "selective exclusion" takes place (p. 45) an important and initially positive adaptation to one's environment.

However, as development proceeds to adolescence and adulthood, this routine and rapid exclusion of potentially important information can become maladaptive and enter the realm of psychoanalytically-oriented defensive processes which would impact mood and behavior. More recently, theorists have indicated that these experiences have long-lasting neurological impact upon an individual's ability to emotionally self-regulate (Amini, 1996) and manage social relationships (Amini, 1996; Siegal, 2001). The past then interacts with present psychic reality (Chodorow, 1999) and, without intervention, conceivably continues on into the future.

Indeed, as an apparent result of memory (Amini, 1996) and information processing, attachment relationships which extend beyond parents to partners and others contain both cognitive and affective components (Bowlby, 1980). Individuals with an avoidant internal working model may show a "walling off attitude" (Mikulincer, 1997, p. 1218) relative to new information about the environment and other people. Anxious-ambivalent individuals may be caught between wanting to seek new information about their environment in order to control it, and being fearful of doing so due to pessimistic expectations (Mikulincer, 1997). In addition, strong emotion can arise within attachment relationships and one's attachment style can cause some information to become excluded from further processing. Bowlby (1980) indicated this as a process of "defensive exclusion" (p. 45) wherein the adolescent or adult may continue to react as if adverse childhood circumstances remain present (Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1996) thus complicating present relationships.

Enhancement or blunting of affects is potentially a significant concern. Affects are important aspects of human functioning, providing information about internal and external events (Isaacs, 1984). Basic affects including distress, anger, fear, and shame gradually allow the individual to anticipate and further adapt to threats within the environment, as well communicate with others as social beings (Basch, 1976). However, protective defensive exclusion may initially be, one can surmise that the potential for rigidity and overcorrection in reaction to others is always present. In fact, Bowlby (1980) has noted that the persistent exclusion of similar categories of information can become maladaptive and restricting in adolescence and adulthood.

Under some circumstances an individual's reaction may operate within the frame of "rejection sensitivity" wherein the expectation of hostile intent (Fields, 1996, p. 19) is present. This understandably can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, insecure adolescents may become overwhelmed by affect in dealings within attachment relationships, or may distance themselves from the development of new relationships for ostensibly protective purposes. Communication may become difficult as a result of cognitive distortions (Beck, 1985) and the defensive exclusionary process (J. Allen & Land, 1999b).

Insecure adolescents, who are rejected by their peers, may be involved in processes that are at least partially unconscious. Freud, who gave us the topographic and the tripartite models of mind (Gedo & Goldberg, 1973) frequently spoke of repression, the process of "keeping something out of consciousness" (Freud, 1915, p.104) as a means of avoiding psychic pain. (A discussion of Freud's repression versus Bowlby's

defensive exclusion is beyond the purview of this document. It is mentioned to indicate that Bowlby did apparently derive this from Freud.) Chodorow (1978) describes this and other defenses as unconscious operations which help us to cope with “lack of control , ambivalence, anxiety, loss, feelings of dependence, helplessness, envy” (p. 42). Bowlby (1980) describes repression, which he views as virtually identical to defensive exclusion, as a process wherein information is excluded along with relevant thoughts and feelings, and their resultant behavioral systems. Therefore an individual with a dismissing attachment style might disconnect from the importance of early parental relationships and perhaps all relationships, much like Laura, who was mentioned in the introduction, appears to have done. Adding to this, it should be noted, that similar to previous assertions regarding the organization of cognitive schemas, multiple models of both the self and of attachment figures can develop which occasionally may include some that are unconscious and actually incompatible with the first (Bowlby, 1973).

It can be seen that within the context of early adolescent interactions, an already intricate process, conscious and unconscious internal working models could lead to variable and confusing interactions within peer groups. These might conceivably have the potential for the development of conflict between peers which could result in rejection. In fact, students who have difficulty understanding their own and another youth’s motives and intentions are at a special disadvantage.

Attachment and the Development of Mentalization

Attachment intertwines with the process of mentalization, or “the capacity to understand others’ objective experience” (Fonagy, 2003, p. 190) including mental

“intentional states” (Fonagy, 1999, p. 3). It is this “theory of mind” also known as “reflective function” (p. 3) that allows us to work with others through the appreciation and anticipation of others’ thoughts, feelings and wishes, frequently through nonverbal cues such as facial expression and vocal intonation (Fonagy, 1999). This capacity, which ideally develops within a secure attachment relationship, also allows an individual to develop an awareness of his or her own behavior related to mental state (Fonagy, 1999) which is a critical skill for social as well as self-reflective functioning.

Bowlby frequently alludes to the survival nature of infant to caregiver attachment. Fonagy (1999) further refines this through discussion of the importance of a child’s ability to understand a parent’s mental state, especially in abusive or traumatic situations. Disrupted, inconsistent, or inappropriate attachment relationships can impact the development of mentalization, in that a child may appear indifferent to attachment relationships, when, in reality, relationships may provoke significant anxiety within the child. However, in another vein, it has been noted that aggressive behavior which persists from early childhood through adolescence can result from a deficit in mentalization. In this instance, the child fails to have a “sense of the other as a psychological entity” (Fonagy, 2003, p. 191). It appears that failures in reflective functioning may produce a youth who exhibits socially indifferent behavior with underlying anxiety or one who shows aggressive behavior with little empathic sense of their peers’ emotions, needs, or motivation. Thus the stage can be set for socially inappropriate behavior that is either withdrawn or aggressive-behavior which may lead to a youth who becomes rejected or who rejects others.

It is apparent that some internal working models lend themselves more readily to reflective functioning than others (Fonagy et al., 2004). A securely attached individual would be more likely to have a positive model of self and others ostensibly developed through sensitive reflection of affect from the caregiver (Fonagy et al., 2004). It is through the social feedback and appropriate affect mirroring of the earliest caregiving relationship that a child can develop self-knowledge, self-control, and gradually an awareness of the difference between internal and external reality (Fonagy et al., 2004) . (The reader is referred to **Attachment, Affect Regulation and Identity Formation**, this document, for detail on the mirroring process.)

Disrupted, absent or inappropriate mirroring as an apparent result of failure of the caregiver's reflective functioning leads to an insecurely attached child. This is related to the caregiver's attachment security and internal working model. A caregiver with a dismissing style fails to mirror, while a pre-occupied caregiver may mirror too strongly (Fonagy et al., 2004). If these situations are severe, personality disorders can develop and ultimately the child may learn to manipulate others to maintain some degree of self-cohesion, through causing others' external behavior to match internal representations (Fonagy et al., 2004). Thus a complex dance of emotion and behavior can develop between bully and victim, one that may become even more complex between youths who alternate between rejecting and being rejected by their peers.

However, beyond factors related to early caregiving relationships, ultimately the youth's interactions and relationships with others are impacted by biological factors such as inattention, hyperactivity, and poor impulse control, as well. In addition, since

reflective function involves person-in-situation factors, responses can become non-reflective during emotionally charged interactions (Fonagy et al., 2004) leading to further conflict. However, it should be noted that some rejection is unprovoked and due to other contextual, systemic factors.

Attachment, Peer Rejected Youths, and the Systems Approach

Attachment is not an exclusively internal dynamic; it is interpersonal by nature. As a result, consideration must be given to the systemic aspects of the process. The systems model which has had significant impact upon social work practice since the 1960's, encourages practitioners to view clients as interacting with larger systems rather than as existing as isolated entities, shifting the focus from a medically- oriented to a more sociologically- oriented framework (DeHoyos & Jensen, 1985).

Systems ideas within social work originated with the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1969) and his biological theory within which all organisms are viewed as systems containing subsystems that are ultimately part of "super-systems" (Payne, 1997, p. 97). Von Bertalanffy decried what he termed the passive behavioral stimulus-response "robot model of human behavior" (p. 188). He indicated instead the presence of an "active personality system" (p. 192) allowing an individual at some level to create his or her own environment. This would appear congruent with Bowlby's description of an individual's active role in the processing (inclusion/exclusion) of surrounding information, with resultant defense.

Payne (1997) and Friedman (1997) described key characteristic of systems: the use of input to maintain a steady state, the drive to maintain homeostasis in spite of

changes brought about by input, the growth of complexity of a system through differentiation, as well as the reciprocity of change within a system when one part of it is changed, and finally, non-summativity, the notion that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (Payne, p. 138). Von Bertalanffy (1969) indicated homeostasis as being limited in terms of conceptual usefulness during situations which contain “growth, development and creation” and the “build-up of tensions” (p. 210). As a result, although one can note that individuals during early adolescence might attempt to maintain homeostasis, this is conceivably a nearly futile task due to the rapidity of growth and change.

Closely aligned to systems concepts are those of the ecological or life model wherein people are viewed as changing and being changed by their environment. According to Friedman (1997), C. B. Germain (2002) intertwined ecological principals with systems theory producing an ecological systems perspective. Within this frame of reference, causality is viewed as circular and as taking place within transactions, which conceivably cause reciprocal change in both parties. Ecology is in fact the study of relations between an organism and the environment. Social problems can, in fact, interrupt important reciprocal adaptation (Payne, 1997), in that a stigmatized, rejected adolescent can then develop social-emotional difficulties (Boulton 1999, Donohue, 2000) due to negative environmental transactions.

It can be seen that for complex situations such as those within the frame of social work services, reciprocal causality is a more useful metaphor than linear (Germain & Gitterman, 1987). Potentially, the youth rejected by peers struggles to develop,

differentiate, adapt, and manage attachment relationships all at once, while impacting and being impacted upon by his or her home and school environments. Given that everyday person-in-environment transactions frequently produces stress (Friedman, 1997), intervention at this interface can focus upon both changing the individual's coping ability and as well as changing the environment itself in order to improve fit. It is likely that youths with insecure attachment styles show reduced coping abilities within interpersonal environments. These may combine with impingements within the environment and promote disruptions in peer relations. However, the interpersonal nature of attachment initially emerges within the family system.

Attachment within the Family System

Consideration of the family system enters the realm of reciprocal causality and the observation of patterns, along with a holistic, relational focus (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Within their transactions, family members create patterns that impact upon an individual's view of self and others (Minuchin, 1998, 1999). In addition, family structure and "unspoken rules" (Minuchin & Nichols, 1998, p. 23) impact parent-child boundaries and relationships. Families of children who show bullying behaviors frequently show a lack of warmth and excessive permissiveness, while families of victimized rejected children often show enmeshment (Mishna, 2003). Family functions serve as the context for attachment processes as well as a template for peer relations while all members of the family co-exist within and interact with home and community environments (Andreae, 1996).

Attachment theorists appear to focus upon the future impact of these early parent-child relationships, indicating that the past affects the present and beyond (Miller, 1993). Indeed, it has been shown that parents' own insecure attachment histories are significant predictors of children's externalizing or internalizing behaviors in school in that attachment impacts marital interactions and parenting style (Cowan, 1996). An anxious-preoccupied parent can be erratic and unpredictable, thus leading to a child who is wary and hypervigilant. Further, a child may develop a dismissing/avoidant attachment style as a defense against a neglectful parent (Garbarino, 2006). This appears to occur within a complex mixture of linear past to present relationships surrounded by circular systemic family interactions. Early attachments can be viewed as dynamic processes among family member, that ultimately affect an individual's ability to interact with peers (Cui, 2002; Updegraff, 2002). According to Lewis (2000), the early processes of matching, attunement, and reciprocity in the infant-caretaker relationship may conceivably have long term consequences. Although misattunements are common and expected, if left uncorrected, actual structural changes within the brain can develop and the child may begin to focus more on self-regulation than on relationships (Lewis, 2000).

Indeed, it has been noted that children's early attachment histories "may contribute" to their involvement in the process of bullying either as bullies or as victims (Mishna, 2003, p.514). Not surprisingly positive parental feedback and affect are associated with the development of positive peer relationships (Cui, 2002; Updegraff, 2002) and non-supportive parent-child relationships are associated with aggression and peer rejection (Clark & Ladd, 2000).

Although traditional attachment theory focuses primarily upon an individual's early relationships and their representations including consideration of the infant's temperament (Hill, Fonagy, Safier, & Sargent, 2003), the traditional "Strange Situation Test" (Mary D. Ainsworth, 1978; Solomon & George, 1999) is ultimately relational in nature (Hill et al., 2003) as the parent and infant interact in an either secure or insecure (avoidant, ambivalent or possibly disorganized) manner during time-limited separations and reunions (Solomon & George, 1999). Hill et al. (2003) expands this interaction beyond the Strange Situation into a description of an on-going "ecology of attachment" within the family which utilizes the concept of "shared frames" (p. 205). This includes the sharing of emotional representations, cognitions, and behaviors among family members, underscoring the relational nature of attachment.

In addition Clark and Ladd (2000) describe two important complementary strands within the family: connectedness and autonomy support. This is congruent with the "exploratory system" and the "attachment system" (Hill et al., 2003, p. 208) frequently described by attachment theorists. If a child is surrounded by a secure base of positive family attachments, confident exploration of the environment of peer relationships can occur (Bowlby, 1988). The delicate balance between attachment and exploration becomes more challenging during adolescence as individuals search for a sense of belonging while establishing an identity (Johnson & Watt, 1983).

Attachment in Adolescence

Attachment behavior has been described as significant and potentially active throughout life (Bowlby, 1980). Attachment within the context of adolescent development proceeds along two fronts that of transformations in an adolescent's relationships with his or her parents as well as changes in peer relationships. Attachment within adolescence is frequently discussed relative to the stability of the internal working model as well as in relationship to the age-related progression of identity formation. Both will be considered.

The current literature is sparse regarding the stability of the early adolescent's internal working model. Mid to late adolescents, 16-18 years of age, apparently show strong stability of attachment representation as assessed by the Main's - Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) during that time (Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002), especially relative to the preoccupied state of attachment. According to the authors, this attachment state indicates "extended and irrelevant discourse about attachment experience" (Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002, p.170) possibly due to an the on-going process of individuation.

However, utilizing the Bartholomew categorization, attachment from late childhood to early adolescence, age 10-14 years appears to show more pronounced stability of secure and dismissing attachment styles when compared with preoccupied and unresolved categories. In addition, the author indicated that over this age span, adolescents show a predominance of dismissing strategies overall, possibly indicating a need for early adolescents to distance themselves from parents somewhat during this time

of identity formation (Ammaniti, 2000). It is possible that adolescents first need to distance or dismiss, in late childhood or early adolescence, in order to then become more preoccupied with attachment during mid adolescence, as phase – specific identity-formation issues intensify. The difficulty here is that while the above researchers describe attachment representations as overall stable, they go on to highlight those attachment styles which appear to be *more* stable-a curious situation.

Although adolescents can be seen to ostensibly distance themselves from parents, these attachments continue to retain significance and influence. In addition, although adolescents become less dependent upon parents, they gradually develop a “goal-directed partnership” with them (Allen & Land, 1999, p. 320) within which they negotiate day to day activities. This ideally takes place within the framework of a secure parental base, wherein the adolescent’s anxiety is kept to a minimum through positive family interactions.

When one considers the progress of adolescent development occurring at this time, the orthogenetic principle of development appears useful. The concept of differentiation, wherein one moves from a global and homogeneous state to a more heterogeneous situation (Payne, 1997; Von Bertalanffy, 1969; Werner, 1976) is applicable to the young adolescent who negotiates relationships in the light of his or her developing self. As the adolescent moves toward an increased state of “differentiation, articulation, and hierarchic integration” (Werner, p. 109), an enhanced capacity to take on the perspective of others develops (Allen & Land, 1999; Werner, 1976) and the adolescent gradually becomes more capable of managing his or her environment. In

addition, perception, learning and thought processes including the ability to problem-solve increase in maturity and complexity (Werner, 1976). All of this has significant potential impact upon the parent-adolescent relationship and would ideally promote the continuation of their attachment in spite of emotional and relational upheaval.

Indeed, unlike during infancy, parental attachment during adolescence serves more of a structural and less of a physical survival function. This surrounding structure is aimed at the building of the adolescent's coping strategies for the regulation of the inevitable stage-related emotional storms (Allen & Land, 1999). It would appear that a secure adolescent who is not preoccupied with issues of parental attachment would be in a better position to move forward and explore what life has to offer in terms of peer relationships.

In fact, peer relationships during adolescence may exist on a number of levels. Although childhood playmates may not necessarily become attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; J. Allen & Land, 1999b), as children move into adolescence, long term relationships do appear to have attachment components. Ainsworth (1989) describes true attachment relationships as "affectional bonds" (p. 711) within which one has a unique connection with another. Within an attachment relationship, an individual seeks to remain physically close to that person and experiences distress upon involuntary separation, and grief upon loss. With attachment needs met, an individual is also fortified to move into exploratory behavior and engage in other activities (Ainsworth, 1989). This phenomenon can be described as "secure base behavior" in the presence of an attachment figure and "safe-haven behavior", or retreat to an attachment figure when experiencing a threat

(Allen & Land, 1999, p. 323). Thus romantic or best/close friend relationships in adolescence frequently evoke attachment behaviors and emotions as an adolescent transforms from primarily hierarchical reception of parental care, to more egalitarian giving and receiving of support (Allen & Land, 1999). Early adolescents appear to be in transition from childhood play relationships to those of the older adolescent or adult. It is conceivable that within any peer group of students, individual youths may be at various points on this developmental continuum at any given time. In addition, some peer relationships during adolescence may be characterized as “affiliative” rather than as attachment-oriented in nature, providing stimulation and sharing rather than emotion and security regulation (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999, p. 338). The intensity and importance of this process may predispose young adolescents to a susceptibility to peer pressure (Allen & Land, 1999) which becomes intertwined with identity development.

Early Adolescent Development and Interpersonal Identity Formation

Just as adolescents can be at differing levels of relationship formation, they may also be at varied points in the process of identity development. E. Erikson (1968) has put forth an epigenetic approach to identity development wherein an organism grows under the apparent influence of a “ground plan” in a predetermined sequence, with each part having its “time of special ascendancy” (pp. 92-93). This occurs, according to Erikson, in a predictable sequence from the development of trust in infancy ultimately to the emergence of intimacy in adulthood, with an important pause in adolescence to form identity and hopefully avoid role confusion. Although each stage is clearly depicted in terms of a dichotomous crisis, which ideally is successfully negotiated before moving on

to the next, E. Erikson (1963; 1968) does acknowledge that this does not occur in a vacuum, as the school and larger society impact the adolescent within this process.

Indeed, Bruner (1986) portrays development as firmly embedded within culture in that developmental phases exist as common “cultural representations” (p. 134) which become accepted as real. In addition, Bruner appears to go beyond Erikson’s acknowledgement of cultural impact indicating that any developmental theory we may posit is but one point of view among many possibilities within the description of human nature. However, beyond differences in cultural descriptions, it should be noted that a theory of development must encompass individual differences as well as a general overall scheme (Werner, 1975), a direction, and an endpoint (Overton, 1988). In addition, development can be viewed as showing both continuous and abrupt features (Werner, 1975) with adolescence emerging as a pivotal and accelerated time in this process. For the young adolescent this includes an identity which encompasses interpersonal relationships as the youth begins to explore friendship, dating, sex roles and recreation as well as the more ideological components of identity (Allison & Schultz, 2001). As will be seen, the outcome of the adolescent stage of identity crisis is closely tied to attachment.

In order to more closely study the process of identity formation researchers have utilized developmental psychologist James Marcia’s (1980) descriptions of identity statuses. Marcia operationalizes Erikson’s theory by identifying four possible outcomes relative to identity status: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Those who have accomplished identity achievement have chosen occupational and ideological

goals. However, adolescents who are in foreclosure have passively adopted their parents' ideological choices rather than their own. Those who are in a moratorium status are, according to Marcia, actually in an identity crisis, while individuals in diffusion have no clear ideological or occupational direction. Relative to attachment it has been noted that the state of identity diffusion appears to be linked with dismissing attachment representations, while secure attachment is associated with identity status achievement (Zimmerman & Becker-Stoll, 2002).

Attachment, Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and Autonomy

Part of any individual's social interaction includes the ability to regulate affect during an interchange. Since attachment is involved in this important function, it can directly impact social interactions. According to Alexander and Warner (2003), attachment can be seen as possessing both cognitive and affective elements. The internal working model contains mental representations of attachment experiences. The affective piece appears to develop as a result of the child's attempts to communicate negative affect within the care-giving relationship. The child then learns to either inhibit or exaggerate affects relative to a parental response that is either accepting, rejecting, or conflicted. As a result, the internal working model comes to represent a strategy for affect regulation which affects the ability to "reflect upon and alter" (Alexander & Warner, p. 243) past learned behavior patterns, intrapsychic processes and future relationships (Pamela Alexander & Warner, 2003).

The growth of affect regulation also involves the development of mentalization within the care-giving relationship as the child begins to perceive the caregiver ascribing

a particular mental state to the child (Fonagy et al., 2004). Through this the child begins to feel secure enough to attribute emotional states to others. The child also develops a feeling of “causal efficacy” (Fonagy et al., 2004 , p. 173) as his or internal emotional state becomes externalized.

However, effective affect mirroring must be “marked” (Fonagy et al., 2004, p. 177) in order to prevent misattribution of the emotional state to the parent. Marking consists of an exaggerated response by the parent that shows the parent is reflecting the emotion being ascribed to the child (Fonagy et al., 2004). However, a “marked” anger display by the parent is different than a realistic show of anger. In order for this to feel at least somewhat under the child’s control, this reflection needs to be not only “marked” but also an appropriate and reasonably accurate response to the child’s emotional state. Thus within a secure attachment relationship, the child learns to differentiate and regulate emotions. Lack of markedness, perhaps due to the parents’ own defensive exclusion, will cause the child to attribute his or her own emotions to the parent and interfere with self-perception, possibly leading to emotional dysregulation (Fonagy et al., 2004) which could conceivably impact peer relations.

Frequently the primary underlying attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are useful when considering affect regulation. A child who develops strong emotional reactivity will most likely show anxious attachments, while one who shows “emotional cutoff” (Skowron & Dendy, 2004 , p. 234) will show avoidance. Thus strategies of affect regulation are closely intertwined with attachment organization.

Skowron and Dendy (2004) view attachment as converging with the process of self-differentiation in that positive relations with caregivers assist in the development of mature autonomy within relationships. The ability to manage stress without over-reliance upon or distancing from attachment figures begins in infancy, ideally as a result of emotionally available parents (Volling, McElwain, Notaro, & Herrera, 2002). The ability to self-regulate becomes quite significant at the time of adolescence with its inherent “emotional upheaval” (J. Allen & Land, 1999b, p. 330). Although adolescence presents with fewer threats to direct survival than infancy and early childhood, the need for a secure parental base remains paramount (J. Allen & Land, 1999a). Questions may arise as to who ‘owns’ the attachment organization during adolescence-is it a “property of the individual” (J. Allen & Land, 1999b, p. 329) or a response to on-going interactions with attachment figures? It would appear that attachment throughout the life span exists both within the individual and through relational interaction (J. Allen & Land, 1999a) and the ability to connect with the meaning of one’s own and others’ emotions forms an integral part of this.

Meaning, Attachment, and Adolescent Social Interactions

Moving beyond developmental stages, dichotomous crises, attachment styles, and affect regulation, the idea of meaning is one that is central to identity formation, as the adolescent struggles to grasp both the internal and the external (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1993) including their inevitable interaction. In the unique realm of human meaning systems, during the observation of events and relationships, comparisons are made, similarities or dissimilarities are noted and conclusions are drawn (Polkinghorne, 1988).

These systems contain three different types of meaning: subjective, which contains the individual's own meaning system; shared meaning which is established in interpersonal interactions; and objective meaning which appears to reflect cultural influences (K. Nelson, 1985).

The thought that meaning and context are inevitably intertwined (Chodorow, 1999; Mishler, 1979) foreshadows the role adolescents develop as active participants within the environment during this time of identity formation (Werner, 1976) as they struggle to understand the actions of others around them in relation to themselves. According to Katharine Nelson (1985), "context, cognition, and culture" (p. 12) intertwine to develop subjective meaning and "event representations" (p. 8) arise from daily experiences which generalize and aid in the interpretation of events. Given that internal working models can be described as "mental representations" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 203), which are developed early in life and affect mental processes (Nelson, 1986), it is conceivable that an adolescent's attachment style as exemplified by a secure or insecure working model, can then impact the meaning of daily events, relationships, and whole environments. Meaning, in this sense offers the adolescent an opportunity to organize, evaluate, and communicate thoughts and perceptions and serves as a connection between the interpersonal and the intrapsychic, allowing an individual, in this case the adolescent, to participate and interact with others (Saari, 1991). Ideally this would consist of positive and growth-enhancing meaning and representations, but this is not always the case within the early adolescent peer group.

The peer environment of the adolescent within the school is frequently challenging. Erikson (1963) described adolescents as being “clannish and cruel” in their exclusion of those deemed “different” (p. 162). The formation of cliques and the resulting intolerance, according to Erikson serve as a temporary defense against identity confusion. Although Erikson indicated that he does not condone this practice, placing it within a developmental framework does appear to normalize it, a hazardous stance in the case of peer-rejected youths. The workings of the adolescent group-the boon and the bane of adolescent existence-will now be considered.

The Adolescent Group—Impact Upon Identity

Typically as children move into late childhood and early adolescence their social interactions occur within cliques. Although cliques can be defined as “friendship circles” within which particular members identify each other as connected (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 56), they cannot be regarded as benign. Cliques as “circles of power” (P.A. Adler & Adler, 1995, p. 25) show patterns of recruitment, manipulation, subjugation, and exclusion. Clique members appear to maintain their cohesion through rejecting and “picking on” ... “outsiders” who become relegated to an inferior status (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 64). This is coupled with the intermittent internal rejection of clique members themselves wherein lower status members may experience outright expulsion (Adler & Adler, 1998). Cliques can be seen as socializing their members towards exclusionary dynamics leading to prejudice and discrimination (Adler & Adler, 1995).

Newman and Newman (2001) posit a convincing argument regarding the importance of the peer group in identity formation, especially in early adolescence. This

is accomplished through group connections, support, and according to the authors, periods of alienation as well. The authors further indicate that periods of alienation assist a youth with self-definition as well as with an appreciation of the benefits of group membership. This stance appears congruent with that of Erikson (1963) as described above relative to the utility of clique intolerance.

However, given that group members tend to categorize and label individuals who are emotionally invested in their circle of peers, the group holds tremendous power either for growth or for pain (Newman & Newman, 2001). This is felt most keenly at the time of early adolescence when both individual and group identity issues surface. In addition, group representations containing words and symbols (Newman & Newman, 2001) arise, perhaps similar to the mental representations which develop within internal working models (Bowlby, 1973). These are most likely infused with subjective meaning within event representations (Nelson, 1985) for the individuals involved in peer groups. This meaning becomes quite important for the adolescents involved.

Indeed, much like the survival significance of parent-infant attachment, there is an evolutionary advantage to group membership and protection (Newman & Newman, 2001) within a cooperative group. However, the mental representations developed within the group may not be altogether benign. This is important given the significant impact of an individual's social identity upon his or her perceptions, emotions, behavior (Ellemers et al., 2002) and academic achievement (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). If one is labeled by the group as a "mel," (Merton, 1996, p. 6) "nerd" or "dweeb" rather than a "jock" or "prep," (B. Brown, 1996) very different group mental representations arise. An individual

may then become involved in a rejected crowd (Brown, 1996) with similar labels or may as indicated earlier, experience alienation and isolation.

Alienation that is not conceived of as temporary cannot be considered to be identity or growth enhancing. The idea of alienation has been variously defined throughout history by social philosophers. Keefe (1984) applied the work of Hegel, Durkheim, Weber and others to the alienation seen in social work practice. Although detailed philosophies will not be enumerated global themes useful to social work practice with peer rejected youths, will be noted.

The process of alienation is closely linked to a feeling of powerlessness which may then become learned helplessness, apathy and depression accompanied by a reluctance to attempt new behaviors (Keefe, 1984). It is conceivable that as youths become either socially isolated or 'stuck' in a negative, rejected peer group, they may begin to withdraw or respond in ways that are not helpful to their situation (Merton, 1996). Although some isolates may move from 'nerd' status to a more positive identity and social standing during a change in context from to high school (Kinney, 1993) others may become discouraged as their attempts towards relationship even with 'lower status' youth are rebuffed, and they may stop trying. Instead of drawing together, rejected youths may begin a process of mutual rejection (P.A. Adler & Adler, 1998).

If one combines Goffman's (1963) assertion that a stigmatized person tends to remain so, with Keefe's (1984) observation that alienated individuals require assistance with coping strategies and mobilization of their own resources, a clear need for intervention is shown. Given that experiences of alienation and stigmatization occur at a

critical time of identity formation for peer-rejected early adolescents, it behooves social workers to focus upon methods of empowering these individuals. The rejected youth has limited opportunities for socialization, a lowered self-concept and is frequently subjected to taunting and degradation by the so-called ‘popular kids’ (Adler & Adler, 1998) who are also victims of their own self-perpetuating dynamics.

