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Social and Emotional Development in Middle Childhood

Cassie and Becca had been best friends since first grade. When the girls were in fifth grade, Kelly moved into town. At first, the three of them were quite close. But something happened a few weeks ago. According to 10-year-old Cassie:

Becca kind of forgot me. They started to get really close and they just forgot me. And then they started ganging up on me and stuff. Like, after lunch we have a place where we meet and stuff. We get in a circle and just talk. And they'd put their shoulders together and they wouldn't let me, you know, in the circle. They would never talk to me, and they would never listen to what I had to say. I don't think I've ever done anything to them. I've always been nice to them. I feel like I don't want to go to school, because I don't know what they'll do every day. I talk to my mom but it kind of makes her mad because she says I should ignore them. But I can't. And I can't concentrate. They're like—they look at me and stuff like that. They stare at me. I can hear them saying stuff and whispering and they look right at me.

(Information from Simmons, 2002.)

Very few of us pass through middle childhood without experiencing the sting of peer rejection. As children between the ages of 6 and 12 spend more time in the company of age-mates, and correspondingly less time with parents, peers begin to assume a more prominent place in their lives and exert more influence on their behavior and development. Indeed, one of the most significant changes of middle childhood is the emergence of peer influence as a considerable power in shaping behavior. Sometimes the rule of “might makes right” prevails, as when an especially strong child dominates group activity. At other times, the complexity of social relationships, including popularity, sets the tone, as Cassie came to experience.

The emergence of new forms of *social control*—that is, ways of organizing behavior in relation to group life and society—is also apparent in the changing nature of children's relationships with their parents. Parents can no longer successfully demand blind obedience from their children, nor can they easily just pick them up and remove them from danger or from situations in which they are behaving badly. Parents can still monitor their children's whereabouts, but they must rely on their children's greater understanding of the consequences of their actions and on their desire to conform to the standards that have been set for them about behaving in ways that are safe, socially appropriate, and morally acceptable. As a result, parents' socialization techniques become more indirect, and they rely increasingly on discussion and explanation to influence their children's behavior.

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As their relationships with others change, so, too, do children's sense of themselves. As long as they spend their time primarily among family members, their social roles and sense of self are more or less predefined and determined. They are little brothers or older sisters, with all the expectations and privileges that go along with those roles. When children spend more time