Peer culture contains themes surrounding sharing and social participation, managing emotions and conflicts, and challenging adult authority (Cosaro & Eder, 1990). Those who can navigate and participate in this flow can become accepted parts of the group. Those who stumble, or who just do not ‘get it’ are at risk for rejection. The school social worker needs to assist students, who by virtue of their attachment style, have difficulty with connection, and are treated negatively by their surrounding peer culture. In addition, students who chronically mistreat their peers need assistance with the formation of positive peer attachments as well. The social work intervention aspect will be explored in further depth following a more detailed description of peer-rejected youths, and relevant gender issues, as well as further consideration of the interaction of internal and external effects.

Stigma and the Alien Self-Relationship to Trauma

Stigmatization by one’s peer group can interact with an individual’s internal dynamics which reflect the impact of early attachments. According to Fonagy et al. (2004), in situations where affect mirroring has gone seriously awry, through significant caregiver misattunement or insensitivity, the child comes to integrate the caregiver’s state of mind as his or her own, thus seriously damaging the self. However, this part of the self

remains alien and disconnected and, within attachment relationships becomes externalized through projective identification. Painful peer interactions as well as family trauma or abuse may cause the youth's alien self to identify with the aggressor in order to dissociate from the pain. This can cause the youth to view him or herself as "destructive" or even "monstrous" (Fonagy et al., 2004, p. 12). Thus early negative caregiving experiences can interact with stressful peer interactions within the milieu, further solidifying peer rejection.

Interpersonal childhood traumas, which may include neglect and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, are all associated with insecure attachment (Waldinger, Schulz, Barsky, & Ahern, 2006). This is especially true if early trauma with attachment figures remains unresolved (J. P. Allen, Hauser, & Borman-Spurrell, 1996). Associated family themes may include rejection, role reversal/parentification, and fear as well as unresolved trauma (P. Alexander, 1992). This early childhood trauma within attachment relationships is likely to produce intense shame and if unmentalized it can become "ego destructive" (Fonagy et al., 2004, p. 13). A youth in this situation may find it too threatening to think about his or her own or another's mental state, and may find it too difficult to take another's perspective. Thus an insecure rejected individual would find confirmation of their own deepest shame through stigmatization by their peers. In addition, culturally based gender expectations and meanings can intertwine with past relationship trauma to produce yet another layer.

Bridge to Peer Rejection and Gender

Peer Rejection, Culture, and Gender-“Both/and, not either/or”¹

The larger culture which surrounds any individual, including the young adolescent, contains relatively persistent practices which are tied to a symbolic system (K. Nelson, 1985). This shared meaning system (K. Nelson, 1985; Saari, 1991) includes norms, beliefs, and behaviors (Henslin, 1999) within which meaning is both personal and cultural (Chodorow, 1999). Meaning always comes both from without through, historical, socio-cultural changes and from within through an individual's psychodynamics and psychobiological influences (Chodorow, 1978). A youth's social map develops which may be positive or negative, is based upon temperament along with experiences of nurturing or rejection and may be impacted by rejection sensitivity (Garbarino, 2006). In a larger, cultural sense, the concept of *relative* persistence of past subjective realities is important here in that culture is a dynamic process, within which individuals not only follow cultural definitions but also act to change them if they no longer apply (Saari, 2002). Although this does imply hope for rejected youths, it must be recalled that these individuals can become locked into the process of stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) which occurs within the peer culture of the school and is reflective of societal values including those related to gender (Eder et al., 1995).

Indeed, schools can be seen as vessels for the transmission of patriarchal values, against which adolescent girls experience a struggle between self and achievement

¹Chodorow, 1999, p. 3.

oriented motives and traditional caring and connectedness (Schultz, 1991). According to Dr. Mary Pipher (1994), a clinical psychologist with a background in anthropology, adolescence is especially difficult for girls, as they feel pushed to let go of “tomboyish” behavior as well as the assertive, self-confident aspect of their identities (Van Roosemalen, 2000) in order to move into a more constricted role as a young woman. As part of society’s construction of gender, early adolescent girls are commodified (Pipher, 1994) and objectified (Eder et al., 1995) based upon external characteristics including physical attractiveness, within the context of a culture that is toxic and sexualized for girls (Garbarino, 2006). All of this occurs within the confines of an apparently phase-specific relational crisis which develops (Stevens, 1997) as adolescent girls become aware of a dichotomous bind in societal expectations in that they are encouraged to be relationally focused and connected while separating from parents.

Carol Gilligan and her associates (1990) focus upon the relational intricacies of a similar bind, calling it the “dilemma of inclusion” (p.10) wherein an adolescent girl must discover how to have the presence of both herself and the other within a relationship. Excluding one’s own needs makes an individual a “good woman” while excluding the needs of others makes one “selfish” (p. 10). Adolescent girls often feel tension within this domain.

However, boys have their own concerns to manage. Clinical psychologist, Dr. William Pollack (1998) from Harvard Medical School describes the impact of the “Boy Code” (p. 6) upon youths. According to Pollack, this outdated but still prevalent system of societal constraints has been the norm since the 19th century. Boys learn to hide their

thoughts and feelings behind a “mask of masculinity” (p. 3), especially those which relate to emotional connection and vulnerability (Garbarino, 1999). As a result they may handle rejection/bullying independently in order to avoid feelings of shame or vulnerability compounded by further ostracism by classmates (Pollack, 1998). Practice wisdom indicates that boys often wait until a peer problem is very obvious and disruptive to adults, instead of reporting it. Girls are more likely to seek assistance from the school social worker for peer issues.

In addition, boys are asked to separate emotionally from their mothers at an “unnecessarily early age” (Pollack, 1998, p. 11), first at age six then during adolescence. It is not surprising that social pressure and approval figures prominently in the thoughts, feelings and actions of both male and female. Survival and development depend upon our social connections from infancy onward and any threat of disconnection becomes a threat to survival (Garbarino, 1999). The peer structure of a school serves as the context of interaction, connection, and disconnection.

This peer structure combines with the social construction of gender long before. According to Corsaro and Eder (1990), within a constructivist frame grounded in Piaget’s phases of cognitive development (which will not be elaborated here), it can be seen that children actively take in information from their surroundings which they then organize, interpret and use. Children then interact with others and build social systems which produce their own creative culture including messages surrounding expected gender-related behavior.

Indeed, as children grow and develop, they gradually become their own agents in gender development (Deegan, 1987; Gagerman, 1991). In a participant observational study of gender, culture and adolescence within the, Eder et al. (1995) indicated that social isolates frequently were seen by the rejecting peer culture to lack the stereotypically traditional male-female characteristics; boys were ridiculed for being “sissies” and girls for being “ugly” (p. 155). Best (1983) described this as the “second curriculum”, (p. 59) within which girls learn to be ‘feminine’ and helpful and boys learn to avoid showing emotion. In addition, peer culture within is defined by the activities of the ‘most popular’ and this definition is gendered. Male athletes portray traditional male values including achievement, competition and “toughness” while female cheerleaders become prized and admired for attractiveness and interpersonal relationship skills (Kinney, 1993, p. 26). In addition, the “unofficial school” rewards boys for “coolness” and “savoir-faire” (P.A. Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992, pp. 169, 172, 174), and objective achievements (Garbarino, 2006) and girls for family status, social precocity, and strong interest in boys. Boys can be socially stigmatized for doing either exceptionally well or very poorly in academics, while girls are more likely to achieve positive status for doing well in school. In addition, girls tend to group themselves in cliques of similar academic ability (P.A. Adler et al., 1992). For better or for worse, both can obtain positive visibility within the school for these activities and attributes thus enhancing their status (Corsaro & Eder, 1990).

Chodorow (1978) describes the roots of this as stemming from early mothering experiences since early parenting within virtually all cultures is female in nature. Further,

Chodorow notes differences in the style of relating mothers utilize relative to male and female infants. This apparently produces males whose selves value independence and autonomy over all and females, who, due to identity fusion with mother, value caring and connectedness (Risman, 1998). Chodorow also states that women continue to need mothering by other women, so as to recreate the “dual unity” (p. 200) they previously had with mother, while men learn to deny this affective relationship while learning their ‘masculine’ role. This takes place not so much in relationship to their fathers, but more in reaction to their mothers. Chodorow also describes women’s relationships as “affectively richer” (p. 200). The deterministic stereotypical picture painted by the above is concerning to this researcher. Although clearly this is a dated piece, one wonders whether these dynamics remain active in spite of societal changes. Although the study being proposed will not answer this significant question, it will give a glimpse into the gendered attachments and interactions of early adolescents.

By 1999, Chodorow, a self-described psychoanalyst and feminist sociologist, had come to situate herself squarely upon the “cusp” (p. 8) of the intrapsychic and cultural contributions in terms of their relative contributions to gender, personality, and behavior indicating that the inner and the outer become “inseparable” (p. 8). This stance appears compatible with the social work focus upon person in environment and it alludes to the inevitable intertwining of gender, culture and internal attachment styles.

Although Risman (1998) acknowledges Chodorow’s (1999) feminist psychoanalytic approach, her focus is even more upon gender as part of the structure and fabric of our society. Risman describes males and females as being accountable for

““doing gender”” (p. 22) in terms of following socially prescribed roles. Within this context language becomes a powerful vehicle for labeling and creating oppression, thereby allowing beliefs about gender to be constructed which reproduce gender inequality. Specifically, according to Eder et al. (1995) adolescent girls can be labeled as “sluts” (p. 126) due to assertive behavior as well as due to an interest in sex. In addition, heterosexuality is seen as the norm. Social isolates are frequently labeled “homosexual” and girls who show non-traditional interests are labeled “queer” (p. 126) and are subject to rejection and ridicule. Based upon male standards, girls may be labeled and classified, both by boys and by other girls, as either too sexually available or as too constricted. (p. 139). An adolescent, male or female who is already operating within an insecure, possibly shame based mode, might react in an especially strong manner to labels that are fraught with negative societal meaning, thus illustrating the power of perception combined with the spoken word.

Language with its role in the development of shared meaning and cultural conventions within social interaction (Nelson, 1985) can produce rejection or promote friendship (Cosaro & Eder 1990). Also according to Cosaro and Eder, those who can navigate the waters of playful teasing, and collaborative storytelling within adolescent groups can frequently gain group acceptance. Among early adolescents, the phenomenon of gossip apparently differs between genders, in that it is somewhat more frequent among females and differs in content. Adolescent girls frequently focus upon the appearance, attitude, and behaviors of others while boys focus upon male athletic achievements and abilities.

The dual or different cultures approach is worth further exploration relative to culture. Perhaps, the stereotypically competitive, goal-oriented traditional male instrumental role and the nurturing, affiliative, emotionally expressive female role (Wolf, 1996) may be quite evident during that time. It can be seen as early adolescents “do gender” (Risman, 1998, p. 22), displaying culturally expected behaviors as part of their interpersonal identity development. The dual cultures theory posits that girls and boys exist within essentially different cultures. Socialization to gender roles begins much earlier and is well-established by elementary school (P.A. Adler et al., 1992). Boys’ groups feature “large, public, hierarchical, competitive” groups in contrast to girls’ groups which are smaller, more private and more focused upon intimacy, relationship, and cooperation (Thorne, 1994, p. 91). Boys’ groups, according to this theory, frequently interact outdoors, focus upon physical activity and strength, and often bond through rule-breaking activity. In addition, boys groups organize their hierarchy through powerful language resulting in threats, challenges, or commands (Thorne, 1994). In contrast, girls focus more upon the current and detailed status of relationships, and show a tendency toward monitoring each other’s emotions, physical appearance and attitudes (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Thorne, 1994; Underwood, 2003). In addition, the interactions tend to be more horizontal rather than hierarchical in nature (Underwood, 2003).

However, as previously mentioned, both Thorne (1994) and Underwood (2003) call the two cultures framework into question. The extreme differences which appear to emerge in gender and peer relations research are frequently a partial function of the research method used (Underwood, 2003) as well as a function of dichotomous

conceptions of gender along with the assumption of overriding uniformity within a gender group (Gerson, 1990). Generalized vignettes and questionnaires as well as hypothetical situations have tended to enhance the perception of gender differences, while self-disclosure relative to real friendships has shown mixed results or no differences (Underwood, 2003). In addition, Thorne (1994) emphasized that research on girls' culture has generally focused upon white, middle class populations. Furthermore, the methodology utilized may tend to draw the greatest information from the most prominent and flamboyant groups, frequently the boys (Thorne, 1994). Thorne also noted that the two culture dichotomy overlooks the impact of the type of activity, context, and adult influence in any given situation. For example, the social exclusion frequently found in girls' groups, flies in the face of traditional notions of girls as caring and cooperative (Goodwin, 2002). In fact, a study of male-female language usage in terms of powerful/powerless speech during group interactions supported the use of a "gender similarities" approach (Grob, Meyers, & Schuh, 1997, p. 282), as opposed to the dominant dual culture view. However, although most of the literature gives credence to differences between boys and girls relative to peer group functioning, it appears that identifying this as a fully functioning dual culture remains controversial. All of this appears to indicate a need for careful consideration of context, population, sampling and design issues relative to the study of peer rejection, gender, and attachment.

Gender, Race, and Social Aggression—Emerging Research

An area of peer relationships which is currently receiving attention in both popular and scholarly literature is that of female involvement in social aggression. Although Underwood (2003) indicated that there currently is not an exact correlation between peer rejection and social aggression as far as research documentation thus far, it is clear that there is some connection between both phenomena. Youths who are rejected by their peers may experience and/or participate in social aggression (Adler & Adler, 1995).

Aggression can be defined as behavior which is intended to “hurt or harm” another in some way (Crick & Grotpeler, 1995). Underwood (2003) describes girls and boys as being similar relative to experiencing the emotion of anger, but different in the manner of its expression. In addition, she indicates ‘social aggression’, often called relational or indirect aggression, as a reaction to the stereotype of ‘nice girls’ who are required to be “‘sweet and kind’” (Macoby in Underwood, 2003, p. ix). Further, the girls were described as being more vulnerable to social attack due to their focus on relationality (Underwood, 2003). Relational aggression-gossip, rumors, social exclusion-is described as a way of resolving the dilemma of feeling angry, but being precluded by one’s culture from expressing it directly (Underwood, 2003).

However, research on social aggression is rather inconsistent. Although boys tend to be more overt in their expression of aggression, Phelps (2001), in a study of third through sixth grade students, discovered that boys actually utilize relational aggression as frequently as girls. Tiet (2001), in a study based on maternal report, found similar results

in a wide age group, from four to eighteen years of age, and noted that relational aggression peaks in early adolescence. While Crick and Grotpeler (1995) appear to agree with Underwood (2003) regarding the prevalence of relational aggression in females, Rys and Bear (1997) indicate that gender preference for relational aggression seems to vary relative to the methodology used.

In another vein, L. M. Brown (2003) speaks of relational/social aggression as a predominantly white, middle class female phenomenon, with the behaviors apparently being learned through modeling of parental actions. She describes it as a “gendered” and “racialized” (p. 55) way of managing conflict and wielding power. However, Storch (2002) notes that in fact, the relatively limited research on relational aggression thus far, much like the research cited previously on peer culture in general, has also been performed with predominantly white, middle class samples. Although Brown’s assertions are somewhat difficult to assess given a rather loosely organized presentation, if the possibility exists that her statements bear some significance, this would indicate potentially grave concerns regarding the generational transmission of harmful behaviors.

However, Storch’s research utilized African-American and Latino students in a study of the impact of relational versus overt aggression, indicating that relational aggression does occur in these populations as well. An interesting finding within the above study was that overt (physical) victimization appeared to result in internalizing disorders in African-American and Latino populations, whereas relational aggression apparently did not (E. Storch et al., 2002). It appears that the complexities of the possible interaction of race, gender, and social aggression have not yet been thoroughly

researched. This dynamic will not be a primary focus at this time, due to both insufficient information and the stated focus of this paper upon attachment, peer rejection and gender. Social aggression will be viewed as a subset of peer rejection and although there is some evidence indicating a possibly gendered nature of some form of peer rejection, this is currently inconclusive and also in need of additional research.

Gender and Physical Aggression

One important aspect of peer relations and peer rejection is the use of physical as opposed to verbal or social/relational aggression. For most youths, physical aggression is uncommon and declines in adolescence (Underwood, 2003). Although physical violence is still primarily the “domain of young men” (Cunningham, 2000, p. 1), a Canadian report indicates that female violence is increasing twice as rapidly as males’ (Cunningham, 2000). According to Dr. James Garbarino (2006), this increase in female physical aggression appears to be linked with the rise of greater cultural acceptance of healthier behaviors for girls including an increase in participation in athletics as well as an increase in assertiveness. However, along with an associated increase in self-esteem and self-confidence for girls and a moving away from the constraints of traditional femininity has come an increase in competition coupled with a pop culture emphasis on aggressive ‘superhero’ girls in the media (Garbarino, 2006), thus creating a new but perhaps equally troubling norm.

Attachment and Gender

Within Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) original study of adults which resulted in a four category model of attachment-secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful, specific gender-related differences in attachment styles were noted. Female subjects consistently scored higher in the preoccupied style of attachment, while males showed higher scores in the dismissing category. No explanation was offered for this apparent difference and no application was made to populations younger than adult.

The works of Bowlby contain occasional reference to possible gender differences in attachment behavior relative to the need to attain and maintain physical closeness to an attachment figure. Bowlby (1969) indicated that this attachment behavior persists into adulthood and that it is "especially persistent in females" (p. 226). Although Bowlby attempted to explain his observation from an ethological species survival point of view, he ultimately concluded that this observed persistence of attachment behavior was of undetermined or at least inconclusive origin.

Bowlby's second volume (1973) contained a somewhat defensive appearing note that "feminist opinion notwithstanding," there are gender related differences in "susceptibility to fear" (p. 187) a quality which appears to promote female attachment behavior. Although Bowlby viewed this as a being "constitutional variable" (p. 187) he did admit that this propensity could be magnified by culture (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby, within the same volume, went on to cite four studies from circa 1930 to 1960 which, in his opinion, indicated females as more fearful than males under various circumstances. However, a review of the methodology and definitions utilized within these studies as

described by Bowlby, indicated that the researchers were most likely tapping into the presence or absence of feeling expression (reporting of fear), rather than feeling (presence of fear) per se.

In fact, more recently, in a study of interpersonal concerns and social functioning of students, utilizing the Peer Relationship subscales from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), and the Neediness/Relatedness subscale of the Interpersonal Concerns Factor as well as other scales, it was noted that boys tended to have less disclosure of emotion than girls (D. Henrich, Blatt, Kupermine, Zohar, & Leadbeater, 2001). In addition, although neediness and relatedness were shown in young adolescents in general, these factors emerged as more critical for girls' social functioning. Whereas relatedness but not neediness was seen as necessary for interpersonal competence and peer attachment for boys, relatedness was even more strongly associated with interpersonal competence for girls, and neediness created a significant and negative impact on interpersonal competence, peer attachment, number of close friends, and popularity (D. Henrich et al., 2001).

Boys' relationship needs appeared connected to the confirmation of status and agency for them, while girls' relationships fulfilled an apparent need for affirmation of affiliation and connectedness (D. Henrich et al., 2001). While this study indicates that within groups of boys intimacy and expression of emotion is considered "unmanly" or "feminine" (p. 62), even among groups of girls accustomed to close interpersonal relationships, excessive neediness and demands for reassurance tends to disrupt relationships. For the girls in this study, a self-fulfilling prophecy developed. Girls who

attempted to make peer relationships exclusive to themselves, and those who perceived rejection in neutral circumstances, or showed ‘needy’ behavior became socially isolated. Perhaps this is the dynamic of an adolescent girl with a preoccupied attachment style. Although this study theorized about the possible dynamics of female adolescent behavior in this regard, it did not further develop the male pathway to peer rejection—a curious situation. However, the authors of this study appeared more interested in comparison of the subscales being utilized than in an actual in depth discussion of early adolescent socialization.

However, the above aside, it is possible to consider Bowlby’s observations regarding attachment and gender as foreshadowing later work. Perhaps Chodorow (1978) and Risman’s (1998) discussion of the gendered development of caring and connectedness in females through the maternal relationship, although developed within different theoretical frames, hearkens back to the importance of and *possible* gender specificity of some attachment behaviors within relationships. Henrich et al.’s (2001) study appears to indicate that, to varying extents, excessive neediness within attachment relationships is disturbing for both boys and girls. However, the fact that it was apparently more disruptive for girls within their social circles raises some interesting questions. Is this due to early adolescent girls’ heightened reactivity to relationship stress (D. Henrich et al., 2001) apparently stemming from a need for social perfection (Garbarino, 2006)? In another vein, are girls in our society now, perhaps unconsciously attempting to disengage from past stereotypes of “needy” female behavior? Could this be

the result of an intersection of cultural expectations, early adolescent development, and attachment style? This leads us to the focus of the proposed study.

Attachment, Peer Rejection, and Gender—Possible Connections

The early adolescent's specific attachment style can be characterized as either : secure, preoccupied, or dismissing (Furman, Simon, Schaffer, & Bouchey, 2002). Each of these categories contains the potential for either positive or negative mental representations of the self and others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Fields, 1998) which could potentially impact the daily interactions of adolescents with their peers. In addition, attachment theory provides a lens through which one can view the interaction of gender with peer rejection. Given that there appears to be some evidence for varied styles of rejection dynamics relative to gender, one might suspect that the possibility would exist of different attachment styles when comparing rejected boys to rejected girls. Further logic exists for this assumption, when one considers that the development of self and relatedness proceed within a complex interaction (Henrich et al., 2001) and that gender is an identity which is always present in one's background (C. Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999).

Indeed the discussion of attachment becomes more complex when applied to early adolescents, since they may be temporarily engaged in a struggle with both internal development and external familial and cultural messages and, as a result, may display gender role dichotomies in the extreme. Perhaps, the stereotypically competitive, goal-oriented traditional male instrumental role and the nurturing, affiliative, emotionally expressive female role (Wolf, 1996) may be quite evident during that time. One might

wonder what impact if any this apparent dichotomy has upon male and female adolescent attachment styles and the resulting peer acceptance or rejection. Would a girl who presents as dismissing rather than relational be more likely to be rejected by her relationship-oriented peers? Would a boy who interacts with a preoccupied attachment style be more likely to be rejected and bullied by his more confident, goal-oriented instrumental peers or would both genders reject a peer who appears constantly preoccupied with relationships, perhaps similar to Henrich et al.'s (2001) 'needy' adolescents. Overall, do peer-rejected early adolescents differ in attachment styles from those who are well-accepted by their peers? There currently exists some practice-oriented theory which describes adolescents with ambivalent insecure attachment patterns as showing patterns of needy, demanding behavior, coupled with narcissism, while avoidant adolescents emerge as bullies or "depressed loners" (Mackey, 2003 , p. 83). Female avoidant adolescents present as co-dependent caretakers of peers, functioning in a socially acceptable manner, while avoiding their own needs for intimacy (Mackey, 2003). A study of early adolescent peer rejection relative to attachment and gender would serve to clarify and further describe the above.

Further Contextual Considerations—The Impact of Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress upon Attachment and Peer Relations

Since an individual's internal working model both impacts and is impacted upon by life experiences (P. Alexander, 1992), the potential effect of child and adolescent traumatic experiences and any resultant stress, must be taken into account as part of the backdrop of this study. Lack of resolution of trauma in adolescence has been correlated

with developmental disturbances, including disrupted moral development and aggressive or delinquent behavior (Saltzman, Layne, Pynoos, Steinberg, & Aisenberg, 2001). It has been mentioned previously that trauma stemming from childhood abuse is related to insecure attachment. A diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) indicates that a child or adolescent has experienced an event involving a “threat to one’s own or another’s life or physical integrity and that this person responded with intense fear, helplessness or horror” (Hamblen, 2007, electronic source). This includes not only direct familial interpersonal trauma such as abuse, and traumatic grief/loss (“Types of Traumatic Stress”, n.d.) but also community violence, including shootings or assaults (Hamblen, 2007; Saltzman et al., 2001), catastrophic events (Goenjian et al., 2005), terrorism and medical trauma (“Types of Traumatic Stress”, n.d.). Traumatic events, including the witnessing of domestic violence (Kilpatrick & Williams, 1997) can interfere with the development of secure attachment (Cook et al., 2005).

Bullying itself can also produce post-traumatic stress (Burril, 2006) especially when “poly-victimization” (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005, p. 1297) has occurred. In addition, the impact of multiple episodes of other kinds of abuse and trauma can produce cumulative effects (*Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters*, 2001). This is especially troubling given that traumatized youths in schools tend to not seek out mental health assistance (Saltzman et al., 2001) in spite of studies that indicate that from 15 to 43% of girls and 14 to 43% of boys have experienced at least one traumatic event during their lifetime (Hamblen, 2007). Further, 3-15% of girls and 1-6% of boys could be diagnosed with PTSD, with at-risk students showing

rates of 3 to 100%, depending upon the traumatic event (Hamblen, 2007). This is potentially quite significant given that early adolescents with untreated PTSD show a substantial increase in depression over time (Goenjian et al., 1997), which may become chronic (Goenjian et al., 2005). This could conceivably impact an adolescent's availability to close relationships.

In addition, the more specific impact of trauma on relationships is also significant. Tense, vigilant, or avoidant behaviors may develop, which can worry or anger peers ("PTSD and Relationships", n.d.). It is also possible that a traumatized individual could present with anxious avoidant behaviors or thought patterns which may emerge as an anxious or avoidant attachment pattern on a questionnaire. Since feelings of anxiety and fear are most prominent in the early weeks and months after a trauma ("PTSD and Relationships", n.d.), for purposes of this study, it was important to ascertain whether and when a participant had been traumatized. This was accomplished through a Parent Questionnaire, which included questions about bullying as well as other traumas, including violence and abuse. This questionnaire also included questions about divorce or separations which are often considered life events rather than necessarily traumas. However, since some research has shown that life events, at least for adults, can produce even higher PTSD scores than specific traumatic events as mentioned above (Saskia et al., 2005) these will also be taken into account for this study of early adolescents (see Appendix A, Parent Questionnaire).

Relevance to Social Work

Social Work Frame of Reference

A brief discussion will be made now of the historical development of school social work. The school social worker will be identified as having an important role with peer-rejected youths. Attachment style and gender will be identified as possible organizing themes for school social work intervention, and current clinical and policy practices, as well as the organizational context will be reviewed as background for this study.

Historical Social Work Perspective—Path to the Present—Link with Present Study

The school social worker's role has gradually evolved over the years to one that holds potential for assisting peer rejected youths at multiple levels of service. The school social worker currently functions as both clinician and change agent, assisting students directly and removing environmental barriers to their education as well (Brieland, 1995; Constable, 2002). Although authors frequently note the historical dichotomy within social work as a result of the well-known Jane Addams group work, community organizational focus vs. Mary Richmond's diagnostic more individually-oriented focus, these women became less polarized over time (Germain & Hartman, 1980). In addition, according to Bartlett (1970), early social work encompassed both social action and assistance to individuals and families who were experiencing stress. Historically school social workers have developed and modified their roles as needed in order to assist children, families and the surrounding community. Traditional casework has been combined with systems and ecological approaches (Costin, 1987) and current school social work focuses upon

the coping abilities of the child and family, the quality of the impinging environment, and the all-important transactions between them (Monkman, 2002).

Howard Goldstein (1973) speaks of another dichotomy within social work-that of the functional (Rankian) vs. diagnostic (Freudian) approaches. The former appears to emphasize a 'here and now' snapshot of persons within their immediate environment and the importance of relationship, while the later focuses upon the influence of the past upon the present function of the individual. However, Goldstein emphasizes a much-needed unitary approach wherein the common ground in values, knowledge base, and approach to practice is emphasized (Dorfman, 1988; H. Goldstein, 1973). It would appear that for a school social worker to utilize an attachment-oriented approach to students, both must occur: a 'real time' focus upon relationship -- with the worker and with others, along with a thorough understanding of a student's attachment history and its possible impact upon present relationships and self-concept.

The approach described above is clinical in nature. Dorfman (1988) characterized clinical social work practice as controversial since critics often view its definition as too limited. In reality, clinical social work encompasses a great deal. Clinical social work can be defined as a "method of practice" (p. 18) involving work with individuals, families, and groups. It is a "helping activity" which assists clients with "problems in social functioning" whether these are caused by "internal or external" factors (Chestang, n.d., p. 2) . These problems may manifest themselves in difficulties with intrapsychic or interpersonal functioning, or difficulties involving a person's transactions with the environment (Chestang, n.d.). Youths rejected by their peers who show insecure

attachments have difficulty with environmental transactions possibly as a result of internal working models that place human relations in a negative light. Societal gender expectations may further complicate interactions.

It should be noted that all humans organize and construct meaning from these internal and external experiences (Rosen, 1998) derived from both past and present events. Although part of an individual's uniqueness includes his or her perspective upon the meaning of a particular problem (Bartlett, 1970), one can become too focused upon a particular way of viewing meaning within a situation (Rosen, 1998). It is possible that the internal working model of an insecure youth organizes and restricts meaning relative to relationships. In a somewhat different light, youths who are treated in an aggressive manner may become locked in an anxious-ambivalent struggle with a powerful peer. Meaning in this situation may involve feelings of powerlessness leading to hopelessness and helplessness (Keefe, 1984).

Given the dual mission of social work relative to interventions which produce growth within the individual as well as those which improve and enhance the environment (E. Goldstein, 1980), it can be seen that the school social worker must utilize an all-encompassing thought process when approaching the problem of peer rejection taking into account both internal and external factors. Although the focus can be upon attachment as intertwined with gender and peer rejection, school and societal contexts must not be overlooked. The image of the as a societal microcosm must remain in the background as the school social worker utilizes social work values and knowledge with this population.

Social Work Knowledge and Values re: Attachment and Peer Rejection

Social work knowledge arises from multiple sources, including other disciplines and direct social work experiences (Bartlett, 1970; Payne, 1997). Some “social work theory” has been criticized as being too medical in nature (Payne, p. 21). A more useful approach is one which is “reflexive”, wherein the worker, the client, and the context, interact and affect each other (p. 21). This perspective appears congruent with the interactional nature of attachment as it occurs between worker and client and ideally among young adolescents within the context of the peer group, and surrounded by societal expectations. Social work interventions must take this all important context into account.

In addition, interventions within any social work setting must be informed by the core set of social work values as delineated by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999). These include the importance of human relationships, the dignity and worth of the person, as well as social justice, among others. Also included within this document is a broad and all-encompassing definition of the word ‘client’ which includes individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. As mentioned previously, the Code of Ethics includes client self-determination, a principle which can be applied to youths who are constricted and ostensibly controlled by peer rejection.

According to Bartlett (1970), social work practice combines values, knowledge, and interventions in the service of clients with a focus that is primarily upon this area of social functioning. The worker then assists the client in developing a balance between

environmental pressures and coping abilities. This operational base is clearly present within the area of school practice and includes a respect for individual differences, as well as the acknowledgement of the right of all children to be included in the educational process (Constable, 2002). Work with special populations who have unique needs falls within the typical purview of social work practice (Morales, 1980). Youths who show difficulty with the formation of positive peer attachments, as noted in the introduction, struggle within their social environment, and are at risk for present and long term mental health difficulties due to reduced opportunities. As such, they are a population in need of social work intervention and assistance with empowerment (see Figure 3 on following page).

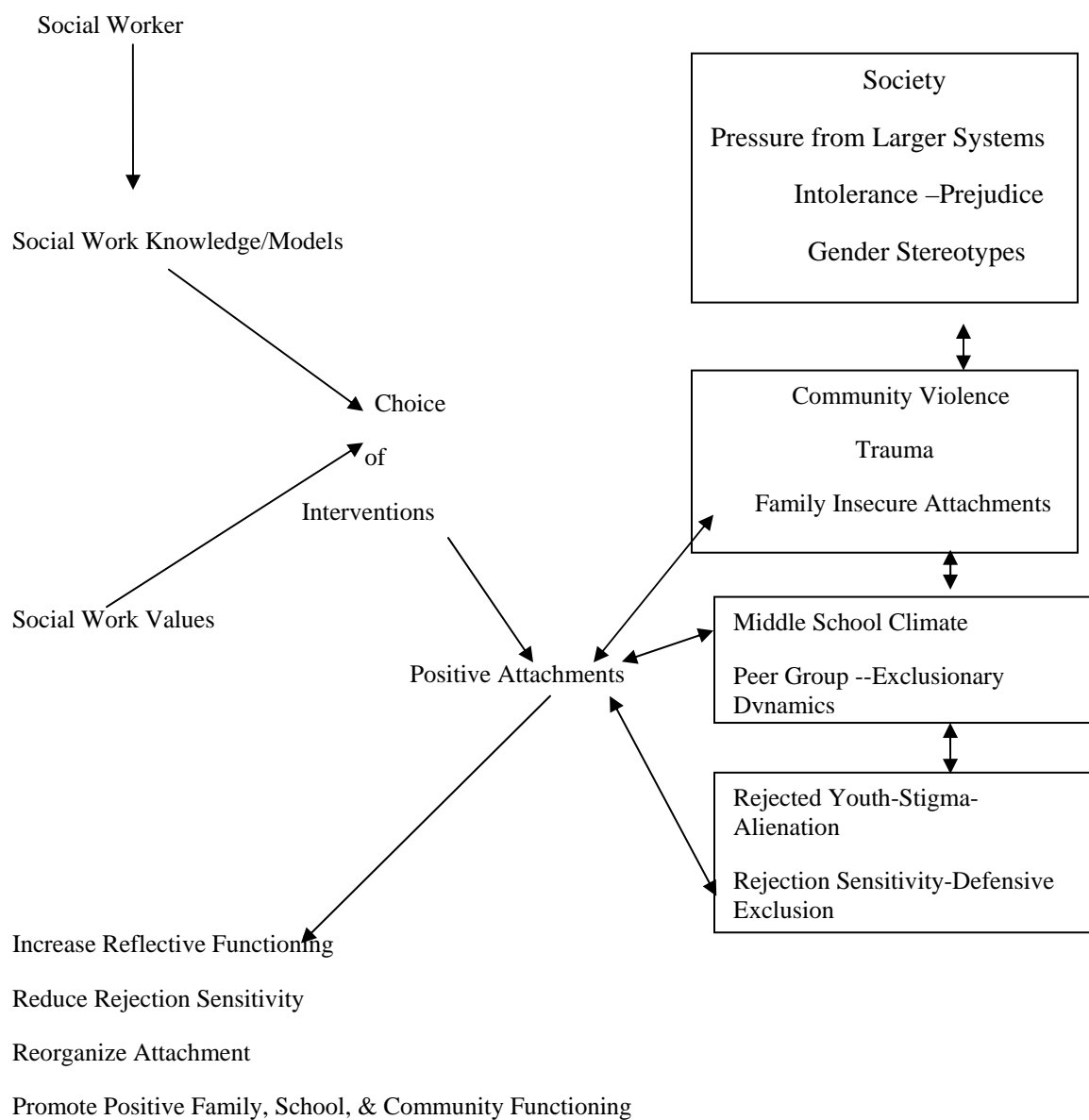
Oppression, Empowerment, and Peer Rejection

Although they did not yet have the specific language of empowerment, early social work practitioners from the 1890's onward focused upon the disadvantaged (Simon, 1994) or oppressed. Oppression can be defined as a situation within which power is utilized in a "tyrannical manner" (Dominelli, 2002, p. 7) and subjects are treated with cruelty and injustice. It is a complex process that is socially constructed within interpersonal interactions (Dominelli, 2002). Populations at-risk for oppression include people of color, the GLTB-Q population, children, the poor, the terminally ill, people with some form of handicapping condition (Butler, 2001) as well as women (Langan & Day, 1992) and the mentally ill (Dalrymple & Burke, 1995).

An important bridge to an understanding of oppression and empowerment is an understanding of the concept of power. Feminists have frequently discussed three types

of power: “*power over, power to, and power of*” (Dominelli, 2002, p. 17). These concepts, which are frequently applied to gender relations, actually have broader applications and will be summarized briefly here. *Power over* refers to situations involving dominance of one party over another, while *power to* indicates an individual or group’s “potential to take action” in order to reach a goal (Dominelli, 2002, p. 17). *Power of* speaks to the inherent power involved in relationships as people come together to make changes (Dominelli, 2002).

As a result of an apparently powerful bullying/rejecting youth who exerts control over the rejected peer, a student who is rejected or bullied may develop a submissive posture (Roland, 2002) within that relationship. Powerlessness, the opposite of *power to*, may develop as a result of both a negative self-image and external blockages to action (Dalrymple & Burke, 1995). This can take the form of learned helplessness which may develop, for example, in learning disabled adolescents (Hallenbeck, 2002) who frequently also show social skills deficits (Most & Greenbank, 2001). Within the environment, as mentioned previously, this group as well as other sectors of the student population experience rejection and/or bullying. These are frequently students who are ‘different’ and in some way stigmatized, often as the result of special education status, or the manifestations of emotional/mental/behavioral illness. These students experience some degree of oppression, which limits their opportunities within the school environment.



(The social work knowledge, values, and interventions portion of this figure was adapted from Bartlett, 1970)

Figure 3. Relevance of Study to Social Work Practice

Dominelli (2002) further indicated that definitions of oppression are frequently too “binary” (p. 7) and simplistic. The author advocated movement away from a dichotomous model of oppression into one that views this process as a continuum. Indeed, the relationship of bully to victim or rejecter to rejected does not necessarily remain discrete and clearly defined, since some victims go on to bully or reject others, (Glover, 2000) thus finding power through a continuation of oppressive behaviors. To add to the complexity of this dynamic, it should be noted, that youths who themselves bully or reject can also become victims of the process in that they may develop mental health issues as well (Roland, 2002).

It can be seen that the school social worker must become adept at analyzing the often complex and subtle power aspects of a peer rejection situation, including those related to gender in order to assist all involved to develop more positive interpersonal interactions. According to Simon (1994), social workers who bear an empowerment perspective must avoid the pitfalls of “fatalistic determinism” (p. 3) within which the individual is viewed as being completely at the mercy of large external forces and “hubristic grandiosity,” (p. 4) its opposite, wherein the focus is exclusively upon the individual personality and degree of ambition. The internal and interpersonal process of attachment must be placed within the social context of the school and larger society. Attachment style must be acknowledged and utilized for the client’s benefit. Empowerment for a rejected or rejecting youth will come initially from the establishment of a secure base which encompasses an attachment figure who provides a feeling of safety (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Bowlby, 1988; Ornstein & Moses, 2002) within the

social work relationship. Encircled in this security, the student will gradually form the ability to develop and maintain positive attachments with peers. Before discussing the specific practice aspects of attachment-oriented school social work with students, the school as context and the school social worker's role within it will be considered.

The School as Context for Relationships

The School Social Worker Within the Organizational Context of the School

School social work is performed within a complex environment, one which carries with it specific communication patterns, structure, rituals, organizational vision, power flow, and overall culture (Pawlak & Cousins, 2002). The culture of any organization reflects its priorities (Dennis, 1996) and it is no different for schools. Each school has its own climate or "heart and soul" within the school (Dupper, 2003, p. 28). Schools may be heavily steeped in either centralized or decentralized rules and bureaucracy (Pawlak & Cousins, 2002) and may possess both risk and protective factors within their climate and culture (Dupper, 2003).

School risk factors which have been frequently identified within the literature include negative disciplinary practices and punitive or inadequate attendance policies, large school size, and a climate of low academic expectations, especially if held by teachers (Dupper, 2003). Practices such as tracking and grade retention, as well as district structures which necessitate several school transitions during a student's school years also increase risk (Dupper, 2003). A school climate that tolerates bullying either among students, or from staff who treat students in a demeaning manner (Garbarino & De Lara, 2002) also creates a risk-laden environment.

The school also contains the potential for protective, supportive dynamics which include engagement with a positive and challenging curriculum that takes a developmental approach and enhances coping strategies and self-esteem (Dupper, 2003). This is especially important given that 40-60% of all students are considered “chronically disengaged” (Blum, 2004, electronic source) from school. Attachment relationships with caring adults (Dupper, 2003; Garbarino & De Lara, 2002) are also key ingredients in a supportive school climate. The school social worker is frequently in a position to perceive attachment needs and has the difficult task of intervening to meet those needs within the demands of the school environment.

Although the school social worker is well-equipped to assist and give voice to children and parents with special needs, this function must be balanced with the demands and goals of the school (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 1986). In addition, the school social worker typically functions as a public service worker with limited resources, and, according to Lipsky (1980), is faced with the dilemma of the demand for services continually outstripping the supply. Therefore some prioritizing of services becomes necessary.

Role of the School Social Worker—Practice Models

When describing the role of the school social worker, five specific practice models are frequently mentioned in the literature. Based upon the work of William E. Gordon and Harriet Bartlett, practice models developed by John Alderson in 1974 include the clinical, school change, community-school, and social-interaction models (R. Constable, Mc Donald, & Flynn, 2002). An additional school practice model was

developed at about the same time by Lela Costin, the school community pupil relations model (R. Constable et al., 2002). The differences between these models center around the focus of intervention. The clinical model focuses upon implementing change within the student or possibly the family, while the other practice models, more systemic in nature, appear to move outward toward the interfaces and “dysfunctions” (Allen-Meares & Morrison, 1992, p. 16) of the school and community. Specifically the school change model focuses upon changing the environment of the school itself, and the community-school model has as its particular focus, the interactions between the community and the school within underprivileged populations (R. Constable et al., 2002). The social interaction approach focuses upon the dysfunctions in systems among students, the family and the community with a strong use of mediation and advocacy (Allen-Meares & Morrison, 1992). Finally, the school-community-pupil-relations model attempts to improve relations and relieve stress between all three of these entities (Allen-Meares & Morrison, 1992).

In reality, the school social worker need not rigidly adhere to one particular model or approach, but instead should utilize multiple models and approaches as needed. In fact, the *Pupil Personnel Services Manual* indicates that the real difficulty for school social workers is not the availability of models, approaches, or interventions but the lack of time to analyze, reflect upon and choose the best approach in a given situation (Allen-Meares & Morrison, 1992). With a complex population such as peer rejected youths, interventions must proceed from the micro-level on outward, from individual, family, and school to the larger community (Mishna, 2003). This is congruent with current school

practice which has begun to emphasize a broader clinical approach as described by Frey and Dupper (2005). Even if the school social worker utilizes the narrowest view of the clinical model, additional choices still need to be made relative to an approach to peer-rejected youths. Current clinical interventions will now be reviewed.

Current Clinical Interventions

Recent clinical interventions for youths who are rejected by their peers appear to center around behavioral and cognitive-behavioral models. However, some literature is beginning to arise which utilizes attachment-oriented approaches and these will be described as well. It is assumed at this point that students with significant peer relationship difficulties may have attachment needs. Specifics of this contention as well as gender aspects will be discussed. The question of whether intervention with peer rejected youths with insecure attachment needs to be gender-specific will be set aside at this time, and will be revisited in the light of data obtained.

Behavioral Paradigm

Within the behavioral paradigm, all behavior is considered to be learned and therefore capable of being clearly defined and changed. Social-emotional problems are viewed as phenomena which can be observed and measured as well as modified through variations in reinforcement (Thomlison & Thomlison, 1996). Behavior is also seen as developing through “copying” the actions of surrounding others (Payne, 1997, p. 114) as social learning takes place.

Social Skills training (SST) a type of behavioral intervention, is often utilized within the school. According to Greca (1993) in the molecular approach, specific skills,

such as how to join a peer group activity are broken down into discrete behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, and others. Through role-play, discussion, and selective reinforcement of behavior, learning takes place (Malik & Furman, 1993). In the molar approach, larger more general social skills areas such as cooperation, sharing, and peer group participation, are reinforced. Both approaches utilize the behavioral techniques of modeling, coaching, behavioral rehearsal with feedback as well as practice within real social situations (Greca, 1993). In terms of effectiveness of SST, the research has been mixed, with some studies showing very positive initial changes for children who participated in training, but difficulty with the maintenance of behavioral changes in natural settings (Greca, 1993; Malik & Furman, 1993).

Adding a cognitive frame to behavioral strategies can prolong treatment effectiveness and thus enhance social acceptance, at least among younger children (Blonk, 1996). Cognitive-behavioral therapy adds the dimension of restructuring cognition as well as performing specific behavioral interventions (Blonk, 1996). Negative attributions of self and other frequently arise within youths who are victimized by bullies (Dess, 2001). The cognitive paradigm is the bridge which will ultimately lead towards attachment-oriented practice strategies.

Cognitive Paradigm

In the cognitive approach to intervention, thoughts are seen to affect emotion, behavior, and problem-solving. One's internal communication can promote "irrational beliefs" (Lantz, 2000, p. 103) about the self or others. Schemas or core beliefs, deep internal organizing principals, can be easily triggered. A core belief involving rejection,

once activated, can stimulate dysfunctional emotional, behavioral, physiological, and additional cognitive responses (Kuehlwein, 1998). Behavioral techniques such as social skills training do not directly address the core belief systems involved. Rejected youths frequently experience social anxiety and negative self-perceptions (Blonk, 1996). Cognitive restructuring can be utilized to alter negative thought, emotion, and behavior patterns (Kuehlwein, 1998) and can be part of either individual or group work within the school.

Although there appear to be similarities between schemas and internal working models, in terms of the cognitions, information and affect carried within each, the internal working model more clearly indicates relational style. Behavioral, cognitive and combined cognitive-behavioral approaches appear useful albeit incomplete.

Relationship Factors and Attachment—Oriented Approaches

Biestek (1994) described the client-worker relationship as the “*soul* of casework” (p. 30) (author’s emphasis). Within this accepting, non-judgmental relationship, the client may develop a feeling of security which allows him or her to express needs and feelings (Biestek, 1994). Attachment-oriented approaches view security as also a prerequisite for outward focus towards relationships and school progress as well. The concept of the secure base can be applied within multiple relationships that go beyond parents and can be utilized within micro, mezzo or macro approaches to rejected youths. It is important to note that currently little information is given about attachment theory within the typical social work curriculum (Jackson, 2004) and that emerging practitioners need to become

well-versed in this useful life-span theory, in order to skillfully navigate the intervention strategies described below.

Within the micro-approach, the school social worker must provide this secure relationship from which the youth may explore attachment representations of self and others, along with the impact of these upon his/her behavior in the present (Bowlby, 1988). Since this can be a painful and emotional process, the social worker needs to contain the youth's rage and anxiety while assisting the individual to manage these difficult feelings (Ornstein & Moses, 2002), in order to increase the youth's capacity for reflective functioning and affect regulation. Within this therapeutic process, the youth can then create a more meaningful and positive narrative (Fonagy et al., 2004).

Any disruptions within the social work relationship itself must be explored and handled sensitively (Ornstein & Moses, 2002). There are numerous opportunities for this task within the school with its specific calendar and breaks as well as disruptions of scheduled social work times due to crises and meetings. Thus a negative aspect of the school environment can be utilized as a means of enhancing a youth's growth and development.

Moving out into the mezzo level, Ornstein and Moses (2002) described small group work, mentorship, and a welcoming school climate as important in helping students to feel and be a part of the school, which then itself becomes a secure base. For a rejected or isolated youth who is overwhelmed by the complexity of a group experience, peer pairing may prove beneficial (Mervis, 1985). Social work treatment with a peer dyad may be a supportive intermediary step for students who show aggressive or

disruptive behaviors within a group (Mervis, 1985) and may enhance social status and acceptance (Micou, 2003).

Given the importance of the clique in early adolescence, the school social worker may wish to target this group for intervention. The attachment quality of relationships within the clique may determine the rejection that occurs both within and outside of the group and this will need to be assessed. For example, difficulties may arise if a group member is attempting to relate to a peer with an attachment level intensity, while that particular peer is interested at a more superficial affiliative level. The social worker could assist youths to further understand and have realistic expectations of peer relationships.

Ornstein and Moses (2002) described several macro interventions for students with attachment needs. These include advocacy for services within the school including Case Study Evaluations when indicated, and the fostering of an inclusive climate open to students with diverse needs. Case management and linkage to community services are important as well. In addition, given that school social workers frequently become involved in conceptualizing, organizing, advocating, and analyzing school policy (Flynn, 2002), policy related to practice with peer rejected youths will be examined.

School Social Work Intervention Policy

In addition to consultation regarding school wide programs, the school social worker enters the “policy space” (Flynn, 2002, p. 331) during the determination of, along with colleagues, special education eligibility and the decision making regarding social work practice strategies in any given situation. The social worker needs to utilize social work knowledge and values to determine an intervention strategy (Bartlett, 1970). A

school social worker will most likely view the array of possible intervention strategies through the lens of a single or some combination of the previously described Costin/Alderson models of school social work. The school social worker then develops “minipolicies” (Flynn, p. 331) relative to service needs and practice decisions. This gives the school social worker substantial “discretionary power” (p. 331) which must be used in an ethical and knowledgeable manner.

Since schools are considered the main socializing institutions for children, an emphasis is placed upon the acquisition of social skills, frequently through specific social skills programs (LeCroy & Wooten, 2002). As previously mentioned, students who are rejected by peers often show social skills deficits, and social skills training is typically recommended. This is often implemented through time-limited social skills groups which allow the social worker to serve several students within the same time frame.

However, for the peer-rejected youth with an insecure attachment, this may prove insufficient. A longer term process through an interpersonal relationship with the social worker, preferably on an individual basis, may be indicated. Although social skills are essential, real improvement in the youth’s social functioning can be brought about through this relationship with the worker as well through interventions within the client’s systems (Cohen, 1980). The policy implication in the above is financially difficult one—schools must be staffed with a sufficient number of social workers to attend to a youth’s attachment needs as well as to skill-deficits. Parent support and education regarding the importance of attachment would be important as well. Thus the school social worker needs sufficient time to work with students, their family systems and other systems as

needed. In fact, the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) is currently recommending that the ratio of school social workers per student population be 1:400 (SSWAA *Resolution-School Social Worker Staffing Needs*, 2005). School social workers need to partner with their state and national organizations to advance this professional standard.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Especially within the ethically structured profession of social work, the onus is upon the research-practitioner at the outset to produce knowledge that is not only helpful to humankind, but also faithful to the promotion of social justice and to the maintenance of the dignity and worth of the person. Indeed, what comes to mind is the phrase which challenges the medical profession: “Primum non nocere”, which means “First, do no harm” (Brewin, 1994). The following study has been designed with the vulnerability of the early adolescent population in mind.

Overview and Research Rationale

How Current Topic Knowledge has Shaped the Research Question

Attachment theory has been shown to reveal important information regarding how early life experiences shape long term perceptions of the self and expectations of others. Prior research on peer rejection has shown that rejected peers not only show social skills deficits, but also differ from non-rejected peers as to their interpretation of the environment related to benign or hostile intent. In addition, gender differences regarding behavioral patterns of rejected individuals, including different ways of expressing anger and aggression emerge in some studies, typically showing stereotypical patterns.

Research Study Focus and Assumptions

This study's primary focus is upon the students' internalized perceptions of their environment: internal working models/attachment styles as related to peer rejection and gender. An assumption has been made that students, given an appropriate research approach, will be capable of providing data which will reveal their state of peer acceptance or rejection as well as overall attachment style. Peer rejection data has been supplemented with information gleaned from the parent questionnaire.

Research Question

What is the relationship between attachment style, peer rejection, and gender in middle school students?

This study seeks to explore the impact of attachment style upon the presence or absence of peer rejection. Further, it intends to discover the influence of gender as it intertwines with both. It is hypothesized that attachment style and gender both have an impact upon the phenomenon of peer rejection.

Research Project Design—Two Phase Explanatory Model

According to Creswell (1994) research study design begins with the choice of a topic and a paradigm. Although a "purist" might choose to commit clearly to either a quantitative or a qualitative approach (Duffy, 1987, p. 131), a combination of both approaches provides "a better understanding of the research problem than either approach alone" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 5). This is a two phase mixed method study utilizing an Explanatory Follow-Up Explanations Design (Creswell & Clark, 2007, pp. 72, 73).

The qualitative data has been utilized to explain and expand upon, as well as confirm/disconfirm the quantitative data.

Phase One: Quantitative Data Collection, Analysis, and Results

Phase Two: Qualitative Data Collection, Analysis, and Results followed by Interpretation of Qualitative and Quantitative Results

This design aims to offer an explanation of the relationship between the dynamics of attachment styles, peer relationships and gender.

During the initial quantitative phase, data was obtained relative to peer rejection status, attachment style and child demographic data. The following is a depiction of Phase I, the quantitative phase as it transitions into the qualitative phase.

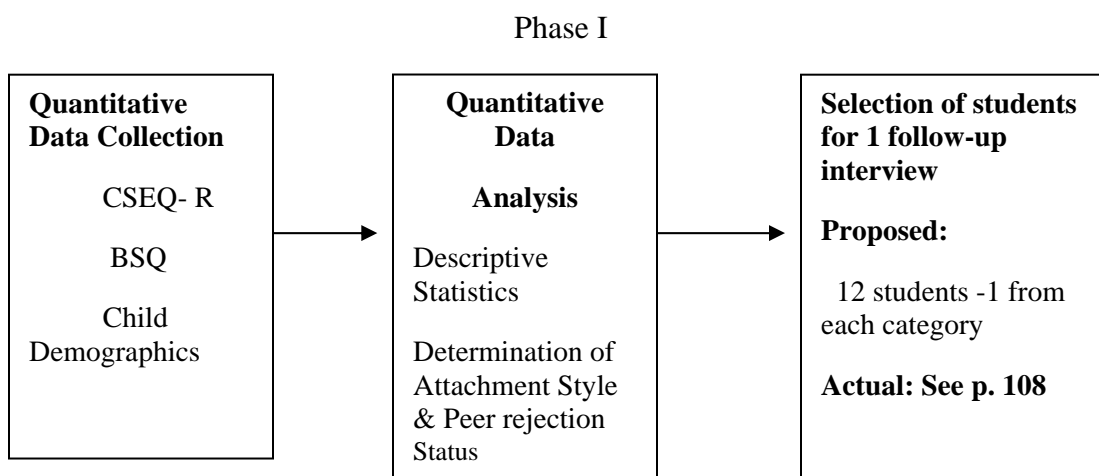


Figure 4. Attachment, Peer Rejection, and Gender Study Design: Phase I

Once students were placed in attachment and peer rejection categories, interview candidates were determined and qualitative data was gathered, analyzed, and compared

with quantitative data as seen below. Child demographic data also became an important part of the study. The following is a depiction of the qualitative phase of the study:

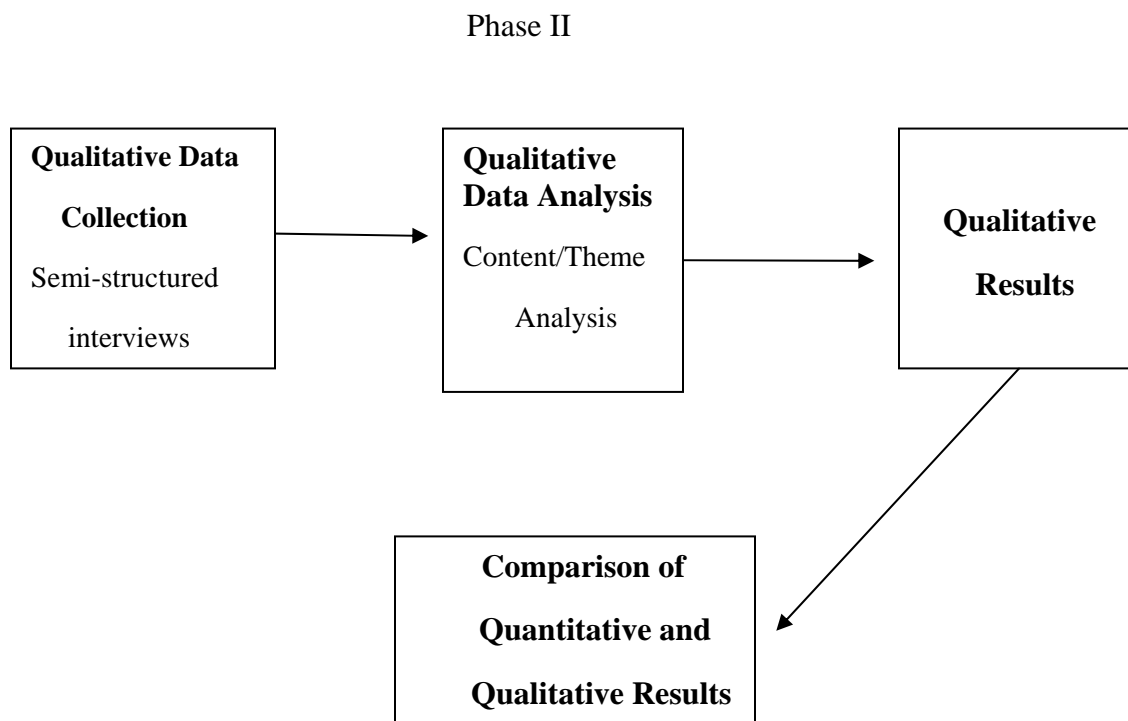


Figure 5. Attachment, Peer Rejection, and Gender Study Design: Phase II

At the end of Phase II the quantitative and qualitative data were compared for enhancement of and confirmation/disconfirmation of quantitative data where possible. This Two Phase Explanatory Follow-Up Explanations Design has the advantage of being straightforward to implement, with clearly defined phases which begin with a base of quantitative information. However, due to the decision-making between phases as well as the time involved for data collection within each phase, this can be a lengthy and involved process (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Phase I

Sample—Quantitative

The sample was drawn from, this writer's place of employment. There are approximately 535 students, 169 sixth, 193 seventh, and 172 eighth grade students. It is a fairly homogenous Caucasian, middle class population, with only small groups of students of Asian, Latino, and Eastern European descent. Neumann (2000) states that sample size is based upon the degree of accuracy required, the degree of variability or diversity in the population, and the number of different variables to be examined within the population. A smaller sample may be utilized when less accuracy is required. Neumann quantified this by recommending a large sampling ratio, approximately 30%, for populations under 1,000.

In order to obtain an adequate sample, a permission form was mailed home to each student/family with the exception of those receiving school social work or clinical services within the community (please see Delimitations section). In total, 45 students were removed from the mailing list, 18 sixth grade students, 10 seventh grade students, and 17 eighth grade students. Although the recommended sample size listed in the table of a standard research guide indicates the following: if $N = 550$, then $n = 226$ (Patten, 2002, p. 114), which is the nearest table listing to the current population, this was not obtained. A total of 47 students, 20 male and 27 female actually participated. Although this researcher was prepared to modify research instruments or to read instruments to students with limited reading skills or cognitive ability, or limited English proficiency, no students in these categories participated.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of this study is the use of a convenience sample of middle school students from this writer's place of employment followed by the relative lack of diversity within the study due to the northwest suburban site. Although generalization to larger populations will not be possible, the 'weakness' of the study is also an advantage. Since this writer is aware of community issues, and thus able to be mindful of these throughout the process, this study did reach further than initially anticipated, albeit in somewhat different directions.

Measures—Quantitative

Phase I consisted of the determination of peer rejection status, and attachment style of student participants and the gathering of demographic, life, and social experience data from parents of the participating students. The following is a discussion of the process that was followed in determining and developing appropriate measures for this study culminating in a description of the actual measures used.

Measurement Issues and Quantitative Instrument Choice Rationale: Peer Rejection

Literature review revealed that peer rejection can be assessed through sociometry self-report, or parent or teacher report. Sociometry can be performed by either peer nomination or peer rating scales (Damon, 2000). Peer nomination consists of having students' list peers they most like or dislike. The numbers of nominations are then tallied to create an index of rejection or acceptance. To accomplish this, students may be given a class list and asked to choose their three most and three least liked peers (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). The peer nomination method was deemed impractical since its focus is upon social mapping of one classroom at a time, which would have been tangential to the

purpose of this study. Further, given that teacher and peer report of the more passive forms of social rejection may disagree (Olson & Brodfeld, 1991), both student self-report and parent report are important. In addition, since parents and students may report different barriers to positive peer relations, both perspectives are needed (Davies, Davis, Cook, & Water, 2008). Also even within the peer report aspect of the study the fact that girls are more likely than boys to report peer threats (Vernberg, Ewell, Beery, Freeman, & Abwender, 1995) will need to be considered and discussed.

The Index of Peer Relations (IPR) (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000) had been under consideration for the purpose of assessing the presence or absence of peer rejection. This scale, which was normed on a clinical population, was created primarily to determine treatment effectiveness (Hudson, 2005, electronic communication). An attempt was made to contact the author of the scale, Walter Hudson, in order to determine whether this measure would be appropriate for this study, since most of the questions do describe rejecting or accepting social behaviors. Unfortunately, this was no longer possible since the author is now deceased. As a result, another measure was investigated and chosen.

Peer Rejection Instrument Utilized—CSEQ-SR—Description and Challenges

The scale which was used as a measure of peer rejection is the Social Experience Questionnaire, also referred to as the Children's Self-Experiences Questionnaire- Self-Report (CSEQ-SR), developed by Nicki Crick of the University of Minnesota, Institute of Child Development, Director of the Crick Social Development Lab. This is a 15-item self-report scale which assesses the presence of overt and relational aggression as well as

pro-social behavior (Crick et al., 1996) (see Appendix A). The CSEQ-SR which is written in child and youth friendly language, balances questions about positive and negative social experiences a student might have within the course of a typical school day. The SEQ has been used with students in third through sixth grade (Crick et al., 1996) and with adolescents from age 13-17 (Storch, 1995b). In addition, Dr. Eric Storch, Director of the Cognitive Behavior Research and Therapy Departments of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the University of Florida has indicated the SEQ as appropriate for the population as well (E. Storch, Retrieved 1/23/2006). The article by Storch et al. (2005) examined the psychometric properties of the CSEQ-SR and illustrated its strengths and weaknesses. Internal consistency and interscale correlations were measured by Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients, which were deemed acceptable by the authors for the Relational Victimization and the Prosocial Behavior subscales, 0.78 and 0.82 respectively. Lower internal consistencies were noted for the Overt Victimization subscale, especially in female students (0.60). This is possibly related to the larger sample of girls in this study, as well as to the relatively small number of items per scale. However, the author did note that alphas within the 0.50 range "are generally considered acceptable" for brief scales with items that are only moderately related (p. 174). Small to modest interscale correlations were seen (-0.12-0.45) indicating separate but related concepts. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis supported the use of the three category scale structure (Storch et al., 2005).

It was noted in the above article that the test-re-test stability over a 12 month period was modest. Given that within the behavioral sciences, "perfect reliability is not

always achievable” (McCall, 1986, p. 357), one might speculate that changing peer relationships as well as evolving adolescent perceptions due to on-going growth and development could conceivably impact test results at any given moment. The constructs utilized in each scale appear congruent with descriptions of overt and indirect peer rejection within the literature, and the brevity, clarity, and face validity of the questionnaire appear to be at least adequate.

Upon initial inquiry, as noted above, the rating scale authors had indicated to this researcher that the CSEQ-SR would be appropriate for study needs. However, once the study commenced some additional scoring information was needed and staff at the Crick Social Development Lab were contacted. It was then ascertained that the CSEQ-SR was designed to only compare the *degree* of victimization within the sample when comparing one child to another rather than to determine an absolute presence or absence of victimization. Since there had been no cut-off scores established to determine whether or not a particular child was being victimized, Peter Ralston, Crick Social Development Lab Coordinator at the Center on Relational Aggression Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota suggested that for this study’s purposes a child could be considered victimized if his or her total victimization score were one standard deviation above the mean (Ralston, 11/14/2008, electronic communication). This was accomplished, also upon Mr. Ralston’s suggestion by summing the relational and victimization scores.

Use of the Parent Demographic Form

The Parent Demographic Form was developed to obtain student educational and developmental background information, including presence of any potentially traumatic life events that might impact attachment. In addition, it briefly assessed parent perception of student social interactions including rejection or victimization (see Appendix B). As will be seen, at times there were definite differences between parent and student perceptions relative to the presence or absence of peer rejection for a particular student, which added further complexity to both the interview decision-making process and to the results themselves. In addition, when gathering the information on the Parent Questionnaire regarding potentially traumatic life situations, it was not possible to determine the meaning and in some instances the exact specific sequence of some life events. In some situations student interviews served to illuminate this area.

Measurement/Instrumentation Issues and Quantitative Methods and Evaluations: Attachment

Prior to the commencement of the study it had already become apparent that the measurement of attachment in a population would be a challenging endeavor. As a result, a number of instruments were explored, considered, and rejected. Literature review of attachment measures has indicated two distinct ‘camps’, those who advocate interviews accompanied by narrative analysis, and those who utilize self-report measures. In addition, it appears that much like the fable of “The Three Bears”, it is difficult to find a measure that is not too young or too old, but “just right” for the early adolescent population. In addition, it is also important for purposes of this study, to measure the

appropriate type and number of attachment dimensions. Two dimensions –secure/insecure is not definitive enough, and therefore insufficient. However, four dimensions may be unwieldy and excessive for data analysis procedures.

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) by Mary Main, a semi-structured interview of adults about childhood attachment experiences (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999) is also often used to measure attachment in older adolescents. However, according to Dr. Peter Fonagy, the AAI would be inappropriate for young adolescents, aged 11 to 14 years. Dr. Fonagy recommended the Child Attachment Interview (CAI) for this population (Fonagy, 6/13/2005, electronic communication). The CAI, which was adapted from the AAI and contains a new coding system, was designed for middle childhood, ages 8-13 years. Child interviews are videotaped and coded on multiple scales which include emotional openness, anger and dismissing of either parent, among other dimensions. Direct questions, rather than projective techniques are utilized and attachment is rated as secure or insecure. Although this scale is described as having good discriminant validity and test-re-test reliability, different coders over differing time periods showed mixed results (Target, Fonagy, & Shmueli-Goetz, 2003). Other drawbacks include the extensive training needed in order to perform the interview, training which is currently only offered at the Anna Freud Institute in London, England. Of greater importance, however, the need to videotape interviews may have inhibited study participation and injected its own bias as well. As a result, the CAI was not utilized.

The Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire (RSQ) (self-report) and the Adolescent Relationship Scales Questionnaire (A-RSQ), which are based upon the

Bartholomew attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) along with the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) had been under consideration for the determination of attachment status. Although a source from Georgia University indicated the above measures as showing “good reliability and construct validity” (Kennedy, Kennedy, & Taylor, retrieved June 23, 2003), unfortunately, “problems with internal consistency have plagued the RSQ” (Scharfe, 2003, 2006, electronic communication). Furthermore, Elaine Scharfe of Trent University in an electronic communication recommended that either subjects be interviewed and coded for attachment or that “multiple measures” from “multiple sources” be used. The Inventory of Parent and Peer attachment (IPPA) or the Family Attachment Interview (FAI) which utilizes Bartholomew’s categories was both recommended to enhance validity. An additional strategy recommended was that of utilizing parent and teacher ratings as well.

However, in order to avoid expanding the study to parents and teachers, beyond the Parent Demographic Questionnaire, thus reducing the desired focus upon student perceptions, both quantitative and qualitative data collection from student subjects was utilized. The Family Attachment interview (FAI), as cited in Scharfe’s (2002) article, is considered to be a reliable measure of a clinical sample of adolescents. However, this measure takes one to two hours to administer and contains rather intense questions more suited to older adolescents in a clinical setting rather than the predominantly non-clinical sample of early adolescent students.

One possible change that may have served to enhance the validity of the RSQ would have been to expand the brief paragraphs to include more attachment description

from Mary Main. For example the dismissing category in Main's (1996) description of the Adult Attachment Interview contains references to the past and indicates a subject's tendency to dismiss the impact of it. This and other areas could have been adapted to the RSQ to possibly enhance its validity. However, this procedure would have been fraught with validity concerns as well.

Although the above measures described have their own strengths, they were not deemed appropriate for this study. The measure chosen needed to be more congruent with a non-clinical young adolescent sample. The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ), which was utilized, appeared to meet this requirement and will be described in detail below.

Attachment Measurement Strategy—The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ)

The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ), which was developed by Dr. Wyndel Furman from the Department of Psychology at the University of Denver in Colorado, has thus far been used with high school students by Dr. Furman and his associates. However, Dr. Furman, in an electronic communication indicated his belief that it would be appropriate for students as well (Furman, 2006; Garbarino, 1999). The BSQ is a self-report measure containing subscales which provide questions related to friend, boyfriend/girlfriend and parent relationships, and physical intimacy. The intimacy subscale was not used for the present study, since some of the questions were not applicable to the majority of students and/or many of the questions would have been quite uncomfortable for youths to consider. The boyfriend/girlfriend scale was also not used, since this study's focus was upon peer friendship relationships rather than romantic. Thus

the friend and parent subscales were the sole ones utilized (see Appendix C). The author in fact, had indicated that it is permissible to use some scales and not others as long as questions are not removed or rewritten (Furman, 1/23/06, electronic communication). The scale was described by the author as capable of obtaining ratings in: Secure, Dismissing, and Preoccupied attachment styles, as well as Caregiving, and Affiliation and an overall Behavioral Styles Score. Internal Consistencies of the three style scores are satisfactory with Cronbach Alpha's > than .85 (Furman et al., 2002). Only the attachment style ratings were calculated for this study's purposes. Although this was deemed somewhat less reliable than using all scales using only the attachment style scales was considered by the author to be "sufficiently reliable" (Furman, 11/16/08, electronic communication).

Based upon Field's conceptual description of attachment described under *Aspects of Attachment*, the Preoccupied category on the BSQ is roughly equivalent to Ainsworth's Anxious-Ambivalent category. Although Bartholomew's Fearful category is not specifically listed, its essence is roughly subsumed into the Preoccupied Category. Mary Main's (1996) Unresolved-Disorganized category is not directly represented in this instrument. This is significant in that this category is specifically linked with loss or abuse. Traumatized students will be listed in the three categories above. Although as previously noted Main's AAI would not have been appropriate for the population, according to Main, upon interview "a striking lapse or (lapses) in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse" (Main, 1996, p. 238) may emerge during any discussion of traumatic events. In fact, during interviews some students did show a change in affect and

communication during discussion of apparently traumatic interactions which will be discussed later.

Additional Measurement Issues

It was expected that students with limited reading ability, including those with severe learning disability or cognitive limitations would have difficulty with some research instruments and modifications would need to be made. In actuality no students with overtly significant reading difficulties volunteered for the study so these students were not represented. Since the measurement tools were only available in English, it was anticipated that those students who did not have sufficient language ability to read the rating scales would need to have the survey read to them by a social work intern. No student research subjects fell into this category.

In addition, since some time had elapsed between initial inquiry into and adoption of research tools and the actual study, author opinions about use and scoring appear to have changed. Perhaps as time elapsed, the original authors further refined and developed the usage of the research instruments. However, the design in this study is predominantly based upon the original author-stated use and purpose of each of the scales, although apparently newly formed author clarifications and opinions have been taken into account. The reader will subsequently be made aware of the consistencies and inconsistencies which emerged when comparing interviews with scale categorization.

Ethical Considerations

A study of this nature has been rife with potential ethical concerns. Prior to its beginning, parent consent and student assent forms (see Appendices F and G) were developed along with procedural safeguards including the information about counseling resources) if needed (see Appendix H). Parents were informed of this writer's obligations and procedures should risk of harm or abuse or neglect issues emerge during the course of the study. Parents were also informed that they would not risk loss of any services for their children if they did not participate and students were informed of the voluntary nature of the study. Methods for maintaining confidentiality were given. In addition, it was explained that due to the nature of the study, anonymity could not be guaranteed. All relevant procedures and documents were submitted to Loyola's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and to Suburban School District and permission was obtained from both.

Young adolescents by their nature are a vulnerable, changing and often emotional population. As will be seen, although as mentioned no apparent issues requiring intervention emerged during questionnaire administration, interviews appeared to touch tender areas for some of the participants. These situations were handled in an empathic manner. Although no parent expressed concern to this writer during the course of the study once underway, it is not known whether any of the families utilized any of the counseling resources sent home in the packet. It is also not known whether students experienced any yet undiscovered issues. However, the reverse could have also been true.

Some students appeared somewhat gratified by their participation and some even seemed uninterested in whether they received the participation gift.

Delimitations

Students who were receiving direct school social work services were not utilized so as to preserve the therapeutic relationship and avoid a dual role. Students who have had psychiatric hospitalizations within that school year as well as those known to be receiving therapy within the community at the time of the study were also excluded in order to reduce the risk of harm. Therefore this is a predominantly non-clinical ostensibly low risk sample. It should also be noted that although the contextual, environmental aspects of the school climate relative to peer rejection are critical factors in its development, they were not the direct focus of this study. They did, however, emerge through themes in student report.

Data Collection—Quantitative

Initial Recruitment

Prior to beginning the study, consent was obtained from Suburban School District the cooperating agency for Middle School. In Fall, 2008, all eligible families at Middle School, received study packets in the mail containing (see Appendices B and D-G):

- a) Parent and student cover letters
- b) Parental consent and student assent forms
- c) Parent Questionnaire
- d) Counseling Resource List

Parents and students were instructed to sign and return to their advisor (homeroom teacher) parent and student consents and assents while retaining informational documents and copies including the Counseling Resource List. Parents were given a contact phone number for this writer that was different than that of the schools' or the school social work office, in order to establish this study as independent from school control. There were parental calls from each parent of a divorced family indicating their wishes that their child not participate. It was re-explained to each, that participating was completely voluntary and this was resolved without further concern. There was one parent who contacted their child's advisor who then contacted this researcher to send in a consent packet after the deadline. Since the two week deadline was arbitrary in nature, and the return rate was moderate, this was granted. In fact, recruitment continued for approximately three more weeks as late packets continued to arrive and were accepted.

Recruitment Activities

The overall small sample occurred in spite of the following activities which were performed to increase response rate:

1. Information about the study was placed on the Middle School website through the Middle School newsletter to further publicize the study.
2. Posters were placed in the hallways asking for student volunteers. After recruitment began, additional posters were placed in eighth grade hallway since this subgroup had the lowest return rate.

3. The study was explained to administrators, teachers, and other staff through in-person and e-mail contacts in order to enlist their cooperation in promptly returning permission forms, and allowing the administration of questionnaires during advisory.

4. A small gift was provided to participating students, which consisted of a \$5.00 McDonald's Gift Certificate which was given to each participant for survey and interview participation, plus entrance into a raffle, conducted by this researcher, for a \$25.00 movie theater entertainment certificate. One student was selected from this pool to receive the prize.

Data Collection Procedures

Arrangements were then made for questionnaire administration with each student's advisory teacher. Advisory, which is the initial class period of the day, is the most flexible time in the student's day and the least intrusive to their schedule or academics. Parents and students were made aware of the on-going study through morning announcements to the student population, hallway posters, and articles in the parent newsletter. Specific student names were not announced to the general population. Although other students may have had some awareness of students who were leaving the busy advisory rooms, they may or may not have been aware of the purpose, since students leave advisory for multiple reasons. This writer's two female social work interns administered the BSQ and the CSEQ-SR to groups of six to ten students in the conference room. A "Do Not Disturb" sign was placed on the door. The interns had been previously trained by this writer as research assistants in:

a) The purpose of the study

b) Strategies for unobtrusive obtaining of students from classrooms if needed

c) Administration of the questionnaires

d) Techniques for managing issues during administration including: appropriate question clarification, assisting an upset or disruptive student, and instructions for ceasing an administration before completion if needed. A blank sheet was stapled over each questionnaire packet to provide some measure of privacy. Although there had been concern that the questionnaire material could possibly evoke student emotional reaction, per research assistant report, this did not appear to be the case, at least not in any apparent sense. There was only an occasional student clarification question that needed to be answered and administration proceeded smoothly.

Data Management Strategies—Quantitative

Quantitative data was scored on SPSS or by hand as indicated and stored in a locked file cabinet in this researcher's home office, in order to keep this raw data from any possible viewing. Data has also been stored on an external hard drive locked, along with hard copy of interviews, in the researcher's home file cabinet.

Data Analysis Strategies—Quantitative

Given the small sample, 47 students overall and 11 student interviews, complex statistical maneuvers for correlation and significance were not feasible. Data analysis was confined to description, tabulation, comparison, and content analysis. Some of this was phase-specific in that the next task was the determination of interview participants using the results of the attachment and peer rejection measures to select students across a range of attachment styles by peer rejection status.

Phase II

Sample—Qualitative

Once peer rejection status and attachment style were determined for each student an interview strategy was developed. The following was the initial interview strategy that had been designed to include cells which included cases in three attachment styles, two rejection statuses, and both genders. Thus, each of the three attachment styles would have four cells for a total of 12 cells of cases. Students to be interviewed would ideally have been drawn from quantitative cases from all 12 cells as seen below:

Initial Proposed Interview Strategy

Attachment Styles	Gender	Rejection Status
Secure	1 male and 1 female	non-rejected
	1 male and 1 female	rejected
Dismissing	1 male and 1 female	non-rejected
	1 male and 1 female	rejected
Preoccupied	1 male and 1 female	non-rejected
	1 male and 1 female	rejected

However, as one might expect, the possibility existed that the anticipated data would not appear in all cells.

Actual Interview Strategy

The actual interview strategy deviated from the above due to instrumentation issues with both rating scales which impacted the course of the study. Two problems occurred which had an impact upon the determination of interview subjects: the emergence of attachment ratings on the BSQ that differed between parent and peers as

well as a lack of subjects for a particular cell either due to study results or to lack of parent consent or student assent. Three subjects were not interviewed, two due to lack of student assent and one due to lack of parent consent. While two of these subjects were replaced (secure rejected and non-rejected female students) in their categories, the female non-rejected student who showed Dismissing parent, Secure friend attachment ratings was not. Based upon the data received, some categories are incomplete or absent. There were no consistent Preoccupied ratings and only two consistent Dismissing ratings. The following indicates the subjects interviewed as identified by corresponding attachment style and rejection status:

Consistent Attachment Styles*

Secure Parent Secure Friend (SPSF)	1 Male Rejected 1 Male Non-rejected	1 Female rejected 1 Female Non-rejected
Dismissing Parent Dismissing Friend (DPDF)	0 Male Rejected 1 Male Non-rejected	0 Female Rejected 0 Female Non-rejected

*Both parent and peer scales identified same attachment style of subject.

Mixed Attachment Styles*

Secure Parent Dismissing Friend (SPDF)	0 Male Rejected 1 Male Non-rejected	1 Female Rejected 1 Female Non-rejected
Dismissing Parent Secure Friend (DPSF)	0 Male Rejected 1 Male Non-rejected	1 Female rejected 0 Female Non-rejected**
Dismissing Parent Preoccupied Friend (DPPF)	0 Male Rejected 0 Male Non-Rejected	1 Female Rejected 0 Female Non-Rejected

*Parent and peer scales identified different attachment style of subject.

**No Parent permission

Data Collection—Qualitative

Prior to the interviews, each student participant and his or her parent, as part of consent and assent were asked whether he or she would be willing to participate in an interview as well as complete the surveys.

Qualitative Procedures—Interview Protocol

One 30-40 minute, semi-structured, performed in as non-threatening, conversational manner as possible, was completed individually to ensure privacy (see Appendix I, Interview Protocol Outline). Most interviews were performed by this writer in the conference room with a “Do Not Disturb Sign” placed on the door. This was done to avoid the possible problem-oriented tone and mixing of roles of the school social work therapy office. Although, in a few cases, this was not possible due to unforeseen use of the conference room by school administrators, the alternative classrooms or offices utilized did not appear to hamper the students’ participation. This was perhaps due to the rather fluid use of time and space that is the norm for this environment. In fact during one interview, this researcher and the student being interviewed needed to move from one room to another mid-interview. What could have been quite problematic ended up being yet another source of attachment-related information about the particular student which will be explored later. Upon completion of the interview, if a student was late for second period class a hall pass was issued to avoid a problematic situation for the student.

In all cases the interview was performed as per the indicated protocol, with the exception of one item. For the initial interviews an additional prompt was given for the opposite gender in order to ascertain a student’s point of view of the opposite gender’s

dynamics in the particular area being asked: Ex: (To a boy) “Tell me about how girls’ groups interact”... (To a girl) “How do boys bully each other?” As interviewing progressed this was dropped, since it appeared to startle or confuse the subjects. Although it was not pursued throughout all interviews, the response to this type of question was interesting in and of itself.

Interview Considerations

The above described procedure was purposive rather than random, in order to choose a representative from as many cells as possible. This interviewer was faced with the delicate task of sensitivity to the young adolescent’s feelings while being mindful of the fact that the interview was not a therapy session. At times, in the student’s best interests, follow-up questions were omitted when it became apparent through verbal or non-verbal communication that the student did not wish to discuss a topic further. In addition, when concerns emerged relative to child safety, untaped follow-up questions after the research interview were performed as indicated. The initial focus of the interview was twofold: upon the students’ perception of their peer relations as related to the presence or absence of peer rejection, as well as a semi-structured interview surrounding the attachment categories utilized in the Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ) described below—secure, preoccupied, and dismissing. Since the interview was flexible and open to the students’ narrative, a rich tapestry of the complexity of student interpersonal relationships emerged which then gave meaning and additional focus to this study.

Data Management—Qualitative

Qualitative data for 11 student interviews was typed in transcript form, including comments and notations regarding non-verbal communication as well.

Data Analysis Strategies—Qualitative

Content analysis was performed and major themes were identified. These were compared with quantitative data for confirmation/disconfirmation of attachment style and rejection status. The reader is referred to the **Comparison of Qualitative and Qualitative Data-Attachment and Peer Rejection** in Chapter Four.

Unanticipated Contextual Events

Originally the interviews were planned to have been conducted shortly after the questionnaires in Fall, 2008. Although the delay was partially due to quantitative instrumentation and scoring challenges, another event delayed the process. In early February of 2009 a male teacher who had been with the school district for nearly 25 years, was arrested and charged with sexually assaulting a male student who had attended Middle School about two years previously. Shortly afterward while at home awaiting trial, he committed suicide by hanging himself. Students, staff and parents alike were reeling from these events. This writer was intensely involved in providing support and services to those who were experiencing the strongest emotions. Interviews did not take place until March/April 2010 as the immediate crisis showed signs of subsiding. This writer was concerned that students might feel too anxious and mistrusting to be interviewed. In fact all students who had planned on giving interviews did so. Although there was no *apparent direct* impact the results will need to be examined in the light of

the possible impact upon the students' feeling of attachment security being disrupted by these events, especially relative to some teachers and possibly some parents who could not serve as secure bases during the time of crisis.

It is important to also remember that impact of the crisis was intertwined with the normal adolescent growth and development which occurred between the administration of the questionnaires and the interviews. It may be useful to consider the images received through both as 'snapshots' of moments in time-nothing more, but nothing less. These contextual and developmental themes along with consideration of the limits of measurement of the dynamics of living, breathing youths and the events they experience, will be considered in depth.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

There is a wealth of information which emerged relative to student attachment and peer relationship styles and dynamics. First the life experience and peer relationship information gleaned from the parent questionnaires will be presented followed by attachment trends and peer relationship dynamics as viewed by the students and as revealed both through quantitative and qualitative means. Ultimately although the original research questions will be addressed, additional significant information related to attachment, peer rejection and gender will emerge.

First a description of study participants will be provided.

Profile of Study Participants

The following is a description of study participants sorted by grade and gender. As can be seen overall there was greater participation by female (n=27) than male (n=20) students. In addition, participation was rather sparse among eighth grade students, with only three taking part in the study.

Table 1

Gender by Grade (n=47)

	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
6th	8	17	7	15	15	32
7th	9	19.1	15	32	24	51
8th	3	6.4	5	10.6	8	17
	(n= 20)	42.5	(n=27)	57.4	47	100

Participation of predominantly sixth and seventh grade students set the mean and median age as 12. Although most students in this sample had attended Suburban District schools all of their school careers thus far, over 25% of participants had attended either another public or a parochial school prior to Suburban District.

Generally, participating students were those who received regular rather than special education services. They were also native English-speaking students, or at the very least not recent immigrants requiring transitional services.

Table 2

Students Receiving Special Services per Parent Questionnaire (n=47)

	Current	Past
Special Education	5	5
Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) (ESL)	0	0
No Special Services	41	39
Missing Responses	1	3
Totals	47	47

Note: TPI students are those who need academic assistance due their primary language being one other than English. They are equivalent to ESL (English as a Second Language) students.

There are many competing activities at the middle school and eighth grade students are typically focused upon high school placement testing, completion of the constitution test and other preparation for graduation. In addition, eighth grade students, who are further into adolescent development, may not have viewed this activity as one with enough social ‘cool’ or academic benefit to make it worthwhile. They may also have been less attracted by the incentives offered. As a result this sample is not solely, but predominantly that of the ubiquitous 12 year old. The qualitative sample also contains representation from all grade levels. The small sample occurred in spite of multiple recruitment activities.

The Parent Questionnaire

Life Experiences of Study Participants

This was a predominantly non-clinical, English-speaking, non-special education sample that contained more boys than girls. This was also a group that had not only experienced the more typical vagaries of life, such as illness and death of grandparents, but also somewhat less typical events or processes such as divorce, change in caretaker, the student's own illness, death of a sibling, death of a family pet, and to a much lesser extent, abuse or neglect. All of these events, which are potentially traumatizing, must be considered in light of their possible impact upon attachment and peer relations.

Table 3 is a detailed look at study participants as seen through the Parent Questionnaire.

The Parent Questionnaire was a useful tool, not only for basic demographics but also for detailed description, from a parent point of view, of their child's life thus far including both familial and social events (see Appendix B). Since these were overlapping categories percentages are not given only event totals based upon parent input. It should also be noted that three families reported that their children had had *no* significant losses or changes; one parent noted her perception that her child had thus far led a "charmed life". In Table 4, life experiences are categorized and summarized for those who had indicated such events, 42 of 47 participants.

Table 3

Combined Demographic and Life Experience Data per Parent Questionnaire (n=47)

Subject	Gender	Age	SPED/ ESL Gifted	Only Suburban District	Loss Through Death	Illness of Other	Illness of Self	Divorced/ Separated	Other
1	M	11	None	No	None	Handicap Both parents deaf	Food Poisoning	Yes	Bullied. Change in caretaker
2*	F	12	None	No	None	Yes	None	Yes	
3	M	11	None	Yes	Grandparents	None	None	No	
4	F	11	SPED	Yes	Grandfather	Grandparents	None	No	
5	M	11	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	
6*	M	11	Gifted	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	
7	M	11	None	Yes	Grandparents	Sister in serious car accident	None		
8	M	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	Stressful immigration of family to US
9	F	11	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Change in caretaker
10	F	11	None	Yes	Pet	Mother's Surgery	None	No	Bullied. 2 changes in caretaker
11*	F	11	None	No	Grandfather Great grand- parents	Open Heart surgery- grandfather	None	No	Bullied. "Lacks self- confidence"
12	M	12	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	
13	M	11	SPED 4 th & 5 th grade	Yes	None	Father's heart attack and brother's surgery - same time period	None	No	Mother gave a detailed account of past bullying of student and his brother
14	F	11	None	Yes	Great grand- mother	Father-cancer	None	No	Bullied
15*	F	11	None	Yes	Brother	Mother	None	No	Bullied. Multiple changes in caretaker

16*	F	12	SPED	No	Grandmother	Grandmother	Resp. and Neuro. Issues	No	Bullied
17	M	12	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	
18	Fr	13	None	No	None	None	None	No	Bullied
19*	M	12	None	Yes	Grandmother	Grandmother	None	No	Change in caretaker. Negative comments from peers which parent believes are not upsetting
20	F	12	None	Yes	Yes	None	Yes	No	
21	F	12	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	
22	M	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	
23	F	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	
24	M	12	None	Yes	None	Yes	Yes	No	
25	F	13	None	No	Yes	Yes	None	No	Bullied
26	F	12	None	No-Art/ Science Academy	None	None	None	No	Bullied
27	F	12	Speech services 2 nd -4 th grade	Yes	None	None	None	No	Adopted
28	F	12	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	Yes	
29	M	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	
30*	M	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	Bullied
31	F	12	None	Yes	Yes-Sister died of SIDS	None	None	No	
32	F	12	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Bullied
33*	F	12	None	No	None	None	None	Yes	Bullied
34	F	Not Giv	Previous SPED	Yes	Grandmother	None	None	No	Change in caretaker
35	M	12	None	Yes	Grandfather	None	None	No	

36	F	12	504 Plan academic accomo- dations but not SPED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Bullied; Received family counseling
37*	M	13	None	Yes	Grandparents	None	None	No	Bullied
38	M	12	None	Yes	Father Grandmother	Grandfather	None	No	
39	F	12	None	Yes	Yes	None	None	No	Bullied
40*	F	13	None	No	Yes	Yes	None	No	Bullied
41	F	13	SPED	Yes	Yes	None	None	No	Bullied
42	M	14	None	Yes	Grandparent & Uncle	None	None	No	
43	F	13	None	Yes	None	None	None	Yes	Bullied
44*	M	13	None	Yes	Grandparent	Grandparent	None	No	
45	M	13	None	Yes	No	None	None	No	
46	F	13	None	Yes	Cousin	Grandparents	None	No	
47	F	13	None	Yes	No	None	None	No	

Note: An * indicates a student who was also interviewed as part of the study.

Table 4

Life Experience Profile of Study Participants—Summary (n=42)

Event Reported	Age at Occurrence				Event Totals
	0-3	4-5	6-10	11-14	
Death of Someone Significant	8	4	15	8	35
Illness of Other	3	5	14	6	28
Illness of Self	2	3	1	0	6
Experienced Abuse or Neglect	0	0	1	0	1
Experienced Violence to Others	0	0	0	0	0
Parental Divorce or Separation	3	1	2	0	6
Change in Caretaker	2	1	1	1	5
Event Totals	18	14	34	15	81

It should also be noted that it is not known how often death and illness events are referring to the same significant other. However, it could be argued that a long, disabling illness or a short catastrophic one could have been a frightening and traumatizing event for a youth separate from the potential trauma that may have occurred from the significant other's death itself.

However, although there are definitely limits in the ability to discern discrete events from overlapping categories, the parent report tally above does show some apparent trends:

1. Only one abuse event and no violent events were reported.

2. These are predominantly dual parent families.
3. More loss of significant others appears to have occurred within the age six to ten category (see Table 4) with 34 total events

In retrospect, consideration was given as to whether questionnaire instructions were specific enough relative to delineating the time lines and the specific significant other involved in illness as compared to the age of the child. However, perhaps this specificity is unrealistic given that the impact of various losses depends upon the meaning and significance of the event within the child's narrative (Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002).

Life experiences described in the parent questionnaires included death and illness of extended family including grandparents, and to a lesser extent a great aunt, cousin, sibling, or a family pet. The category of students who had experienced their own illnesses included food poisoning, Celiac Disease, diabetes, pneumonia, asthma, and neurofibromatosis with "spotting on the brain". All issues had been diagnosed between the ages of 0-5.

The part that appears necessary for this study's purpose is a comparison of each individual student's attachment style with number of life events. At this point, a judgment is not being made relative to the quality of event(s) but only to the presence or absence and to the degree of presence. Traumatic events can level a single "blow" or multiple episodes (Massat, Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2009, p. 641). Child and adolescent traumatic experiences can often involve single, multiple, or on-going episodes of abuse. As has been mentioned this was not the case for this sample. However, deaths and illness

of others and illness of oneself can be traumatic in their own right. A summary is given below of each subject's attachment style compared to whether he or she experienced single, multiple, or no potentially traumatic life events. Although it is not possible to determine the meaning of events in the overall total sample given below, some clarity will emerge as interviews are presented later.

Key to Abbreviations Below:

- Secure – (Consistent) Secure Parent Secure Friend (SPSF)
- Insecure -- Mixed
 - Secure Parent Dismissing Friend (SPDF)
 - Dismissing Parent Secure Friend (DPSF)
 - Dismissing Parent Preoccupied Friend (DPPF)
- Insecure -- (Consistent) Dismissing Parent Dismissing Friend (DPDF)

Table 5

Attachment Style and Life Events (n=47)

Attachment Style		Frequency per Life Event Category		
	None	Single	Multiple	Total
SPSF	5	4	17	26
SPDF	1	1	6	8
DPSF	1	1	5	7
DPDF	1	1	1	3
DPPF	0	0	1	1
Missing	0	0	2	45
Total	8	7	32	47

To summarize, 30 out of 47 students had experienced multiple life events. Of these, 17 out of 26 were secure (SPSF), 12 out of 15 were mixed (SPDF, DPSF, DPPF) and one was dismissing (DPDF). Four secure students had experienced a single event, and five had experienced no significant life events. Three other students--two mixed and one dismissing--had also not experienced any significant events, per parent report. Two multiple ratings were unable to be scored due to incomplete information. Thus, in the multiple category, the consistently secure ratings (14) and the mixed or dismissing ratings were nearly equal (12). It would appear that secure ratings existed in spite of multiple potentially traumatic life events. Perhaps these families provided a secure base that allowed students to manage death, illness, and divorce and maintain feelings of security. However, what of the nearly even amount of insecure ratings within the multiple event category? It is not known whether life events had impacted and changed the security of these students, or whether the students' insecure status had existed since infancy. Although the interviews will shed light in these areas, the methodology of this study does not lend itself to complete resolution of these questions. However, since the majority of the student study subjects regardless of attachment style had experienced some potentially traumatic event prior to the point of study participation, this was not a differentiating factor.

Peer Relationships—Parent Perceptions

The Parent Questionnaire also contained questions regarding peer relationships. The following is a summary of parent responses in this area. Since these are not mutually exclusive categories only frequencies for categories have been tallied and percents are not given.

Table 6

Bullying Experiences and Gender (n=47)

	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Bullying Experience:			
Has experienced bullying	4	16	20
Does not experience bullying	16	8	24
No Response		3	3
Total			n=47

According to parent report, the majority of female participants have experienced bullying while the majority of males in the study have not. The three missing responses for this question were from parents of female students. There is no way of knowing whether this meant that the students had not experienced bullying, or whether they had experienced it and parents were uncomfortable noting this. The questionnaire also contained questions asking whether the child could be described as “bullied” or “sometimes bullies peers”. Only parents of one male and one female indicated an

affirmative response to “bullied” and no one responded affirmatively to “sometimes bullies peers.” However, as mentioned previously it should be noted that after data collection one female student was referred for social work services due to apparent bullying behaviors noted by the teachers. It appears feasible that parents might not be aware of bullying behaviors in their own children and would be unlikely to report them.

There is also a possible questionnaire weakness that should be noted. Since parents who indicated that their child “has experienced bullying” greatly outnumbered the “bullied” response, there may have been some misunderstanding and inconsistency. A definition for the “has experienced bullying” which indicated a time frame would have been useful, since some parents may have been speaking of the current school year and others may have been speaking of the past. In addition, some parents gave clarifying comments while others did not. It is rather typical at Middle School for school forms, especially those involving developmental information, to be completed by mothers. However, since the questionnaire did not have a response area to indicate which parent had completed the questionnaire; this information is also not known. Therefore the possible specific parental impact upon responses cannot be ascertained.

Another gender-related trend was noted in the types of bullying reported. Rumors and shunning were the exclusive domain of the bullied female students, and ‘put-downs’ were overwhelmingly utilized by them as well. Physical violence and threats were not common for either group, although as cited earlier in this document, some authors have noted an increase in physical aggression in adolescent females. Overall, girls experienced

more bullying events, which were predominantly verbal/relational in nature, which is consistent with the literature.

Table 7

Types of Bullying per Parental Report (n=47)

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Physical Violence	3	2	5
Threats	2	2	4
Put Downs	4	15	19
Rumors	0	5	5
Shunning	0	8	8
Total	9	32	41

Part of the questionnaire also asked parents to circle words or phrases which most described their sons or daughters relative to social interactions. Again, these categories were not mutually exclusive and parents could and did choose several descriptive categories. The following table summarizes that information.

The majority of students in the sample were described by their parents as well-liked and as having friendships. Somewhat surprisingly, even those students who were described as having experienced bullying were often also described as being well-liked and as having friends. This particular sample of students appeared fortunate in that they were apparently able to count on the support of friendship while dealing with the rigors

of bullying. Thus apparently these students were not rejected by most peers, but were bullied by some. No student in this sample was described as being isolated although some were indicated as shy. In fact, later it will emerge that some of these students, upon interview gave detailed descriptions of the qualities of isolated/rejected students at Middle School as well as some indication of the possibility of their having participated in the rejection of these students.

Table 8

Parent Social Descriptions of Youths (n=47)

	Gender		Total
Descriptor	Male	Female	
Has frequent conflicts	0	3	3
Has trouble making friends	0	4	4
Gets along well	17	27	44
Has friends	18	21	39
Isolated	0	0	0
Rejected	1	0	1
Popular	7	7	14
Well-liked	19	22	41
Shy	5	6	11

At this point there will be a pause in the description of peer issues in order to display attachment information. This will be followed by students' descriptions of social

dynamics. Finally attachment, peer rejection, and gender information will be combined.

In order to give a clear picture, both quantitative and qualitative information will be intertwined under each category.

Attachment—Quantitative

Measurement of Attachment Style—The Behavioral Systems Questionnaire (BSQ)—Changes and Challenges

As described previously, the BSQ was utilized in order to assess attachment style. However, instead of clear summarized categories which would include both parent and peer ratings, it was discovered during the scoring process that only separate ratings could be obtained. In fact, during this communication with the author, it was discovered that his current contention regarding the BSQ was that it, in fact did not place attachment into categories, but treated attachment as a continuum, rather than as a discrete variable. This significant factor will be discussed further after results have been given. For purposes of this chapter and indeed this document, attachment has been placed into categories, although categories have been modified as indicated to conform to BSQ scoring restrictions. Further discussion will occur later regarding the nature of attachment and its implications for this study.

During the initial phase of the scoring, consideration was given as to whether attachment style could or should be assigned based upon only one relationship-peer or parent. This writer returned to the literature to resolve this important question. What was discovered was that as children mature and increasingly seek out peers, peer behaviors become incorporated into working models, and parent and peer working models

interrelate leading becoming more generalized (Ma & Huebner, 2008). However, the original attachment bonds formed during infancy also impact and influence an individual throughout life and generalize to relationships with others. The quality of the parent relationship strongly influences life satisfaction in early adolescents, especially as related to parental trust. However this is still intertwined with peer relationships (Ma & Huebner, 2008). In addition, although, parent attachment is stronger in girls, girls may be more likely than boys to draw support from peers, due to active pursuit of relatedness (Ma & Huebner, 2008). In addition, as previously noted adolescents show a predominance of dismissing strategies overall, possibly indicating a need for early adolescents to distance themselves from parents somewhat during this time of identity formation (Ammaniti, 2000). Thus, it would appear that both parent and peer attachment relationships interrelate and must be taken into account. In addition, according to Furman, they often differ on the BSQ (Furman, 11/16/08, electronic communication). Table 9 is a compilation of parent and peer attachment styles by gender.

Table 9

Attachment Styles by Gender as Measured by BSQ—Frequencies (n=47)

	SPSF	SPDF	DPSF	DPDF	DPPF	Missing*	Totals
Male	11	5	2	2	0	1	21
Female	15	3	5	1	1	1	26
Subtotals	26	8	7	3	1	2	47

*Two cases were unable to be classified due to missing information.

Attachment Style Key: SPSF=Secure Parent Secure Friend; SPDF=Secure Parent Dismissing Friend; DPSF=Dismissing Parent Secure Friend; DPDF=Dismissing Parent Dismissing Friend; DPPF=Dismissing Parent Preoccupied Friend

Over half (26 out of 47) of the students showed secure attachment patterns with both parents and peers. Dismissing attachment with both parents and peers was a much less common finding. The least frequent attachment style was that of dismissing parent and preoccupied peers. Given that this was a generally non-clinical sample one might expect these students to show predominantly secure attachment, which was the case, although this was not universally true. There were some slight gender differences. Although there was only one female student who emerged as preoccupied with peers, there were no preoccupied males. It should be noted, that within this writer's experience, female students who frequently show anxiety and distress due to preoccupation with peer relationships, tend to develop peer difficulties and are referred to the school social worker. It is possible that anxiety for male students that is less obvious comes less often to the school social worker's attention. Later the topic of anxiety will be approached related to student interviews when compared to quantitative classifications. As previously noted, students receiving school social work services were excluded from this study.

The BSQ results will be further discussed later when compared with peer rejection status (CSEQ student report and parent report per Parent Questionnaire) and gender. At this point description will be given of student interview responses in order to paint a picture of their attachment styles and relationships. Trends and themes unable to be captured by the BSQ or CSEQ will be revealed.

Attachment—Qualitative: Students and their Attachment

Relationships as Revealed Upon Interview

Eleven of the 47 students were interviewed as described previously (see Appendix I). Student names have been removed or changed. Questions regarding attachment took place during the second half of the interview. The original rationale for this was that these questions, involving important relationships might be the most sensitive and should be broached after the ostensibly less sensitive questions on peer and school dynamics. In actual practice it was discovered that sensitivity to particular questions varied by student and occurred or did not occur in either, both or no phases of the interview.

Attachment oriented questions encompassed descriptions of family dynamics, brief descriptions of friends and core secure base attachment-related issues including dependence on others, caring relationships, and feelings of acceptance. This section of the interview also included a question about feelings of non-acceptance which could promote anxiety. The interview also attempted to access the students' exploratory behavior in terms of moving outward and assisting or becoming an attachment figure for others.

This section of the interview began in a basic manner with an inquiry as to "*Who lives in your house?*" In addition to parents, family and possibly extended family, five out of 11 students mentioned family pet(s) as part of the family composition, possibly emphasizing the importance of this relationship. Descriptions of family interactions were

placed into the three categories described below and are based upon student interview responses.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most students described variable interactions with family members. This seems congruent with the typical upheaval of adolescence and its possible impact upon family interactions. No male student described predominantly negative interactions. The one female student with a negative rating indicated few interactions with family members who worked long hours and poor interactions with siblings.

Table 10

How do People in Your Family get Along? (n=11)

Typical Interactions*	Male	Female
Positive/smooth	1	2
Variable	4	3
Negative/Conflictual	0	1

***Key**

Positive - Ex: “quite well” “pretty well”

Variable - Response includes a mixture of positive and conflictual examples or comments

Negative - No positive interactions described or little to no family interaction

Students were asked to give three words to describe their families and friends.

This served as a brief, succinct way of characterizing people in their lives. Frequencies in parentheses are displayed below by gender.

Table 11

Three Words to Describe Your Family (n=11)

Male	Both Male and Female	Female
Energetic (1)	Fun (1 M, 2 F)	Kind (2)
Loud (1)	Close (1 M, 1 F)	Respectful (1)
Friendly (3)	Caring (2 M, 1 F)	Responsible (1)
Athletic (1)	Smart (1 M, 1 F)	Generous (1)
Happy (1)		Polite (1)
Patient (1)		Annoying (1)
		Loving (2)
		Loveable (1)
		Normal (1)
		Busy (1)
		Campers (1)

Two boys gave phrases as well as descriptive words describing arguments with a sister, a brother in a gifted program, and a family tendency to not use much heat or air conditioning. Most noticeable is that the only negative descriptor was that of “annoying.” Four positive attributes were shared by both genders, and girls used a greater number of the single word descriptors than boys. All interviewed students readily gave positive descriptors; this included those classified with dismissing attachment tendencies. Although many of the male descriptors were of the active, instrumental genre (athletic, energetic etc.), “patient” was not and some male students also shared in connecting attributes such as “close” and “caring”. The female students appeared to use more accommodating and conforming terms “polite”, “kind”, and “normal”.

A similar inquiry was made relative to qualities of the interview participants’ friends. These frequencies are displayed below.

Table 12

Three Words to Describe Your Friends (n=11)

Male	Both Male and Female	Female
Daring (1)	Nice (1 M, 2 F)	Helpful (1)
Close (1)	Caring (1 M 1 F)	Courageous (1)
Feel protected (1)	Outgoing (1 M, 1 F)	Unique (1)
Comforting (not alone) (1)	Sharing (1M 1 F)	Trustworthy (1)
Friendly (2)	Good Friends (1 M 1 F)	Fun (1)
Bit of Temper (1)		Smart (1)
Understanding (1)		Responsible (1)
Athletic (2)		There for each other (1)
		Enjoy each other's company (1)
		Like to laugh (1)

Both boys and girls appear to value friends who care and share and each gender had a way of indicating that they appreciate friends who can protect, assist and “be there” for them. Boys also favored assertive sometimes aggressive friends who were “daring”, “athletic” and who showed their “temper”. While girls also valued friends who were “courageous”, they also preferred those who were “fun, “responsible” and “unique”.

This admittedly small interview sample contained secure, dismissing, and mixed attachment styles. The only slightly negative quality expressed was “a bit of temper” by a boy with a Dismissing Parent, Dismissing Peer BSQ rating. The positive descriptors were equally shared by students with all of the styles listed above.

The following questions were utilized in order to get some sense of attachment figures that provide a secure base when present with the youth or safe haven when the student is faced with a threat. Students were allowed to give multiple responses.

Table 13

Who do You Depend on? (n=11)

Male (n=5)	Parents	3
	Friends	3
	Sibling	2
	Father	1
	Teachers	1
Female (n=6)	Mother	4
	Friends	2
	Family	2
	Father	1

One boy branched out of the family and peer groups to utilize a teacher for support. Unlike two thirds of the interviewed girls, none of the boys mentioned a dependence upon mother specifically. One might wonder if this dynamic was there but was unacknowledged due to its possibly being considered socially unacceptable or incongruent with a masculine self-image. In another vein, this attachment may have merely been subsumed by noting dependence upon parents. None of the students indicated dependence upon any adults outside of the family. Both boys and girls mentioned that they depend on others for “advice”.

Table 14

Who Helps You? (n=11)

Relationship		Frequency
Male (n=5)		
	Friends	4
	Parents	2
	Brother	1
	Older Sister	1
	Father	1
	Mother	1
	Family	1
Female (n=6)		
	Mother	4
	Friends	3

In this question, the specificity and possible intensity of attachment figures for girls emerged more clearly. Unlike the boys, they did not appear to receive assistance from siblings, father or other family. It would appear that for these students a disruption in the maternal relationship would be especially challenging. One student's comment offered a great deal of insight:

We are both girls. She is always there for me. She knows and understands me so well. It is almost like we are twins except older. Even if she can't help me with a problem, it always feels better to talk with her.

Girls also noted that they appreciated talking to friends as well. Boys noted relying on friends and family. One noted "my dad, for sure".

Students were also asked about their perceptions of caring relationships in their lives:

Table 15

Who Cares About You? (n=11)

Relationship	Frequency
Male (n=5)	
Family	4
Friends	4
Mother	1
Female (n=6)	
Family	6
Friends	5
Mother	1
Sister	1
Some Neighbors	1
My cat	1

Emma, who seemed very tentative about her relationships stated:

My friends, I hope. Certain friends I feel a lot closer to-they care about me. I'm pretty sure my family cares about me. At times they don't understand, so I go to close friends.

This student was rated as Secure Parent, Dismissing Friends, which does not appear to fit the above quote. Upon interview, this student came across as anxious and insecure regarding her relationships.

Since relationships by their very nature are dynamic entities, it was not enough to ask students who they believed cared about them. They were also asked whom they cared about as well.

Table 16

Who Do You Care About? (n=11)

	Relationship	Frequency
Male (n=5)	Family	4
	Friends	4
	Anyone hurt or bullied	1
	Mother	1
	Other people in school	1
Female (n=6)	Family	6
	Friends	4
	Pet	2
	Neighbor	1
	Everyone who cares about me	1
	A lot of people	1

The boy who responded “mom” did not indicate any others that he cared about. However, his BSQ indicated a rating of Dismissing Parent, Secure Friends, yet another possible inconsistency. Overall, students described caring relationships with friends and family members. In addition, some indicated feelings of caring which expanded outward towards an ill extended family member, neighbors, and students in need. They also indicated reciprocation of any caring they had received. This caring apparently evidenced itself in acts of kindness toward others which is shown in the following:

Table 17

Who Depends on You? (n=11)

Relationship		Frequency
Males		
(n=8)		
	Friends	3
	Younger Sister	2
	Younger Cousins	2
	Brother	1
Females		
(n=6)		
	Friends	2
	Younger sister	2
	Mother	1
	Children I teach at church	1
	Cat	1

Students appeared to take seriously their responsibility to reach out to children in the community as well as to younger siblings as well as to peers. Both boys and girls indicated their perception that younger siblings or cousins “looked up to them” for advice or guidance. A boy described “sticking up” for his younger cousin while a girl noted her friends expect her to “be there for them”, “lend them lunch money”, and not “talk behind their backs”.

One girl noted a somewhat different view on the need for dependence than what one might expect to hear:

Sometimes my mom depends on me...to keep up my grades and stuff...to be nice to my sister and be responsible and baby sit.

It appears that simple parental expectations were raised to a level of dependence in this student's mind.

Table 18

Who Do You Help? (n=11)

Relationship	Frequency
Males (n=5)	
Friends	4
Younger Sister	2
Parents	1
Mother	1
Brother	1
Cousins	1
Females (n=6)	
Friends	4
Family	2
Younger brother	1
Father	1
Sister	1

Students perceived themselves as helpful to both nuclear and extended family. Examples included helping siblings with homework, assisting a father with a work-related task, and helping a friend make an important decision. Students of all attachment styles described behaving in an exploratory manner reaching out to and assisting others.

At this point we are moving gradually from attachment style to feelings about peer relationships. Regardless of the 'good deeds' and caring described by the students above, all but one student described times of feeling unaccepted as well as accepted. The

categories below were developed as themes which emerged from student responses to the question about acceptance.

Table 19

Moments of Feeling Accepted (n=11)

Moments of Feeling Accepted	
Male	
	<u>Affiliation/Acceptance/Support</u>
1.	“Accepted by older boys at baseball camp”
2.	“Feel accepted now by 6 th and 7 th graders...used to go to a parochial school and changed schools”
3.	“When they let me join in games”
4.	“When I need help, someone might help me”
	<u>Achievement/Appreciation/Approval</u>
1.	“Once I helped everyone in computer class and all appreciated it.”
2.	“When you do something good-put on a nice show and Mr.....(band teacher) gives you a thumb’s up.”
Female	
	<u>Affiliation/Acceptance/Support</u>
1.	“When I asked a certain group of girls if I could hang out with them they said like ‘sure’ and we had a sleepover that night...and I became best friends with one member.”
2.	“Now. My friends are here. I’ve known them since 3 rd , 4 th , or 5 th grade. They accept me for who I am. I don’t have to change my hair or anything.”
3.	“This entire school year I made friends and everything just feels right...it’s a sensation that feels so wonderful; the pressures of the day seem to melt away.”
4.	“Going with a huge group of friends to the mall...when invited, I feel accepted.”
	<u>Achievement/Appreciation/Approval</u>
1.	“When I got the Mac Master Award. Dad was very proud of me; he framed it.”
2.	“When they (classmates) heard me sing really really good”

Male and female students both derived feelings of acceptance from affiliation and achievement. Girls especially verbalized in a detailed emotional manner about the

benefits of feeling accepted. Boys may have felt as deeply, but may just not have given as much detail. The following question was actually placed before the above in order that the interview not to end on a sour or disturbing note. However, the next question is an appropriate segue to a further examination of the world of early adolescent peer relationships.

Table 20

Moments of Feeling Unaccepted (n=11)

Moments of Feeling Unaccepted	
Male	<p><u>Humiliation/Bullying</u> (Change in Social Status)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) "Laughed at during football when I missed a catch" 2.) "Random kids would bully me along with the bullies (3rd grade) <p><u>Uncertain or Refused to Respond</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) "Maybe when I was younger-not now" 2.) "Don't ask that" 3.) "I don't know"
Female	<p><u>Being and Feeling Left Out or Unacknowledged</u> (Weakened Attachments)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) "In our group? People were talking behind my back" 2.) "Last school year friends started to drift away; I felt like they didn't want to be around me so I didn't want to be around them. I felt kind of alone except for when I went home" 3.) "Friends uninvited me to go with a group to a movie" 4.) "I try to talk to my family and they seem to not listen" <p><u>Being Different</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) "They called my family druggies" 2.) "They found out about my (medical problem)," touched me and said 'eeuw' as if I had germs" until "the teachers told them to stop" (occurred in elementary school, but recalled now) <p><u>No Problem with Unacceptance</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) "I don't really have times like that"

Upon interview some of the boys described clear direct experiences of bullying or humiliation. Some of them mentioned or alluded to prior bullying, but refused to discuss further. Tension appeared high during those moments of the interview and it seemed that these young men may have been traumatized to some degree by these occurrences. Girls described episodes of shunning, rumors, and harassment about differences, as well as feelings of being misunderstood by family and some appeared matter-of-fact while others appeared somewhat sad while giving descriptions. One student indicated that she had never had a moment of feeling unaccepted. This particular student had been helpful to this writer, in terms of helping set up the room and tape recorder during the interview and appeared focused upon making positive responses.

Some students appeared to have developed a significant degree of perspective, and a capacity for observation and at times mentalization which will be discussed later. It is now time to focus more intensely upon the dynamics of peer relationships and the strategies that students used to cope with difficulties. In addition, apparent differences between parent perceptions and student perception of peer relationships will be explored.

Peer Dynamics—Quantitative

Measurement of Peer Rejection—The CSEQ-SR—Compared to Parent Perceptions

Once the CSEQ-SR author's instructions were followed in order to determine the possible presence or absence of peer rejection, these ratings were compared with the previously given parent report regarding the presence or absence of peer rejection. The following includes attachment style and gender.

Table 21

Comparison of Student and Parent Report of Rejection per Attachment Style and Gender
(n=47)

Frequencies: Rejected Youths						
	Student Report			Parent Report		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
SPSF (n=26)	0	1	1	2	9	11
SPDF (n=8)	1	0	1	1	4	5
DPDF (n=2)	0	0	1	1	0	1
DPPF (n=1)	0	1	1	0	1	1
DPSF (n=7)	0	3	3	0	2	2
Missing Parent Report:						3
Missing CSEQ-SR:		1				
Missing BSQ:	1	1				
Missing Both:		1				
Totals by						
Gender:	1	6		4	19	
Total:		7			23	

Key: S=Secure, D= Dismissing P=Parent, F=Friend

If one were to consider rejection only as the 'qualifying' score on the CSEQ-SR, then there were few rejected students which emerged within this sample. However, from a parent point of view there were many, nearly half the sample. Overall the rejection rate was higher among female students. Although there was only one rejected student per CSEQ-SR in the secure category, there were ten cases per parent report. Perhaps part of

this discrepancy resides in the measurement and definitions being used. While parents were asked in a few direct questions whether they consider their child to be rejected, bullied, popular etc. the students completed a more lengthy questionnaire which asked specific questions about peer behaviors.

The results were similar, although with smaller numbers and smaller discrepancies in the SPDF and the DPDF attachment styles. Both parent and child indicated rejection for the one DPPF case. Although the preoccupied friend status is one which within the previous literature review has been shown to be connected with peer difficulties, one might surmise that the bond with parent might become strengthened with peer relations in disarray. However, it does appear that for this youth parent communication was sufficiently present to allow the parent to perceive his or her child's rejection difficulties. In addition, also considered previously in the literature review, there is some evidence that adolescents show a slight tendency towards showing a dismissing parent attachment style.

The DPSF category was the only one to show more student report rejection than parent report although admittedly by only one case. This appears to make somewhat more intuitive sense than the above, since perhaps the students were able to recognize and identify rejection through the questionnaire but chose not to relay it to their parents. Although the secure friend attachment piece is at first confusing in light of rejection, it can be recalled that the parent questionnaire indicated that frequently even young adolescents who were being bullied did experience positive peer relations as well. It is also interesting to note that there were no student reports of rejection in the DPDF

category, although this finding is certainly weakened by only being representative of two cases.

Table 22

Comparison of Student and Parent Report of Non-Rejection per Attachment Style and Gender (n=47)

	Frequencies: Non Rejected Youths Student Report			Parent Report		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
SPSF (n=26)	10	12	22	9	4	13
SPDF (n=8)	3	4	7	3	0	3
DPDF (n=2)	2	0	2	1	0	1
DPPF (n=1)	0	1	1	0	0	0
DPSF (n=7)	2	1	3	2	2	3
Missing CSEQ-SR:	2					
Missing BSQ:	1	1				
Missing Both:		1				
Missing Parent Report:					3	
Totals by Gender:	18	22		15	9	
Total:	40			24		

Key: S=Secure, D= Dismissing, P=Parent, F=Friend

This inverted presentation of the findings displays results for non-rejected students who are clearly the majority of the sample. In order to simplify and focus upon the students' perception of rejection as expressed by the CSEQ-SR and then compare this with attachment style and gender. In the following table, the mixed attachment styles (SPDF, DPSF, and DPPF) have been collapsed into one category. The parent perception

has been omitted for this presentation. As indicated some BSQ and CSEQ-SR data is missing.

Table 23

Attachment Style, Peer Rejection, and Gender Summary (n=47)

Attachment Style	Gender and Rejection Status					
	Rejected			Non- Rejected		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Secure	0	1	1	10	12	22
Mixed	1	4	5	5	6	11
Dismissing	0	0	0	2	0	2
Missing CSEQ-SR	1	0	1	0	2	2
Missing BSQ	0	0	0	1	1	2
Missing Both					1	
Totals	2	5	7	18	22	40

Within this simplified format utilizing only student data, it appears that nearly all secure students were non-rejected. However, although the cluster of mixed attachment styles contains more rejected students than the secure category, there are more than twice as many non-rejected than rejected students. No female students emerged in the consistent dismissing category and the two males in this category were both non-rejected. This is perhaps the most notable finding relative to gender. Perhaps a more reserved dismissing approach to relationships is acceptable for male students. However, since there were no females in this category no comparisons were possible.

Peer Relationships—Qualitative:

Dynamics and Strategies as Perceived by Students

Student Culture at Middle School

At the beginning of the interview in order to help students become reasonably comfortable with the interview and step outside of themselves to engage in discussion, they were asked to discuss how students at Middle School were treated. A sampling of opinions from interviewed students will be given. The following quote from Katie in sixth grade is a useful starting point:

It depends--Some people treat people rudely if they're different and some groups have posses, which means there are a lot of groups in our school. But me, I go around to each group because I have friends from different schools here...

Overall although according to Rob, an eighth grade student there is “not much bullying” and students tend to “help each other if picked on or having a bad day”, some people do “get teased” according to Matt, a seventh grade student, and “some kids bully” according to Dan, another seventh grade student. However, Jay, a seventh grade student noted that “it’s a little better at Middle ... at other schools if you’re an outcast you’re an outcast.”

However, while Rob noted that he was uncertain whether there was a hierarchy at Middle School Janna, an eighth grade student explained that “certain groups like to hang out with certain groups.” Sharon in sixth grade observed:

Sixth graders use sixth graders. Some kids feel bad about what they wear if it’s different from what the popular kids wear. Popular kids say mean things or whisper to other kids about someone else. If you’re popular and get good grades, it doesn’t make any difference. If you’re not popular and get good grades, you’re a ‘geek’ a ‘nerd’ or whatever.

Although “most kids are pretty friendly” according to Sharon and ultimately “we-re all friends-some people are mean but we’re just friends.” Overall students are “sometimes nice and sometimes mean”, according to Amy in seventh grade.

According to Katie in sixth grade, how students are treated may depend on “if they have issues or if parents are divorced or different from other kids by their nationality and stuff.” However, Christy in sixth grade emphasized that she felt “good about how students get treated.” It appears that although students varied in their observations and experiences, what emerges is an image of a school climate that while better than some, contains students whose peer relationships evidence the variability of adolescent temperament, and the complexity of peer group dynamics along with the possibility of social stratification and stigmatization. This will be examined later.

We will now move from an overview of Middle School climate to a summary of the treatment interviewed students typically receive from fellow students:

Table 24

How do Kids Treat You? (n=11)

Typical Interactions*	Frequencies	
	Male	Female
Positive	3	4
Variable	3	3
Negative	0	0

***Key:** Positive-description includes generally positive descriptions of *current* interactions or phrases such as “good” “ok” “usually nice”. Variable-response includes a mixture of positive and conflictual examples or comments. Negative-No positive interactions described or respondent has no peer relationships.

Students who described themselves as having positive peer relationships in this interview sample indicated themselves as doing well with peers currently, even if they had been bullied in the past. Daniel described himself as being “well-respected” because “I respect them back”. Another stated that friends “helped the bullies go away.” John who described having variable relationships indicated that sometimes physical “joking” or verbal “teasing” might go too far and would then require limit-setting between himself and his friends. Sondra indicated that she and her friends had “ups and downs,” “like sisters,” and would sometimes talk “behind each other’s backs,” would “fight” (verbally) and then “be together” the next day.

At times it appeared some students were uncertain as to whether they had been the recipient of actual bullying or just teasing:

It kind of depends... my friends from class, some can be really nice; a couple people are starting to be mean...I don’t know...(they) will kind of bully...not really bullying, just tease (Lana 7th grade)

In order to clarify this issue the interview then moved into asking students about their definition of bullying. The following are excerpts and paraphrases from the interviews.

Table 25

*What Does the Word Bullying Mean to You?***Boys***You do it when you feel you want power (Sam)***Physical**

Punching

Pushing

Shoving into lockers

Make someone fall down

Occasional Verbal/Emotional

Put-downs/Insults/Teasing

Talking bad about someone

Laughing at another's misfortune

Harassment

Keep saying something (negative) until they cry

Tease someone until they cry

Pick on one person constantly

Taking property

Take someone's lunch money

Combined

Physically or emotionally hurting someone

Mental or Physical

Girls*When people have anger and take it out on (other) kids (Melissa)***Physical**

Pushing others

Verbal/ Emotional

Harsh words

Swearing

Hurting someone's feelings

Being made to feel uncomfortable

Saying disrespectful things about another

Saying things that shouldn't be said

Table 25 (continued)

Harassment
Always hurting someone, calling names and doing everything you can to hurt them
Writing hurtful words on the bathroom wall
Teasing about physical characteristics
Clique Dynamics/Relational Aggression
Rumor spreading
Telling others to stop being friends with someone
Doing what the popular girl wants

Although there was some overlap, it was clear that boys mentioned more physical means of bullying and girls described primarily verbal/emotional. A behavior was deemed harassment if it had a more intense and chronic nature to it that went beyond occasional verbal/emotional behaviors. Harassment was described as occurring both within groups of boys and girls.

However, descriptions of behaviors that arose out of clique dynamics specifically designed to damage another's relationships appeared directly only within the girls' interviews. Kelsey, an eighth grade student did note, however:

...Boys do some rumor-spreading, but not nearly as much as with the girls...I don't see much bullying here like beating people up.

Although it was a boy who had described bullying as being about power, it appeared that this may have been a motivation within girls' cliques as well. Perhaps this is mixed in at times with the anger as previously described by one of the girls. No specific sources for this anger were mentioned, so it is impossible to know whether this was anger due to a specific peer situation or perhaps a more displaced anger due to family or societal issues.

Throughout this study, strong dynamics have emerged-anger, power and control, and anxiety. Details will be revealed within summaries of each student's interview. These will be presented after interview results related to descriptions of students who are ignored, followed by student recommendations for how to make friends, be popular, and avoid bullying.

The Ignored Student—A Description

One of the more poignant and disturbing parts of the interview occurred when students were asked to indicate why a student might be ignored by others. Boys who were interviewed described students who tended to be ignored as those who:

- Are not as intelligent as others
- Are much brighter than others
- Attend special education classes
- Do not speak clearly or correctly
- Have an accent/come from another country
- Do not dress well
- Are short (being tall was not viewed as an issue)
- Look “funny”
- Have a poor complexion
- Are quiet
- Show socially unacceptable behaviors
- Have poor hygiene

Alex tended to ignore quiet students because they “are like talking to a wall”.

Tony noted that ignored students are “gross” and “don’t shower” or who “are super super smart...and really stand out.” Boys tended to give specific descriptions of qualities and behaviors within the categories above. Girls described ignored students as being those who:

- Do not dress well-look “nerdy”; have the wrong “looks”
- Do not wear Hollister or Abercrombie fashion
- Are “dorks” or “geeks” who are in the band
- Do well in school but are not part of the popular group
- Do not have many friends
- Do not belong to a particular group
- Are different

The element of being “different” was difficult to define for Katie who noted that ignored students are:

Unusual in different ways.....hard to explain.....something’s different, but they’re nice sometimes.

However, their apparently permanent status appeared to be emphasized by Mandy who spoke in a rather angry and impatient tone:

They’re different and don’t know they need to face the facts that not everybody’s the same.

There was no expansion on this response and no further probe, since this particular subject had quickly repelled other follow-up questions.

Krista spoke of students being ignored “not in a mean way” but just temporarily ignored while a group of students was focusing on another group of students. Jennifer, an 8th grade student noted that while some students may actually not wish to associate with a particular student, others may feel ignored even if this is not the case. This student indicated that she herself had had this experience:

Some kids may feel ignored and get really quiet, even if no one is trying to (ignore). Then if the kid tries to talk it out with people it can cause a small fight. ...Someone else might be talking to someone else a lot so someone feels ignored.

One might speculate, that this misinterpretation of social cues could have been connected with some degree of attachment-related defensive exclusion of positive aspects of present peer relationships based upon past information processing. As a result rejection sensitivity may have been present leading to the expectation of a slight where perhaps none was intended. To her credit, this student was able to show a rather impressive degree of reflective functioning about her own mental state and about the possible motives of others. It is interesting that this student showed a strong degree of reactivity, given that her attachment style on the BSQ emerged as secure parent, dismissing friend, which would appear to indicate more walling off of emotion than anxiety. Perhaps this points in the direction of difficulties with the measure itself, or at the very least, the fallibility of the brief snapshot nature of a rating scale which could easily be impacted by an early adolescent’s ever changing mood.

Surviving the Peer Arena

One might wonder how students navigated the turbulent and sometimes murky waters of early adolescent peer society. Students were asked about this within the course of the interviews, specifically through the comfort of would-be advice-giving to a new student:

If a new kid came to your grade, how could he or she make friends? Be popular? Avoid being bullied?

These questions will be discussed together, since students frequently intertwined answers as one strategy flowed into the next. It was heartening to realize that students frequently recommended some rather astute coping strategies.

While both boys and girls mentioned using friends as protection from bullies, only girls indicated designer clothing and physical appearance as important methods of belonging socially and becoming popular. Both genders would advise a student to avoid those who are known to bully or to treat others negatively. Girls alluded to the power of the clique to keep others in line by bullying due to their higher social status and greater number of friends.

Table 26

*Social Coping Strategies Descriptions*Boys

“Show them respect and they’ll respect you.”

“Respect them & hang out in a group”

“Stick up for yourself.”

“Get help from others.”

“Get away” (from bullying situations)

“Don’t get violent. Use your words”

“Stay away from people who like to bully”

“Don’t be weird. Be normal.”

“Being yourself can get you into bad places.”

“Be yourself.”

“Try to stay in the right crowd...I guess...
I don’t know.”

“Talk to people you want to hang out with”

“I don’t like to use the word popular.”

“You don’t need a lot of friends, as long as
you have a friend.”

Girls

“Have friends from different groups.”

“Stay with friends who protect you.”

“Tell an adult” if bullied.

“Watch who bullies, make new friends. Don’t
hangout with them (bullies) so much”

“Get around people who are nice; stay with your
friends”

“Hang with the popular crowd...or be popular in
your own group”

“Get yourself noticed.”

“Recognize there will be ups and downs”
(within peer groups); “like sisters we will be on
and off”

Meet various people and “don’t hang out with
those you think will be mean”

“Hang out with the right kids”

(Those who don’t bully)

“Be friendly.”

“Be yourself.”

“Have lots of friends to support you.”

“Stay away from enemies (who have more
friends.) They’re better than others and they
know it. They have more friends and have to
bully the person who doesn’t.”

“I wouldn’t give advice because everyone at our
school is popular...depends what you wear but
most of us wear regular clothes.”

Look cool, be skinny...right make-up, not too
much, not too little. Have all the clothes from
Abercrombie. It’s expensive and some people
might not have the money. That’s hard. If you
don’t wear those clothes, you’re not popular.
You have to wear the cutest outfits...like a skirt
even in Winter.”

Table 26 (continued)

"I have no idea" (how to be popular).	"Be nice and polite...not gossiping or spreading rumors"
"Get involved in school activities"	"Participate in school activities"
"Talk to people; most are nice"	
"Show different interests; some people have that interest."	"Find people with your interests"
	"Expect to be the center of attention" (if you are shy)
	"Just walk up to people"
"See if someone wants to be your friend."	"Go up to someone and ask them to help you."
	"Don't get I with the wrong crowd"
	"Find out who are the right kids to hang out with."
	"Be yourself; if they don't like you for yourself don't hang out with them"
	"People make themselves noticed a lot and other see them and think they're cool popular kids."

Boys varied on whether to advise others to be genuine or to be cautious about how they behaved, possibly toning down their behavior from aggressive to assertive and respectful. One girl advised others to "get yourself noticed". While some boys were tentative in their advice, reluctant to discuss popularity or somewhat bewildered by the social scene, others were clear in their counsel. All of the girls appeared rather convinced of their comments. The element of popularity appeared to be a critical but complex status for girls as expressed by Jenny in 8th grade:

There's a popular group...they say they're popular-no one actually likes them-because they're kind of mean about other people. If you're nice and friendly and talk to a lot of people & if people like you-that's my definition of popular.

It would appear that popular girls have that ‘certain something’ in spite of actually being disliked by many. Perhaps that element is power combined with the trappings of pseudo sophistication based upon media messages. It is now time to take a closer look at the summarized responses of the individual students and compare the qualitative information given with the quantitative rating scales.

Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Data—Attachment and Rejection

Table 27 is a summary of the demographic and life experience data of the interviewed students which, it will be recalled, were chosen from the original sample of 47 students, based upon attachment style and peer rejection status. Parent comments, when available have been included.

The qualitative part of the study was designed to utilize cases in a “confirming and disconfirming” manner (Marshall, 1999, p. 78) where possible. The following interview summaries are presented along with each student’s attachment style rating from the BSQ, student rejection status on the CSEQ-SR and parent perception of the student’s rejection status. However, perhaps the greater value of the qualitative sample is its ability to describe the real day to day relationship experience of the participating students. In addition, descriptive parental comments from the questionnaire are also included in order that the reader can develop an image of each of the interviewed students, in spite of the brief and semi-structured nature of the interviews themselves. Subject numbers are consistent with listings in prior demographic tables.

Table 27

Demographic and Life Experience Data of Interview Subjects per Parent Questionnaire (n=11)

Subject	Gender	Age	SPED/ESL Gifted	Only Suburban District	Loss Through Death	Illness of Other	Illness of Self	Div/Sep	Other
2	F	12	None	No	None	Yes	None	Yes	
6	M	11	Gifted	Yes	Yes	Yes	None	No	
11	F	11	None	No	Grandfather; Great Grandparents	Open heart surgery; grandfather	None	No	Bullied "Lacks self- confidence"
15	F	11	None	Yes	Brother	Mother	None	No	Bullied and change in caretaker.
16	F	12	SPED	No	Grandmother	Grandmother	Resp. and Neuro. Issues	No	Bullied
19	M	12	None	Yes	Grandmother	Grandmother	None	No	Change in Caretaker. Negative comments from peers which parents believe are not upsetting.
30	M	12	None	Yes	None	None	None	No	Bullied

33	F	12	None	No	None	None	None	Yes	Bullied; Changed from mother's to father's custody
37	M	13	None	Yes	Grandparents	None	None	No	
40	F	13	None	No	Yes	Yes	None	No	Bullied
44	M	13	None	Yes	Grandparent	Grandparent	None	None	

Subject-Attachment Style (BSQ)		Student Rejection Status (CSEQ-R)	Parent Perception-Per Questionnaire
2 (F)	SPSF	NR (20)	Parent Rejection Status: R

This student's parent questionnaire indicated that she had moved in from another district. No further information was given as to the quality of this experience.

Interview: She described having been treated poorly by peers in elementary school, but indicated she was being treated well now. She became briefly tearful at the remembrance of past mistreatment by peers. Although she described her divorced and blended family relations as frequently conflictual, she indicated a strong positive relationship with her mother and described her family as "fun". Although the student portrayed herself as someone who helps and is helped by peers, she was later referred for social work services due to her bullying of other students as noted by teachers. Perhaps students treated her well out of fear. Her rejection status score is just below the significance point of 21. Although, the interview appears to confirm her secure status with parents and peers, teacher and student perceptions of peer relationships differ. At one point during the interview, she described a concerning situation related to family conflict, which prompted an untapped follow-up interview immediately afterward. It became apparent that the previously relayed situation was not of significant concern. Since the time of the interview, the student has emerged at school as one who frequently gains peer and adult attention through negative, and sometimes exaggerated or inaccurate story-telling. None of this appears congruent with a secure attachment status.

6 (M)	SPSF	NR (13)	Parent Rejection Status: NR
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This student's parent questionnaire indicated that he participated in the district's gifted program.

Interview: He described close, caring relationships with both parents and peers and a tendency to help other students in need. Although this student's interview statements appeared to confirm the BSQ as well as CSEQ-R, this student became visibly upset when he was asked "who do you care about?" He attributed this upset to some physical symptoms, which sounded anxiety related, that had disrupted his sleep the previous night. He expressed some concern about his teacher "yelling". He appeared calm by the end of the interview. This raises the questions of what degree of anxiety might still be present within secure relationships. It

may also indicate that the secure rating is not congruent with the student's actual status.

11 (F) DPPF R (28) Parent Rejection Status: R

The parent questionnaire described her as bullied and "lacking in self-confidence" and as having experienced multiple extended family deaths and illnesses, including open heart surgery of a grandparent.

Interview: The student described herself as experiencing relational aggression as well as having many friendships. She also described a close positive relationship with nuclear and extended family. Her BSQ indicated much more dependence upon peers than parents and a significant degree of concern regarding her dependence upon peers. Perhaps this dependence provoked peer rejection and her reduced reliance on parents caused her to be more dependent upon peers; the reverse could also be true. While the interview portrayed a secure relationship with parents, this was not evidenced on the BSQ. Perhaps this potentially anxious, preoccupied student was giving socially acceptable responses to this researcher. She, on more than one occasion mentioned to me that she felt "fine" and was "fine" about doing the interview, possibly indicating anxiety, which would be congruent with a preoccupied attachment status, but not a dismissing one. Indeed, if anything the tone of her parent questionnaire as well as her interview gave an aura of anxious closeness.

15 (F) SPSF NR (10) Parent Rejection Status: R

Parent questionnaire indicated her as having had five different nannies prior to her mother's decision to remain at home. Her parent described her as bullied and as having been an "outcast" at her previous parochial school.

Interview: The student described herself as very close to her mother "almost like twins", but went on to also describe positive relationships with family members, friends, and even her cat. Parents described her as possibly having experienced "put-downs". She wanted to be very helpful during the interview and minimized any acknowledgement of her assistance. Although the student's relationship with her mother seemed a bit too close, the student did show secure exploratory behavior in terms of reaching out to peers and the community. This raises the question of 1.) Whether there are degrees of "secure" relationships and whether attachment theory accounts for this, or 2.) Was

this student perhaps more preoccupied than secure. (This family had been in therapy--a fact that was not revealed prior to the study.)

16 (F) SPDF NR (20) Parent Rejection Status: R

Per parent questionnaire, this student was described as having moved from another district. She has experienced not only the illness and death of her grandmother but also her own respiratory and neurological issues. She has been receiving special education services.

Interview: Although the student described herself as being treated “okay” by peers, questioning about the definition of bullying revealed repeated descriptions of students being ignored or treated poorly. However, she appeared to have secure, positive relationships with family and taught younger children for her church in the community, thus validating the secure score with parents. Her CSEQ-R score was just below the significant score, although parents described her as rejected.

19 (M) SPDF NR (11) Parent Rejection Status: NR

Parent questionnaire indicated this student as having experienced the illness and death of his grandmother as well as a change in caretaker. Peers were viewed by this student’s parent as sometimes commenting on his small stature. However, it was the parent’s belief that this was not upsetting to the student.

Interview: The student described strong connections to parents, extended family, peers, and community. The same positive descriptors were given for parents and peers. The student had been teased in the past but did not consider himself rejected currently, although he described his peer relationships as “pretty good”. This student tended to reach out to students who were bullied. On the BSQ, the student’s response indicated more reliance on parents than peers, while the interview showed it to be roughly equal.

Comments: The quantitative piece was completed in Fall, 2008, while the interviews were performed in Spring, 2009, following a previously mentioned school-wide crisis. The student may have developed stronger peer bonds as a result of both continuing adolescent development and response to the crisis. Also, the student’s past negative peer experiences may have been brought forth by rating scale questions which may have provoked a denial of need for dependence on them, thus the dismissing rating which could be gender related.

30 (M) DPDF NR (14) Parent Rejection Status: R

Parent questionnaire described him as bullied which is consistent with data given below.

Interview: Although this student described himself as experiencing occasional teasing and bullying, he indicated close friendships. He emphatically declined to elaborate on a particular incident of feeling unaccepted. He did indicate that peer relationships had improved since changing schools. Change of school had not been noted on the parent questionnaire. His family relationships were also described as positive in spite of his dismissing BSQ rating. In addition, his CSEQ-R rating was non-rejected in spite of parental descriptions of teasing and sometimes physical bullying during 5th and 6th grade. The student also described himself as having teased and bullied others at times. Thus there are inconsistencies here.

33 (F) DPSF R (27) Parent Rejection Status: R

Per parent questionnaire, this student was bullied and had difficulty making friends. She had also changed school districts and had moved between relatives.

Interview: The student described her parents as “caring” and “loveable” and indicated that she cares about them and feels helped by her mother. This was the case in spite of a change in living situation. This does not appear to fit with the dismissing category. Although the category of secure was listed for friends, this student received a rejected categorization on the CSEQ-R. Perhaps the student is secure with her friends but rejected by bullies. This was not discerned in the interview however, since the student indicated that she had not observed or experienced any bullying or any moments of non-acceptance.

37 (M) SPSF NR (18) Parent Rejection Status: R

The student’s parent questionnaire indicated loss through the death of a family member. No other stressors were noted.

Interview: The student described some clearly upsetting episodes of bullying during elementary school but went on to indicate that this was not occurring at Middle School. This is something the student had relayed to parents at the time and may explain the parent’s expectation of continued rejection. He portrayed a close secure relationship with parents and friends

which appears to confirm this rating. This student further reported that friends had assisted him in overcoming bullying situations. This researcher detained the student for a few minutes to make certain he had recovered from the upsetting part of the interview. No further intervention was needed.

40 (F) SPDF NR (13) Parent Rejection Status: R

Per parent questionnaire, the student was described as bullied and as having experienced unspecified losses through illness and death.

Interview: This student described herself as not having experienced bullying and as interacting with multiple groups of friends. She seemed well-aware of relational aggression and appeared to avoid it by keeping her options open with a variety of friendship groups. Perhaps her dismissing rating for friends reflected her efforts to not become too dependent upon one group of peers who may react negatively at any given moment. The student presented with a confident air and was able to verbalize in detail about questions asked. She indicated a close relationship with family in spite of some times of misunderstanding. This appears to confirm the secure rating for parents. However, student and parent rejection status are inconsistent.

44 (M) DPSF NR (12) Parent Rejection Status: NR

This student experienced the deaths of grandparents, but no other noted stressors.

Interview: This articulate student described himself as depending on a relative for support. They “know each other perfectly”. Perhaps this helps explain the dismissing rating for parents since his relative is currently serving as a secure base. This student is apparently secure enough to join school activities and to reach out to his younger sibling as well. The student also described generally positive relationships with peers in spite of a specific time of feeling unaccepted at a sports activity. This would appear to confirm secure relationships with peers.

Interviewing these students was truly an engaging and enriching experience for this researcher. Most students appeared to be open and quite willing participants, despite the above-noted moments of exception. As issues emerged, it was sometimes a struggle

to maintain a researcher stance and at times it was not appropriate to do so when a situation above required follow-up. However, this was the exception rather than the rule.

Although performing the interviews was a generally straightforward process, interview analysis has been complex. The central question does remain as to whether the interviews did, in fact, confirm or disconfirm the BSQ and CSEQ-R data. Even if parent data is set aside, not diminished, but acknowledged as a different data set separate from that of the adolescents, interview data analysis was still complicated by a number of factors. These include some discrepancies between verbal and non-verbal responses to the interview, and the gap of approximately five months between quantitative and qualitative data collection which included variables such as school holidays, possible family and peer group changes, the impact of a school wide crisis, and on-going adolescent change. However, although these factors, and possibly others, need to be taken into account, they do not render the data meaningless, but perhaps instead add new meaning.

Review of the 11 interview summaries reveals three students whose CSEQ-SR rejection scores matched their parents' perception of their rejection status. Two were rejected female students and one was a non-rejected male. Two other female students showed CSEQ-SR scores that were just below the cutoff, which perhaps could be considered borderline but gave some indication in their interviews of having been bullied. Their parents had perceived them as bullied.

As far as consistency between interview, BSQ, and CSEQ-SR data, this was somewhat unclear for some subjects. There appeared to be a continuum whereby at one

end there was definite inconsistency between qualitative and quantitative data such as subject 2 or definite consistency between the data such as subject 37 at the other end. Between definite consistency and definite inconsistency lie the cases that showed a partial match. For example, the interview with subject 19 confirmed the secure parent BSQ rating but did not confirm the dismissing friend classification. Some interviews such as that of subject 33 appeared to disconfirm the CSEQ-SR rating rejected rating, since the student denied having any difficulties with peers, also in spite of the parent indication of rejection. In this situation, it is difficult to decide whether to view the secure friend rating coupled with a rejected CSEQ-SR as one that refutes the original research hypothesis -- that a rejected youth would show *insecure* attachment -- or as an indication of the difficulty with measurement that has plagued this study.

At times, to further muddy the waters, the process or non-verbals within the interview did not fit the content. For example, for subject 11 who presented with arguably the most negative ratings in all categories, insisted she was “fine” in an anxious-appearing manner. Subject 15 with a very positive set of ratings appeared perhaps too close to her mother and a bit too helpful within the interview office. This family was perhaps developing an *earned* secure attachment style (Siegal, 1999; Wallin, 2007) within therapy. In addition, we have the anxious young man with stomach problems who also showed secure attachment and non-rejected status. These nuances will require further discussion including a re-visit to the literature in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Addressing the Original Research Questions

This has been an explanatory two phase mixed method study with the intent of answering the question:

What is the relationship between attachment style, peer rejection, and gender in students at Middle School?

The following assumptions were made:

- 1) Peer rejected youths would be more likely to show insecure attachment styles.
- 2) Rejection would co-exist with different insecure attachment styles for girls and boys.

Regarding the first assumption, utilizing only student data, it was seen that nearly all non-rejected students showed a secure attachment style, so this does head in the direction of confirming the original assumption. However, this finding was dampened by the fact that the mixed insecure category also contained more non-rejected than rejected students although less than within the secure category. Also, confounding this finding somewhat was the fact that the two students with a dismissing attachment style were not rejected. Parent data changes the picture even more by increasing the number of secure rejected students.

Assessment of this assumption was most impacted by the small sample and instrumentation issues. It is therefore not possible to define specific trends and variable relationships in this area. The only possibly gender oriented findings appear to be the fact that there were no consistently dismissing (DPDF) girls and also that a girl held the only rating of dismissing parent and preoccupied friend (DPPF). Again, numbers are an issue here, but this is perhaps an area for further research.

In another vein, it should also be recalled that even though there was delay between the study phases, this still remains a cross-sectional study. Since it only viewed student attachment during brief moments in time, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the attachment stability of these students. It is also not known how much their mood or experiences on a particular day impacted their responses, especially on the quantitative scales.

Comments on Study Design

One might wonder whether the picture would have been different and perhaps clearer had this researcher been able to also study students receiving social work services, including those on my current caseload. Perhaps this would have added a greater number of rejected students and students with a variety of insecure attachment styles to compare with the predominantly secure sample that was utilized. This was so due to the necessity of protecting a vulnerable population and avoiding a dual role. Given that by definition the clients that we see are all vulnerable in some way by virtue of their need for our services, it behooves us to find benign ways of learning more about them. Some of the students studied may have been ‘undiscovered’ clients who had issues but had not yet

been referred; in fact, two students did emerge as clients during the course of the study. It would appear logical within a school setting to omit the *most* vulnerable, those with recent hospitalizations. However, those in outside therapy might actually be viewed as being in an advantageous position, since they were already receiving outside support. Perhaps they did not need to be omitted, just noted.

Given that evidence-based practice has quickly moved to the forefront of discussions related to social work practice (Raines, 2008) and schools are requiring practitioners to utilize evidence-based strategies in order to facilitate positive outcomes for students (Kelly, 2008), current practitioners are more frequently looking to the literature for answers than in previous years. This puts the onus on social work researchers to expand the clinical knowledge base. However, all of this must be done with social work ethics in mind.

Ethical Issues in Social Work Research—Vulnerable Populations, Dual Roles, and the Quest for Relevant Information

In terms of information seeking as professionals, the current NASW code does speak of the obligation for a social worker to not only be competent, but also to strive to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession (Assembly, 2008). However, social workers are also obligated to put client interests first, and avoid dual roles, even professional roles, where possible, if there is a risk of harm or “exploitation” (Assembly, 2008, p. 8) to the client. In reality, the school social worker often has multiple roles with a student. For example, when it is time for a special education re-evaluation process for one of the students on my caseload, in addition to the therapeutic role, I need to gather

information from the student, parent and teachers. This often includes observations, behavior rating scales, and interviews for the purpose of the re-evaluation. In this light, my persona to the student could appear for a brief time to be different. In order to minimize anxiety I explain the process, address confidentiality issues, and then transition back to my more typical role with the student. Thus far this has appeared to work well, at least without any discernible harm to the student.

There is one important difference, which may already be apparent to the reader. The special education re-evaluation process is designed to be of direct benefit to that particular student. Depending upon research design and intent, doing research with one's client may or may not provide direct benefit to that client. Although it was apparent that some students in this study enjoyed and were gratified by their participation, this would not be true for all students in all studies. So where does the above leave this discussion? It lands where many discussions do -- with a need for further dialogue within the profession. We will now move to another challenging issue that emerged from this study.

Measuring Attachment in Early Adolescence—Can it be Done?

This is a topic which has grown and changed during the time of the development and the data collection phases of this project. The reader will note that Elaine Scharfe had recommended the Index of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) and the Family Attachment Interview (FAI) along with parent teacher rating scales in order to enhance validity from the RSQ (Scharfe, 2003;2006). Given the school day time constraints and the non-clinical nature of the public school population being utilized, this plan was

rejected. An additional significant factor was the fact that the IPPA was developed using youths aged 16-20 years (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

However, in recent years a revised and shortened version of the IPPA, geared for a younger age group, 9-15 years, has been released (Guillone & Robinson, 2005).

Another, and more recent self-report scale that was used with a 6th grade population is the Security Scale (Duchesne, Ratelle, Poitras, & Drouin, 2009). It is not known whether either of these measures would have proven more effective than the BSQ for this study. The important positive here is that researchers are continuing to strive to develop better measures for this challenging population.

However, there may be a positive aspect to the separate ratings which were obtained for this study. There is some research to show that there can be within-person variation in attachment style depending upon the particular relationship (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Thus it would not be considered unusual to obtain different ratings for the parent as opposed to the friend scale for some individuals, and in fact, this could be considered adaptive (La Guardia et al., 2000). This did occur for some of the participants.

Attachment stability is another issue contained within the backdrop of this study. There is a variety of information relative to attachment stability. Attachment has previously been described as stable in adults, especially short term, over a period of months (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Mid to late adolescent attachment has also been described as stable, especially, according to Zimmerman and Becker-Stoll (2002), the *preoccupied* state. Ammaniti (2000), however, also indicated stability of adolescent

attachment, especially the *dismissing* category, which, in his opinion, is more common in adolescents. However, within the current study, dismissing friend (n=9) occurred nearly as often as dismissing parent (n=10), an occurrence which would appear to contradict Ammaniti's assertion. According to Scharfe and Bartholomew, childhood attachment varies by changes in the family environment. Positive changes may move attachment from insecure to secure, with the reverse being true for negative changes. Only life events which have the potential of impacting major attachment figures produce change. It is conceivable that students in the study may have experienced changes in attachment style due to divorce, deaths in the family, or change in care taker, that were not visible due to the study's cross-sectional nature. It is also possible that attachment style may have changed in the months between the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study.

However, in this situation it is admittedly difficult to make like comparisons, since the BSQ ratings were unique in that they contained separate parent and friend ratings which were utilized for this study. In fact, consultation with the author regarding a scoring issue revealed his assertion that the BSQ should be considered a continuum rather than a categorical measure (Furman, 2008), a fact that had not been available prior to the beginning of this study.

In addition, the discussion of dimensional versus categorical descriptions of attachment is one that has been occurring within the literature in relatively recent times. Ainsworth's description of avoidant, secure, and resistant sometimes referred to as the "A,B,C" (Waters & Beauchaine, 2003, p. 417) attachment patterns is viewed by some authors as a "measurement convention" (p. 417) that may have been too widely

generalized. It is well to recall that Ainsworth's schema was developed utilizing very specific *infant* observations under the Strange Situation circumstances. Waters and Beauchaine discuss whether a fuller range of individual differences might be better seen within the home environment, rather than within a artificially produced situation.

What this might mean for early adolescent attachment measurement is difficult to define. Perhaps a combination of interview and observation within the home and school environments while the adolescent is in actual relational interaction would be useful. It would appear that a system of interview, rating scales and observation might give more comprehensive holistic data. Use of a dimensional approach to attachment would focus upon two interacting dimensions: the proximity-secure base factor and the resistance-distress factor (Fraley & Spiker, 2003) rather than strict categorizing, assuming these dimensions translated from infant to early adolescent attachment. Perhaps the Fields (1998) description of the dimensions of avoidance and discomfort with closeness or anxiety and fear of abandonment would be useful themes more appropriate for early adolescence.

Discussions also occur around whether the goal of secure attachment is proximity seeking or emotional or "felt security" (Jurist, 2005, p. 428). It would appear that the young adolescents in this sample needed both, depending upon the time, place, or the situation, at times confiding in a parent, and at other times functioning in a confident and secure manner around school. Subject 15, for example appeared to show exploratory behavior in terms of reaching out to peers and to the community, a possible indication of felt security. However, she also described herself and her mother as being "almost like

twins” in terms of their closeness and interactions, possibly an indication of proximity seeking. As mentioned previously this student may have been in the process of moving by way of therapy from a preoccupied to a secure style. A dimensional approach might view this student as being somewhat high in anxiety but low in avoidance, and perhaps as one who works towards self-acceptance by being accepted by others (Fields, 1998). If one focuses upon dimensions rather than the attachment categories from the original Bartholomew and Horowitz framework described earlier in this document (see Figure 2 on p. 19), a different framework emerges, wherein there is less concern about specific attachment category and more thinking about whether an individual is showing high or low anxiety or avoidance within relationships. In any event any view of attachment and attachment measurement, especially within the torrent of adolescence must avoid considering important relationships as reducible to categories. Perhaps a focus upon themes and dynamics would be more instructive.

Adolescent Attachment and Anxiety—What is Security?

It is clear that secure attachment has been correlated with a positive self-concept, ego resilience and better social skills (Wallin, 2007), as well as emotional regulation, including that during conflict resolution (Simpson, Rholes, & Philips, 1996). However, would it actually be reasonable to assume that this would preclude anxiety from developing on any given day for an adolescent during a stressful situation? It would appear that security might be shown by an individual’s actions which may occur in spite of variable emotions. Perhaps the young man (606) who upon interview described being worried about his coach “Yelling” and who became somewhat emotional when asked to

describe his caring relationships, may have been experiencing a concern at that particular moment, one that he perhaps might discuss with his secure base(s) at home. His exploratory actions, typically a sign of attachment security, portrayed a different message than his emotions, since he was moving outward into the community by his involvement in sports. In addition it is well to note that anxiety can be either a “symptom” or a “syndrome”, a “state or a trait” (Legrand, McGue, & Iacono, 1999, pp. 953, 954) which can be fleeting or chronic. Thus it is conceivable that an individual may have an overall secure attachment with passing experiences of anxiety. However, perhaps when anxiety assumes more the level of syndrome, attachment dimensions may be less secure, much like the young woman (611) who showed both dismissing and preoccupied tendencies. Unfortunately, this insecure attachment in internalizing adolescents can be rather stable over time (Buist, Dekovic, Meeus, & van acken, 2004). Perhaps the ability to express anxiety as a strength unlike the above student who kept asserting she was “fine” although she did not appear so.

A discussion of anxiety in this group of students would be incomplete without mention of the parents who gave demographic information for this study. It was clear that the stress of early adolescence and transitions into and through was felt keenly by parents as well as students. As shown in the review of the demographic data in Chapter Four, many parents were concerned about peer relationships and suspected their sons or daughters of being rejected or bullied, even if the youths reported otherwise. In fact, felt attachment security with parents often reduces a youth’s anxiety and provides a secure base for expression of anxiety when needed (Duchesne et al., 2009). Perhaps a parent’s

willingness to express and discuss a concern about their child's peer relationships opens the door for the adolescent to discuss their concerns as well.

Specifically, interview data from this study indicated girls as describing mother as the person most helpful to them (see *Who helps you?* in Chapter Four), while boys widened this to include other family members. This would appear congruent with the fact that the adolescent- mother attachment offers some degree of protection against stressful life events (Dudeck, 2008). Conversely, one could say that the parents, most likely mothers, who completed the parent demographic forms, may be insecure rather than merely concerned and helpful. Further, mothers who show fearful attachment scores are often associated with daughters who show fearful, preoccupied or dismissive attachment, and fearful-avoidant mothers may “transmit attachment insecurities to their daughters” (Kilmann, Vendemia, Parnell, & Urbaniak, 2009, p. 565). This could conceivably cause disruptions in peer relationships. In fact, the present study did not support this since students, predominantly girls, whose parents believed them to be rejected showed secure attachments. However, since parent attachment was not measured, this aspect cannot be fully explored.

Middle School Parent and Peer Relationships and Mentalization

It is known that those with secure attachments are able to access a within mind secure base script which is useful in times of distress and for interpreting social relationships (Mikulincer, Shaver, Yael, & Avihou-Kanza, 2009). However, beyond this lies the process of mentalization whereby we attend to mental states of ourselves and others, “hold mind in mind” and use this information to interpret behavior (J. Allen,

Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008, p. xi). Mentalization comes into play in a number of aspects of this study involving both parent to youth and student to student interactions.

As was noted previously, several parents viewed their sons or daughters as being rejected or bullied in spite of indications to the contrary. Although the possibility always exists that the CSEQ-SR and a short one time interview did not sufficiently tap into the youth's peer relationship concerns, another view exists as well. Mentalization, although a necessary skill for the formation and continuation of satisfying human relationships, like most things, can be overused (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007). It is possible that some of the parents in this study, sensitized vicariously by their child's traumatic rejection or bullying experiences in elementary school or at another school prior to enrollment at Middle School, may have 'overmentalized' with their children and become hypervigilant about any and all peer interactions that were about to or did occur at Middle School. In addition, it should be noted that within the Middle School community parent involvement and participation, is rather frequent, especially relative to the white middle to upper middle-class grouping representative of most participants of this study.

This overuse of mentalization is not limited to parent-youth relationships. There is some evidence that girls are more skilled at mentalizing than boys, and in instances of relational aggression may show actually superior mentalization skills which can be used to socially manipulate and maltreat others (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007). It was therefore wise that the interviewed students offered advice which included avoidance of those who bully or talk negatively about others lest an individual's trust and secrets be used as weapons. In addition, in my work as a social worker, I have frequently noticed

overmentalization as a kind of contagion within cliques wherein the dysphoria of one becomes absorbed and reflected by others in the social group. To some extent one might expect some of this as being part of an empathic response, nevertheless, one that could move from adaptive to maladaptive depending upon the degree and at times also the accuracy of the ‘mind reading’. Since mentalizing includes both thought and feeling aspects of mind (Guido, 2008), it is possible that in these clique situations the emotional aspect may be too predominant.

Misuse of mentalization was not the exclusive domain of the girls, however. Boys who were bullied and apparently traumatized by the experience described humiliation in sports, classroom, or hallway situations that indicated that the aggressor definitely read the vulnerability within their minds. Overt proactive bullying, such as more typically seen with boys also requires an advanced degree of mentalization and social cognition (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007). Frequently, in schools, these students are seen as having social skills deficits. However, this is often not the case.

Problems with mentalization can occur in other ways within the setting. Failures of mentalizing are common. The most complete form of this, “mindblindness”(J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007, p. 11) is frequently seen in those who carry a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder. Although there were no students with this diagnosis in this study other failures of mentalization were in evidence. The bullying scenarios described by the boys appeared to contain the use of mentalization for negative reasons-“nasty” mindedness (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007, p. 108). Although this was true of some of the girls’ situations as well, including deliberate shunning or exclusion, at times there appeared to be episodes

of partial mindblindness wherein the intention of another was missed or misread in the heat of the moment within intense interactions. It was clear that misreading then led to further conflict, greater emotion, and an increasing reduction of empathic communication.

In addition, misreads and misinterpretations might occur while a student was alone and pondering the events of the day - memories of an odd look, a whispered comment, or no room at the lunch table could be distorted, or enlarged in the imagination. This distorted mentalization often does contain and imaginary and sometimes projective elements (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007) which further complicate a situation. Perhaps this is a place where attachment, a youth's internal working model might become evident as a distortion in mentalization which could be evidenced by hostile attributional bias towards benign events. Many times this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A situation which most likely contains elements of all of the above mentalization difficulties is that of the youth who were ignored by peers. Multiple reasons were given by participants for this phenomenon including wearing the "wrong" clothing, having low or high intelligence, showing poor social skills, not being part of a popular group, not speaking well/having an accent, receiving special education services, poor hygiene, physical characteristics, quiet demeanor, stature or just being "different." Nonmentalizing interactions were frequent. No one seemed interested in knowing the mind of someone who looked, sounded, or acted differently. Distortions were also common. It appeared the students were uncomfortable around the ignored students, perhaps attributing hostile intent where none was intended.

Culture, Prejudice, and Failures of Mentalization

Some of this then appears intertwined with cultural issues in terms of poorly mentalized and stigmatized interactions between the predominantly white middle class students and immigrants of varying social class and ethnicity who appear different. Prejudice and fearfulness may have also been present in interactions between students with varying physical characteristics, between those who can afford designer clothes and those who were “just getting by”, between those who know less than oneself and those who know more. Bias was also seen in the exclusiveness of various social groupings and presumptions about students who participated in particular activities and perhaps potentially positive attachments never occur, because they are ruled out before they can happen.

Perhaps, then some degree of mindblindness can be viewed as impacting attachments. One must also remember that since schools are “microcosms of society” (Eder et al., 1995, p. 157), attitudes from families, community, and media resonate within the school walls, and “behaving mindblindly” can cause “incalculable damage” (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007, p. 326). If carried to their logical extent, mentalization failures can become global as current conflicts illustrate.

Risk, Resilience, and Gender

However, we must remain cognizant of the fact that our research subjects are young adolescents, not much more than children, undergoing a significant developmental transition. Perhaps experiencing internal threats through puberty provokes them into becoming ever more vigilant against external threat. Much like previous literature, the

boys within this study appeared especially vulnerable to anything that hinted of humiliation. Some appeared to have, as a result, developed strategies for gaining respect from others through assertiveness, or demonstrations of knowledge and skill. Bullying, especially of the more overt kind, appeared to be a remnant of their elementary school years that they were attempting to leave behind. However, trauma and scars from these episodes left them primed to expect hostility and possibly vulnerable to new attacks. Some did, also, seem somewhat baffled by the intricacies of the social workings of the school. The girls, however, appeared eloquent, skilled and knowledgeable about the dynamics of social interactions. At times this was a strength and at other times this placed them at risk, as they used these skills against each other with surgical precision.

However, some of the stereotypes described in previous literature appear to be changing, at least within this group of students. Both girls and boys, who were interviewed, cared about relationships not only within the nuclear family or friendship groups but also within church groups or for caretaking of needy community members. It was also interesting to note that academic achievement and recognition by family and peers for such achievement was important for both boys and girls. Some differences do remain, as boys continued to be more reluctant than girls to discuss their feelings about family or peer situations.

Although most descriptions of bullying given by students listed concrete characteristics perhaps given to them by teachers within school programs, the comments of two students were especially instructive. While the male student referred to bullying as a way to obtain power, the female student described it as a way of displacing anger.

However, although girls may not have noted power as a motivation, it was self-evident in their descriptions of clique dynamics, as girls followed the lead of the ‘popular girl’ or utilized relational aggression to control others. Perhaps the humiliation that to which the boys alluded is also part and parcel of girls’ clique dynamics. This is significant in that for girls being a clique member is associated with adaptive outcomes relative to relationships, behavior, and school adjustment. This does not emerge in the literature as a significant factor for boys (C. Henrich, Kupermine, Sack, Blatt, & Leadbeater, 2000).

It would appear that there is often a fine line between a clique being a supportive venue for growth and development and a distracting stressor, and as one girl stated anger can be taken out on others. However, what is the source of this anger? Is it related to letting go of parts of themselves as they struggle to fit the mold of slim, pretty and popular, the search for unattainable ‘perfection’ that appears to be part and parcel of our society? Perhaps since they are mired in this struggle, without assistance, they cannot see it and instead, try to be the best at it.

But what of the boys, are they any less at risk in their struggles for control, given the added feature of reduced feeling expression? However, perhaps being female, I am placing value on something that either has less value for boys, or is actually done in a different way. It would appear, at the very least that both boys and girls struggle with the nuances of maintaining the identity they are attempting to form amidst the challenges of social interactions and attachments.

It is here where parents can provide some much needed perspective. Parents in this study did attempt to monitor their son or daughter’s peer interactions and social-

emotional growth. The degree to which this was healthy and useful cannot be known with certainty without knowing more about parenting style, attachment security, and the parents' own experience and processing of any of their own rejection history if applicable. It is also well to remember that the students themselves did have multiple bits of advice and coping strategies that they offered during the course of the interview. These combined with parent support would be a powerful positive force.

Summary of Study Contributions

In addition to the anticipated contributions of this study described in the Introduction, the following emerged. Areas which were limited by measurement and thus not fully addressed will also be noted below.

Measurement/Research

The primary contributions of this study include the development of the intricacies of the measurement of early adolescent attachment through utilization and assessment of the BSQ. In addition the vagaries of determining the presence of peer rejection were addressed through use and consideration of student self-report through CSEQ-SR versus parent report. The conclusion here is that this is not 'either-or' but 'both-and' relative to parent and student information. Both were deemed useful and necessary in order to describe times of rejection in students' lives. Also, the challenges of comparing quantitative and qualitative assessment of the above were displayed. It was concluded that the above measures might have been best used for this study in a descriptive manner through review of the useful data contained rather than for categorizing. It was also seen that even with a small number of interview subjects who were each interviewed only for

30-40 minutes rich detailed information could be obtained about the social-emotional functioning of this group of students, lending additional importance to the role of qualitative data in description of active, living processes.

Theory

Although the intended additions to attachment theory from this study appear weak due to frequent inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative data, other areas appeared to emerge with more strength. The role of mentalization within peer and to some degree parent interactions was described. Although mentalization has been a part of the psychoanalytic psychology literature for quite some time, at least since the late 60's (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007), it appears less well developed in the writings of social workers. If one looks for application of mentalization to social issues, the options become even thinner. It is hoped that this document will widen the dialogue within the social work community, perhaps within the school social work community in particular, regarding the role of mentalization in early adolescent peer rejection issues and social attachments.

At first glance boys and girls appeared to be 'doing gender' and moving in their own cultures, especially relative to types of bullying. However, what emerged is the image of students as actually wanting similar things: positive attachments with peers and family, respect from others, self-respect, recognition and achievement. However, the close relationship between mothers and daughters appeared to encourage mothers to view their daughters as bullied more often than reported by the girls themselves. Perhaps this

says more about mothers' anxiety level relative to launching their daughters into adolescence that it actually does about current peer relationships.

Policy

School policy relative to bullying/relational aggression issues always contains the challenge of maintaining some degree of consistency in consequences while taking into account the nuances of a particular situation. In addition to the legal mandates described in the Introduction, mentalization offers an additional challenge. School staff need to avoid over- or under-mentalizing any given situation in order to make the best decision-a great challenge indeed.

Practice

For peer rejected youths, the school social worker needs to function beyond the rote provision of social skills training. This study has provided a backdrop that can reach further. In addition to the previously described attachment-oriented approach, mentalization can be utilized as a basis for analyzing student behavior as well as the staff approaches being utilized. We can then not only reflect upon our own thoughts and emotional processes but also attempt to, 'put ourselves in another's shoes' so to speak. A mentalization-oriented approach includes an approach that values this process as well as one which actively searches for signs of its occurring within our clients (J. Allen & Fonagy, 2007). Questions can be asked to encourage a student, parent, or staff member to reflect upon what another individual might be thinking or feeling and then make some prediction about this. The social worker would model positive reflective functioning

within the social work relationship. This approach can be utilized in group as well as individual contacts.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further researchers may wish to consider performing a similar study of attachment, peer rejection and gender with consideration of any of the following options:

1. Utilize multiple measures of attachment and peer rejection to allow for current measurement challenges.
2. Perform two interviews—one to focus more deeply in on attachment with less structured questions and one to go into more depth about peer relationships
3. Utilize multiple schools for comparison and to increase sample size.
4. Perform a longitudinal study of the above and compare.
5. Possibly consider, carefully, sensitively gathering data from some low risk students receiving in or out of school clinical services who may be more likely to show insecure attachment. Follow-up, support, and monitoring would already be linked to the student in or outside of school. However, issues of role conflict, risk of harm and possibly greater bias would need to be addressed.

In addition, the parent aspect of this study could be expanded to include utilizing measures to determine their attachment style for comparison with the students. However, any of these changes would present their own challenges.

Multiple fruitful areas for study exist. One would be the area of mentalization. What differences in mentalization might be seen between rejected and non-rejected

students? How would this compare with attachment style, gender or both? The area of trauma could be explored further with more specific and detailed questions related to time, nature, and feelings about occurrences. This could be compared with attachment style, peer rejection and gender. Pre and post studies could be conducted of attachment or mentalization oriented interventions. Totally qualitative studies could be conducted to explore any of the above areas. In addition, with an appropriate sample, cultural aspects of the above variables could be explored as well.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Research Problem

The problem of young adolescents being rejected by their peers is quite prevalent in schools. Active rejection in the form of overt bullying is more noticeable and may occur as often as twice an hour within the classroom (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). In fact 5 to 15% of children report significant, on-going bullying (Mishna, 2003) and nationally more than two million school children may be involved in the process either as bully or victim (Hillsberg & Spak, 2006). Given that the formation of selfhood and identity are influenced by interpersonal interactions and group membership (Ellemers et al., 2002; Paul & Cillessen, 2007), peer rejection of any kind, is a significant concern. In addition, mental health issues are more common in rejected peers (Boulton, 1999; Donohue, 2000; Peskin et al., 2007) as are disruptions in academic progress (Best, 1983; Killian et al., 2006) and attendance (Lopez & Dubois, 2005). Methods of rejection can differ by gender (Bosworth, 1999; Phelps, 2001). Some youths may misinterpret interactions (Peets et al., 2007) possibly due to differences in reflective functioning (Fonagy et al., 2004) and in internal working models.

Summary of Literature Review

The origins of peer rejection may include a number of factors. Students may become stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) as result of differences including cognitive ability (Malik & Furman, 1993; Margalit et al., 1999), and aggressive (Margalit et al., 1999; Merton, 1996), submissive (Margalit et al., 1999; Merton, 1996; Steinberg, 1996) withdrawn, or combination behavior (Harrist, 1997). Rejected students may lack social skills (Merton, 1996; Nation et al., 2008). For purposes of this study the possible impact of attachment style and gender were considered.

Attachment theory is an ethological approach to the development of the human personality (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). It purports to explain an “attachment behavioral system” which develops by the age of seven months between infants and caregivers in order to ensure survival of the infant within its environment (Main, 1996, p. 237). A “sensitive phase” is described wherein the infant, up until the age of 18-24 months has the opportunity to attach to the primary caregiver, in order to develop a “secure base” from which the infant may explore his or her environment (Main, 1996, p. 238). Throughout recent history various clinicians and researchers have contributed to the development of attachment theory and varied descriptions of attachment styles have emerged (see Chapter Two, Literature Review). For purposes of this study attachment styles have been delineated as secure, preoccupied, and dismissing. It is also noted that mentalization, the ability to know one’s own and the mind of others arises within the context of a secure attachment (Fonagy, 1999).

Attachment begins and is cradled within the family system. Two key attachment strands are secure base and exploratory behavior (Bowlby, 1988). Ideally within the family, connectedness and autonomy support are balanced (Clark & Ladd, 2000). This can become challenging during adolescence. Traumatic events can interfere with the development of secure attachment (Cook et al., 2005). Secure and dismissing attachment styles appear to be more stable during adolescence than preoccupied or unresolved, with a predominance of dismissing strategies (Ammaniti, 2000).

Overall, the underlying attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are basic strands to be considered, especially relative to affect regulation (Skowron & Dendy, 2004). Affect regulation is important in the context of the youth's interactions within the peer group. Group membership can serve a protective function (Newman & Newman, 2001). Bullying, however, can produce post-traumatic stress (Burril, 2006), especially if there are multiple occurrences (Finkelhor et al., 2005).

Larger systems including society and the school, act to construct gender. Schools may transmit patriarchal values (Schultz, 1991). Adolescent girls grapple with the dichotomous bind of attempting to separate from parents while remaining relationally focused (Stevens, 1997) as well as how to keep both themselves and the other present in a relationship (Gilligan et al., 1990). Sometimes relational aggression may develop. Relational aggression, the process of manipulating or damaging relationships in order to gain control, is more prevalent within or between groups of girls (Crick et al., 1996).

Boys are pushed to separate from their mothers at an early age and learn to hide thoughts and feelings (Pollack, 1998). At times this precludes them from reporting

bullying events. This effectively places them at risk until bullying becomes obvious to an adult within the school environment.

Attachment representations contain the potential for either positive or negative mental representations of the self or others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Fields, 1998) which could impact the daily interactions of adolescents with their peers.

Attachment theory potentially provides a lens through which to view peer relationships.

In addition, since gender is an identity which is always present in an individual's background (C. Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999), gender may potentially impact rejection dynamics along with attachment.

Exploration of this area is congruent with social work values since rejected youths can be viewed as a vulnerable, potentially oppressed population in need of empowerment. The school social worker needs to function within the complexity of the environment of the peer group and the school. School social workers frequently utilize social skills training to assist with peer relationship skills. Results have been mixed (Greca, 1993; Maag, 2005; Malik & Furman, 1993). Adding cognitive techniques can sometimes prolong the treatment effect, at least with younger children (Blonk, 1996). Cognitive techniques can be aimed at negative self and other attributions, often present in bullied youths (Dess, 2001). What's missing here are the relationship components which can be provided by comprehensive attachment-oriented strategies ranging from micro to macro interventions (Ornstein & Moses, 2002).

Research Questions

What is the relationship between attachment style, peer rejection, and gender in students at Middle School?

The following assumptions were made:

- 1) Peer rejected youths would be more likely to show insecure attachment styles.
- 2) Rejection would co-exist with different insecure attachment styles for girls and boys.

Summary of Methodology

This was a two phase mixed method study utilizing an Explanatory Follow-Up Explanations Design (Creswell & Clark, 2007, pp. 72, 73). The qualitative data has been utilized to explain and expand upon, as well as confirm/disconfirm the quantitative data. This was a predominantly white middle to upper middle class volunteer sample drawn from Middle School, this writer's place of employment. Parent consent and student assent were obtained (see Chapter Three for detailed procedure). The Behavior Systems Questionnaire (BSQ) and the CSEQ-SR were utilized to determine respectively attachment style and rejection status and a determination was made of potential interview candidates representing as many combinations as possible of attachment style, peer rejection status, and gender, given the limits of the sample and of the measures utilized. One 30-40 minute interview was obtained from each consenting/assenting participant. These were analyzed, summarized and compared with quantitative student results and parent demographic questionnaires.

Results

Relative to the actual research questions, the following can be said:

- 1) Regarding the first assumption, utilizing only student data, it was seen that nearly all non-rejected students showed a secure attachment style, so this does head in the direction of confirming the original assumption. However, this finding was dampened by the fact that the mixed insecure category also contained more non-rejected than rejected students although less than within the secure category. Also, confounding this finding somewhat was the fact that the two students with a dismissing attachment style were not rejected. Parent data changes the picture even more by increasing the number of secure rejected students.
- 2) Assessment of this assumption was most impacted by the small sample and instrumentation issues. It is therefore not possible to define specific trends and variable relationships in this area. The only possibly gender oriented findings appear to be the fact that there were no consistently dismissing (DPDF) girls and also that a girl held the only rating of dismissing parent and preoccupied friend (DPPF). Again, numbers are an issue here, and this an area for further research.

In another vein, it should also be recalled that even though there was delay between the study phases, this still remains a cross-sectional study. Since it only viewed student attachment during brief moments in time, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the attachment stability of these students. It is also not known how much their mood or

experiences on a particular day impacted their responses, especially on the quantitative scales.

What did emerge, however, was a rich description of social culture-its risks and resilience. The results confirmed the differences shown in the literature of styles of bullying, that relational aggression is more common in groups of girls. It did however show some blurring of gender differences in terms of indicating that both boys and girls valued relationships in terms of family, and friends, both developed caring volunteer activities within church and community and both appreciated recognition and achievement at school.

Ignored and bullied students emerged as at-risk and possibly traumatized groups. Clique dynamics were shown to be a strong force within the school which varied between adaptive and maladaptive in nature. Students showed themselves to be knowledgeable and often capable regarding social coping strategies. Anxiety regarding the early adolescent transition appeared to be a significant factor for both students and parents.

Limitations/Generalizability

It should be noted that this was a predominantly secure, non-clinical sample of white middle to upper middle class students who appeared to have adequate resources, an ample amount of parent support and generally positive coping strategies. They can only be viewed as a snapshot of this group of students at this point in time.

Conclusions/Implications

This has been a complex and challenging study of attachment, peer rejection, and gender in a non-clinical sample of students. Although this researcher had limited access to data that would definitively answer the original research questions, a wealth of other information did emerge, useful in its own right. Descriptions of peer interactions, feelings and attitudes are useful in planning social work services. The relatively enduring nature of the stigmatized isolated student's status points in the direction of early intervention for students who show difficulty with making positive connections with peers, or who are rejected by virtue of being different. This and the traumatic nature of bullying emphasize the importance of the rejected youth as a priority for social work intervention not only with individual students but also within groups and school wide. Indeed, this points to ever widening circles of societal ills that are slow to change but must be addressed. Perhaps the enthusiasm and the community-oriented nature of many of these students will prove useful in this regard.

In addition, the school social worker must remain mindful of the anxiety surrounding the middle school experience and the entry into adolescence not only for the students themselves but also for their parents. Developing positive attachments with school staff is critical for both. Developing a mentalizing approach to interactions will keep us ever mindful of our minds and of those whom we serve.

APPENDIX A

CHILD SELF-EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE-SELF REPORT (CSEQ-SR)

Children's Self Experiences Questionnaire – Self Report

(This scoring page was removed prior to administration.)

Code _____

The following measure was reported in:

Crick, N.R. & Grotpeter, J.K. (1996). Children's treatment by peers: Victims of relational and overt aggression, Development and Psychopathology, 8, 367-380.

This measure is the Children's Self-Experiences Questionnaire-Self Report and consists of three scales each containing five items. There are no items which need to be recoded.

Subscales

Overt Victimization: Items # 2, 4, 7, 10, 14

Relational Victimization: Items # 3, 6, 9, 11, 13

Recipient of Prosocial Behavior: Items # 1, 5, 8, 12, 15

Internal Uses

THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO ME

Code: _____

DIRECTIONS: Here is a list of things that sometimes happen to kids your age at school. How often do they happen to you at school?

EXAMPLE:

A. How often do you eat lunch at school?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

B. How often does your class go outside?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

1. How often does another kid give you help when you need it?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

2. How often do you get hit by another kid at school?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

3. How often do other kids leave you out on purpose when it is time to play or do an activity?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

4. How often does another kid yell at you and call you mean names?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

5. How often does another kid try to cheer you up when you feel sad or upset?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

6. How often does a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

7. How often do you get pushed or shoved by another kid at school?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

8. How often does another kid do something that makes you feel happy?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

9. How often does a classmate tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

10. How often does another kid kick you or pull your hair?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

11. How often does another kid say they won't like you unless you do what they want you to do?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

12. How often does another kid say something nice to you?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

13. How often does a kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

14. How often does another kid say they will beat you up if you don't do what they want you to do?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

15. How often do other kids let you know that they care about you?

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALMOST ALL THE TIME	ALL THE TIME

APPENDIX B
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent Questionnaire-Attachment, Peer Rejection and Gender Study

In order to t best utilize information received; some background information would be helpful. **Please review this list and place a checkmark in front of those phrases or sentences that apply to your child. Please feel free to provide additional information in any comment areas if you wish.**

My Child's

Name_____Age_____Grade_____Male____Female_____

Advisor_____

Background Information

1.) My child has: (Check only one.)

___ Attended District 23 schools throughout their education

___ Also attended other school districts: District locations and dates attended_____

2.) My child currently receives: (Check all that apply)

___Special Education services

___Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) (English as a second language instruction/ESL)

___ None of the above

3.) My child used to receive:

___Special Education services

Dates or grades_____

___Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI/ ESL) English as a Second Language

Dates or grades_____

___None of the above

Please continue on other side

Social Experiences

4.) My child: (Check only one)

___ *Has not* experienced peer bullying

___ *Has* experienced bullying through (Please check all that apply):

___ physical violence ___ threat or coercion

___ direct, negative disparaging comments (“Put-downs”)

___ rumor-spreading ___ shunning or disruption of relationships

5.) The following words or phrases generally apply to my child: (Please **circle** all that apply).

popular shy well-liked isolated

gets along well rejected has frequent peer conflicts has friends

has trouble making friends bullied sometimes bullies peers

Other Life Experiences

Please place a checkmark in the column of all that apply to your child and provide comments, and details on the line below the table if you wish.

6.) My child has experienced:

Age:	0-3 yrs.	4-5 yrs.	6-10 yrs.	11-14 yrs.
The death of someone close				
The serious illness of someone close				
Their own serious illness				
Any form of violence, abuse or neglect themselves				
Significant violence or threat of violence to another				
Parental divorce or separation				
A significant change in caretaker				

Comments: _____

Thank you so much for your assistance with this important study!

Barb Mestling LCSW, MacArthur Social Worker (847) 870-0531 or
bmestling@d23.org

APPENDIX C

BEHAVIORAL SYSTEMS QUESTIONNAIRE (BSQ)

(Instruction/scoring pages were removed prior to administration)

Department of Psychology
University of Denver
2155 South Race Street
Denver, Colorado 80208

Enclosed you will find a copy of the Behavioral Systems Questionnaire with scoring instructions.

- 1) On the questionnaire, you may only want to use certain scales or have participants rate only certain individuals. I do not mind this kind of reduction, but I would appreciate it if the scales that are used are kept intact (i.e., not reducing the number of items to one or two or rewriting specific items). These kinds of changes make it difficult to compare results. We are currently testing an abbreviated form of the BSQ, and hope to have it available soon.
- 2) I would appreciate receiving information about the results of your work.

I hope you find these scales useful. This letter gives you permission to use the inventory. Good luck with your research!

Sincerely,

Wyndol Furman, Ph.D.
Professor

Behavioral Systems Questionnaire

Scoring Instructions

Structure of the questionnaire

For each relationship type (romantic partners, parents, and friends), there is a separate BSQ. Most sections of the various BSQs are identical, except for the relationship being assessed. For each BSQ, the items are organized by behavioral system. Thus, there is a section of items assessing attachment styles, then a section about caregiving styles, and then a section on affiliation. For romantic partners there is also a final section assessing physical intimacy/ sexuality in the relationships.

Scoring

Dismissing, Secure, and Preoccupied behavioral system scores can be calculated for each of the behavioral systems and each relationship type (i.e., one can assess dismissing attachment styles with friends, etc.). For most purposes, however, we calculate Dismissing, Secure, and Pre-occupied relational style scores for each type of relationship by averaging the attachment, caregiving, and affiliation scales of a given style. Additionally, separate scales are calculated for the physical intimacy/sexuality behavioral system in romantic relationships.

Behavioral System Scores

Behavioral system scores are calculated for each relationship and each behavioral system. All behavioral system scores are the mean of the appropriate items. In order to allow for missing data, endorsement of two-thirds of a scale's items is suggested as a minimum for calculating the scale.

Attachment

Secure items = 2, 4, 8, 12, 13

Dismissing items = 5, 6, 10, 11, 14

Preoccupied items = 1, 3, 7, 9, 15

Caregiving

Secure items = 3, 6, 8, 11, 12

Dismissing items = 1, 2, 5, 9, 13

Preoccupied items = 4, 7, 10, 14, 15

Affiliation

Secure = 2, 6, 9, 10, 15

Dismissing = 4, 5, 8, 12, 14

Preoccupied = 1, 3, 7, 11, 13

Physical intimacy/sexuality

These scales are calculated only for relationships with romantic partners.

Secure = 3, 8, 10, 12, 14

Dismissing (avoidant) = 1, 4, 11, 15, 18

Dismissing (fun/experimentation) = 2, 5, 6, 16, 19

Preoccupied = 7, 9, 13, 17, 20

*There appear to be two ways in which the dismissing views get expressed in physical behavior. One is for the individual to avoid the physical/sexual aspects of romantic relationships. The second is to approach sexual behavior as something that is fun and enjoyable but without any emotional involvement connected to the behavior.

Behavioral Style Scores

For each relationship, three Behavioral Style Scores are calculated. These scores are the average of the three corresponding system scores.

- i. Secure Behavioral Style = mean of secure attachment, secure caregiving, and secure affiliation.
- ii. Dismissing Behavioral Style = mean of dismissing attachment, caregiving, and affiliation scores.
- iii. Preoccupied Behavioral Style = mean of preoccupied attachment, caregiving, and affiliation.

Future Directions

The BSQ has been tested in a number of samples already, and appropriate revisions have been made. There are, however, several issues that may entail further changes. A) We are currently testing an abbreviated version. B) The manifestation of dismissing and preoccupied styles in sexual behavior is still being examined. C) We have not included the sexuality items in deriving the relational style scores so as to make the scores for the different relationships comparable, but we may include it for some purposes. D) We are exploring some alternative means for deriving typological scores. Ultimately, we will report validation and reliability information in a manual. In the meantime, we would encourage you to examine the papers we have written using this measure, as they often contain information on its validity (e.g., Furman & Wehner, 1994; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchee, 2002).

You have our permission to use the measure for research purposes. We would appreciate knowing about any results you obtain that may help us address some of the remaining issues.

Code # _____

MY FRIENDS

For this questionnaire we are interested in how you TYPICALLY feel and act in your relationships with your friends. We are not interested in a specific friend but how you usually act in your relationships with your friends. Therefore, we want you to consider both your past and present friends when answering this questionnaire. Of course, your answers may be more influenced by the relationships that are/were more important to you. Some of these questions may not apply to all of your relationships, but consider how they TYPICALLY apply. Please use the following scale.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. "MY FRIENDS" act as if I count on them too much.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I consistently turn to "MY FRIENDS" when upset or worried.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am afraid that I turn to "MY FRIENDS" more often than they want me to.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I seek out "MY FRIENDS" when something bad happens.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am <u>not</u> the kind of person who quickly turns to "MY FRIENDS" in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I do <u>not</u> often ask "MY FRIENDS" to comfort me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel that "MY FRIENDS" believe that I depend on them too often.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I rely on "MY FRIENDS" when I'm having troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I worry that "MY FRIENDS" think I need to be comforted too much.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I rarely feel like I need help from "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
11. I rarely turn to "MY FRIENDS" when upset.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I seek out "MY FRIENDS" for comfort and support.	1	2	3	4	5
13. It's easy for me to turn to "MY FRIENDS" when I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I do <u>not</u> like to turn to "MY FRIENDS" when I'm bothered about something.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am afraid that "MY FRIENDS" think that I am too dependent.	1	2	3	4	5

Code: _____

The following statements refer to caring for friends. Again, we are interested in what is typical of you. Please circle only one response for each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I would rather "MY FRIENDS" work out their problems by themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am <u>not</u> comfortable dealing with "MY FRIENDS" when they are worried or bothered about a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoy being able to take care of "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
4. I often help "MY FRIENDS" more than they need or want.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I do <u>not</u> like having to comfort or reassure "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
6. I find it easy to be understanding of "MY FRIENDS" and their needs.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I get too wrapped up in my "MY FRIENDS'" worries.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel comfortable with "MY FRIENDS'" coming to me for help.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I do <u>not</u> like "MY FRIENDS" to depend on me for help.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I create difficulties by taking on "MY FRIENDS'" problems as if they were mine.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am comfortable with the responsibilities of caring for "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
12. It is relatively easy to respond to "MY FRIENDS'" needs.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I want "MY FRIENDS" to be independent and <u>not</u> need me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I get over-involved in "MY FRIENDS'" problems.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Sometimes I try to comfort "MY FRIENDS" more than the situation calls for.	1	2	3	4	5

The following statements refer to other feelings in relationships with friends. Again, we are interested in what is typical of you. Please circle only one response for each statement.

	1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1. I contribute more to making our relationship work than "MY FRIENDS" do.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Both "MY FRIENDS" and I make frequent efforts to see or talk with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Spending time together is more important to me than to "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
4. Truthfully, my relationships with "MY FRIENDS" are just not very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I do <u>not</u> want to put much energy into my relationship with "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
6. "MY FRIENDS" and I jointly make the important decisions in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I want to do more things with "MY FRIENDS" than they want to.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I do <u>not</u> put much effort into trying to have good relationships with "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
9. "MY FRIENDS" and I both contribute a lot to our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Our relationship is valued by both "MY FRIENDS" and me.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I find that "MY FRIENDS" are reluctant to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am <u>not</u> very invested in my relationships with "MY FRIENDS."	1	2	3	4	5
13. I want to be closer to "MY FRIENDS" than they want to be with me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am <u>not</u> very interested in making my relationships with "MY FRIENDS" the best they could be.	1	2	3	4	5
15. "MY FRIENDS" and I really try to understand each others' points of view.	1	2	3	4	5

In this questionnaire we asked you to talk about your relationships with different friends. Different people may have been thinking about friend(s) from the past, or those in the present, or a mix of the two. How did you complete this questionnaire?

1. I was mostly thinking about:

A. Friend(s) of the same sex **B.** Friend(s) of the opposite sex **C.** Both same and opposite sex friends

2. I was mostly thinking about:

A. Friend(s) in the present **B.** Friend(s) in the past **C.** Some present and some pastz

3. I was mostly thinking about:

A. One best friend **B.** 2 or 3 close friends **C.** A group of friends

Code # _____

MY PARENTS

For this questionnaire we are interested in how you TYPICALLY feel and act in your relationships with your parents. By parents, we mean all the people you consider to be parental figures; these figures may include natural, adopted, or step-parents—whomever you consider to be parental figures. Of course, your answers may be more influenced by the parent or parents that is/are more important to you. Some of these questions may not apply to all of your parental figures, but consider how they TYPICALLY apply. Please use the following scale.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. "MY PARENTS" act as if I count on them too much.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I consistently turn to "MY PARENTS" when I am upset or worried.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am afraid that I turn to "MY PARENTS" more often than they want me to.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I seek out "MY PARENTS" when something bad happens.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am <u>not</u> the kind of person who quickly turns to "MY PARENTS" in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I do <u>not</u> often ask "MY PARENTS" to comfort me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel that "MY PARENTS" believe that I depend on them too often.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I rely on "MY PARENTS" when I'm having troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I worry that "MY PARENTS" think I need to be comforted too much.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I rarely feel like I need help from "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
11. I rarely turn to "MY PARENTS" when I am upset.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I seek out "MY PARENTS" for comfort and support.	1	2	3	4	5
13. It is easy for me to turn to "MY PARENTS" when I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I do <u>not</u> like to turn to "MY PARENTS" when I'm bothered about something.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am afraid that "MY PARENTS" think I am too dependent.	1	2	3	4	5

Code: _____

The following statements refer to caring for your parents. Again, we are interested in what is typical of you. Please circle only one response for each statement.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I would rather "MY PARENTS" work out their problems by themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am <u>not</u> comfortable dealing with "MY PARENTS" when they are worried or bothered about a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoy being able to take care of "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
4. I often help "MY PARENTS" more than they need or want.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I do <u>not</u> like having to comfort or reassure "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
6. I find it easy to be understanding of "MY PARENTS" and their needs.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I get too wrapped up in my "MY PARENTS'" worries.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel comfortable with "MY PARENTS" coming to me for help.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I do <u>not</u> like "MY PARENTS" to depend on me for help.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I create difficulties by taking on "MY PARENTS'" problems as if they were mine.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am comfortable with the responsibilities of caring for "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
12. It is relatively easy to respond to "MY PARENTS'" needs.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I want "MY PARENTS" to be independent and <u>not</u> need me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I get over-involved in "MY PARENTS'" problems.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Sometimes I try to comfort "MY PARENTS" more than the situation calls for.	1	2	3	4	5

The following statements refer to other feelings in relationships with your parents. Again, we are interested in what is typical of you. Please circle only one response for each statement.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I contribute more to making our relationship work than "MY PARENTS" do.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Both "MY PARENTS" and I make frequent efforts to see or talk with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Spending time together is more important to me than to "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
4. Truthfully, my relationships with "MY PARENTS" are just not very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I do <u>not</u> want to put much energy into my relationship with "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
6. "MY PARENTS" and I jointly make the important decisions in our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I want to do more things with "MY PARENTS" than they want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I do <u>not</u> put much effort into trying to have good relationships with "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
9. "MY PARENTS" and I both contribute a lot to our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Our relationship is valued by both "MY PARENTS" and me.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I find that "MY PARENTS" are reluctant to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am <u>not</u> very invested in my relationships with "MY PARENTS."	1	2	3	4	5
13. I want to be closer to "MY PARENTS" than they want to be with me.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am <u>not</u> very interested in making my relationships with "MY PARENTS" the best they could be.	1	2	3	4	5
15. "MY PARENTS" and I really try to understand each others' points of view.	1	2	3	4	5

In this questionnaire we asked you to talk about your relationships with different parents. Different people may have been thinking about different parental figures. You may have thought mostly of one figure or several figures.

I was mostly thinking about: (check all that apply)

_____ A natural/adopted mother

_____ A natural/adopted father

_____ A step-mother

_____ A step-father

_____ Other _____

_____ Other _____

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APPENDIX D
PARENT COVER LETTER



Water Tower Campus
 820 N. Michigan Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60611
 Phone: (312) 915-7005
 Fax: (312) 915-7645

Important Information on the Attachment, Peer Rejection and Gender Study

Dear Parent (s):

I am currently a doctoral student in the Loyola University of Chicago School of Social Work. I will be completing a research study at ~~MacDonald's~~ Middle School in partial fulfillment of this degree. I am also the school social worker for ~~MacDonald's~~, and it is in this capacity that I have become interested in the topic of students who are rejected by their peers-a situation that is stressful for both students and parents.

We are all born with different temperaments. As we grow up we all develop different styles of attaching and relating to others. The purpose of this study is to find out how middle school students get along with important people in their lives. I would also like to know whether peer relationships differ in any way between girls and boys. This will assist me in planning appropriate interventions to help students with their peer relationships.

Enclosed please find parent and student permission forms. Also, since life experiences can affect how we relate to others, a Parent Questionnaire, which asks about your child's various life as well as social experiences has also been included.

The enclosed permission forms and questionnaire have been sent to a large sample of ~~MacDonald's~~ Middle School students. Receipt of this letter does not mean your son or daughter is having trouble making friends. However, potentially vulnerable students presently receiving counseling or therapy either from school social work personnel or from therapists outside of school will not be included in this study. If your child is currently receiving these services, please do not return the questionnaire or permission forms.

After you have read the consent, please sign the parent and child permission forms, complete the parent questionnaire and return all in the envelope provided, to your child's advisor by 10/01/08. Completion of the parent questionnaire is necessary in order for your child to participate.

Please send the envelope before returning. As described in detail in the enclosed consent, your child will receive MacDonald's gift certificates as a 'thank you' for their participation. In addition, all participants will be entered into a drawing, conducted by myself, for an AMC Theatre Entertainment Card.

I do hope that you will consider allowing your child to participate in this important study. However, non-participation will in no way jeopardize your child or his or her ability to receive any entitled services. If you have any questions, I can be reached at (847) 544-6874.

Thanks for your time!

Sincerely,
 Barbara A. Mestling MSW LCSW
 School Social Worker
 Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E
STUDENT COVER LETTER

Wanted



Students to participate in a research
study about how kids get along with important
people in their lives

All participants will receive

\$5.00 or more in McDonald's coupons

And will be entered in a drawing for a \$25.00

AMC Theatres Entertainment Card

There is information enclosed for both you and your
parents to read and sign if you are interested

If you have any questions, see Mrs. Mestling in
Room 115 next to the Library



APPENDIX F
PARENT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Parental Consent

Project Title: Attachment, Peer Rejection and Gender

Researcher: Barbara A. Mestling MSW, LCSW, School Social Worker, Doctoral candidate

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Randolph Lucente, Dissertation Committee Chair

You are being asked to give permission for your child to take part in a research study being conducted by Barbara Mestling for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Randolph Lucente in the School of Social Work at Loyola University of Chicago.

Parent permission forms have been mailed to a large sample of MacArthur students. Any child who wishes to participate may do so with parent consent. Children who wish to participate who have reading ability that is not commensurate with that of the questionnaire forms may elect, with parent permission, to have the surveys read to them. Potentially at-risk children who are currently receiving counseling or therapy either from school social work personnel or from therapists outside of school will not be included in this study. If your child is receiving these services at this time, please do not sign or return this consent form.

Since participation is voluntary, participation or non-participation in this study would not negatively impact your child's ability to receive any services to which he/she is entitled.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to allow your child to participate in the study.

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study is to find out how students get along with peers and parents

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your child to be in the study:

- You will need to complete and return the Parent Questionnaire along with this signed permission form.
- Your child will need to:

Fill out 2 short questionnaires: one to find out information about your child's peer interactions, and the other to gain information about your child's attachment style with both peers and parents. This will most likely be completed within one advisory period. School social work interns will pass out and collect the forms and give them to me. Students will indicate by checkmarks on their consent form whether they consent to fill

out the surveys, and whether they give consent to be interviewed. **Only a small number of a variety of students will be interviewed. Students chosen for interview do not necessarily have peer relationship problems. Even if your child is chosen to be interviewed, he or she can decline and participate only by filling out the short questionnaires.**

Follow-up **interviews** will be conducted in the following manner:

- Teachers will receive a written note asking them to send the student participant to the conference room during advisory period.
- Parents and students will receive a note by mail prior to this informing them of their child's interview appointment
- Interviews will be performed by this researcher in the conference room and will be approximately 30-40 minutes in length.
- Interviews will explore the students' experiences with peer relationships and important attachments to peers and parents.
- Interviews will be audiotaped to increase accuracy
- Students will be given passes to return to class if needed

Risks/Benefits:

It is possible that for some children discussion of relationships could cause some degree of emotional upset, which could also be upsetting for you as parent. Students can withdraw from any of the above procedures at any point if needed. They may also choose to answer some questions and not others. Also, a list of counseling resources will be provided to parents of all potential participants.

Participation in this research does not provide any direct benefits to the children involved or to their parents.

Compensation: Students who complete both questionnaires will receive \$5.00 in McDonalds certificates. Completion of a questionnaire includes following the directions of the questionnaire. Assistance with questionnaire directions will be provided as needed by the school social work interns who administer these forms during advisory period. Those who participate in an interview will receive an additional \$5.00 in McDonalds certificates. All student participants will be entered in a drawing, held by this researcher, for a \$25.00 Entertainment Card for AMC Theatres at Randhurst Mall. In the unlikely event that a student were to become upset during the course of a questionnaire or interview and decided to withdraw, he or she would still be allowed to keep the certificate(s).

Confidentiality:

- All information collected from your children will be kept confidential. Data will be stored on an external jump drive instead of the computer's hard drive. Questionnaires, interview notes, the jump drive, and audio-tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in this researcher's home office when not in use. Only designated trained research assistants/consultants will have limited access to some research information. Any reporting of information will be anonymous, disguised, or summarized for privacy purposes.
- Some exceptions to confidentiality do exist. If abuse is suspected during the course of the research, this researcher, as a mandated reporter will need to make a report to the Department of Children and Family Services. If this were to occur, per school policy, the situation would need to be discussed with a school administrator. Only the necessary abuse related information would be revealed to the administrator.
- Although confidentiality will be maintained, except as noted above, anonymity is not possible. Advisory teachers will collect permission forms and allow students to fill out questionnaires during advisory period. Students will become aware of each other's participation.
- A code system will be utilized for student questionnaires. This will allow this researcher to go back and interview students as needed for follow-up information. The list of names and corresponding codes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in this researcher's home office. Interviews will be transcribed by this researcher.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you and your child do not want to participate, you do not need to do so. Even if you decide to allow your child to participate and your child agrees to participate, he/she is free to answer some questions but not others or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. As stated previously, participating students would not be those who currently receive counseling/school social work services. However, participation or non-participation in this study would not negatively impact your child's ability to receive any services to which he/she is entitled.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me, Barb Mestling LCSW at _____ or my faculty sponsor at Loyola University Chicago, Dr. Randolph Lucente at (312) 915-7031.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

- ☐ I agree to complete the Parent Questionnaire
- ☐ I agree to allow my child to complete the 2 Child Surveys
- ☐ I agree to allow my child to participate in an audio-taped interview if selected.

Parent's/Guardian's Signature

Date

Name of Child

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX G
STUDENT ASSENT FORM



Chicago's Jesuit University

**LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO**

School of Social Work

 Water Tower Campus
 820 N. Michigan Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60611

 Phone: (312) 915-7005
 Fax: (312) 915-7645

Attachment, Peer Rejection, and Gender Study-Child Assent Form

Dear Student,

I AM LOOKING FOR KIDS WHO WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT HOW KIDS GET ALONG WITH PEERS AND PARENTS. This is a voluntary study, meaning you don't have to do it, but I would really appreciate your help. I would like for all students to have a great middle school experience. If I can get more information about how students handle important relationships, then I can help make this happen.

If you decide to participate, you will fill out two short surveys, during your advisory class period. A few of you may be interviewed 1 time for about 30-40 minutes, if it is OK with you, to get more information. The surveys/and or interviews will ask questions about your feelings about relationships with other kids and parents. All information is important, and all information will be kept confidential. However, you will not be anonymous, which means that other students may notice that you are leaving advisory to fill out surveys or be interviewed.

Here is what would happen if you were to take part in this research study:

- The social work interns would take you from advisory to the conference room across from the teacher's lounge where you will spend about one advisory period time filling out 2 surveys. If you need a pass to class you will receive one.
- If you will be participating in the interview portion of the study, you, your parents, and your advisory teacher will receive a note with your interview time. You will be interviewed by me in the conference room. Interviews will be audiotaped to help me remember your important information, but no one will listen to the tapes except me and my research assistants.
- Discussion of relationships could be somewhat upsetting for some students. If you decide to change your mind about participating or to answer some questions and not others, that is perfectly OK and will not be held against you. If you need someone to talk to about your feelings, that can be arranged.
- As mentioned above, your information will be kept confidential unless someone is hurting you, you are hurting yourself, or there is strong risk of harm to self or others.

There is a consent form with more details for your parent (s) to sign along with a short survey to complete. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT ALONG WITH YOUR PARENTS' FORMS TO YOUR ADVISOR BY: _____ If you fill out both survey forms, you will receive \$5.00 in McDonald's certificates and if you are also interviewed, you will receive another \$5.00 in McDonald's certificates for the interview as a thank you gift. Also, all study participants will be entered in a drawing conducted by me for a \$25.00 AMC Theatres Entertainment Card.

If you have any questions, please stop in and see me in Room 115 next to the library or ask your mom or dad to contact me at _____.

Sincerely,
 Mrs. Mestling
 School Social Worker

.....
 (Please check the box if this is OK with you) I _____ am willing to:
 (Please print your name)

☐ Fill out the surveys

☐ Be interviewed

 My Signature

APPENDIX H
COUNSELING RESOURCES



Water Tower Campus
 820 N. Michigan Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60611

Phone: (312) 915-7005
 Fax: (312) 915-7645

Dear Parents,

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in the *Attachment, Peer Rejection and Gender* research study. In the unlikely event that participation in the study causes areas of concern to arise for yourself or your child, I have listed two local counseling centers below. Both may be easily accessed for services:

Counseling Resource List

OMNI Youth Services

1111 W. Lake Cook Road
 Buffalo Grove, IL 60089
 (847)353-1500

Counseling for adolescents and families; includes 24 hour crisis assistance and assessment

Alexian Center for Mental Health

3350 West Salt Creek Lane, Unit 114
 Arlington Heights, IL 60005
 Phone: 847-952-7460
 Phone: 847-222-1754

Counseling for all ages

24 Hour counseling line: 800-432-5005

Referrals to private therapists can also be arranged through your insurance plan and Mrs. Mestling can be reached at ~~847-870-0531~~ for further suggestions if needed at (847) 870-0531.

APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Words in italics indicate a script this researcher will use to preface each portion of the interview.

Peer Relationships and Gender (This title is for this researcher's reference. It is not part of was read to the students)

Intro: Thank you, __ Student's Name __ for agreeing to be interviewed. I would like to ask you some questions about how kids make friends and get along with each other here at _____. This will help me to understand how to help students who have trouble getting along. If any question is unclear please let me know. Also if you prefer not to answer a particular question, that is ok. and you can let me know that too. If at any time you decide to ask me a question or stop the interview, that is also ok, even if we haven't finished. I will be audiotaping our conversation on this recorder to help me remember it. Do you have any questions before we start?

You know, kids behave all kinds of ways. Sometimes kids are playing around and try to make other kids do what they want. Sometimes kids say things that hurt another kid's feelings and some kids are ignored. Sometimes it's hard to know what kids are doing and sometimes kids bully other kids. These questions are about how you think kids treat one another here at Macarthur.

(The gender of the student being interviewed will be noted)

Each question will have an additional prompt if needed: Tell me about how girls' groups interact... How do boys bully each other? Etc.)

How do you feel about how students usually treat each other here?

How do kids usually treat you?

Tell me what the word "bullying" means to you.

Tell me about a time you saw or heard of someone being bullied. This could be yourself or someone else. This could also be a time you bullied someone.

Are some kids just ignored by others? If so, why?

If a new kid came to your grade, how could he or she make friends? Be popular?

Avoid being bullied?

Attachment. (This title is for this researcher's reference. It is not part of what was read to the students)

Intro: students often have relationships with lots of different people: parents, grandparents, and other family members as well as friends and classmates and, teachers, counselors, social workers, and other school workers.

I would like you to ask you some question about relationships with people in your life. As mentioned above, I will be audiotaping if you do not understand a question or prefer not to answer it, just let me know.

Who lives in your house?

Tell me about how people in your family get along.

Give me 3 words that describe your family.

Give me 3 words that describe your friends.

Who do you depend on?

Who depends on you?

Tell me about a time you felt unaccepted by others.

Who usually helps you?

Who do you usually help?

Who cares about you?

Who do you care about?

Tell me about a time you felt accepted by others.

*Well, (Student's **First Name**), I am finished asking you questions. Do you have anything you would like to ask me? Thank you so much for participating. You have been very helpful. (Student will be given a pass to the next class if the interview is not completed the end of the class period.)*

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VITA

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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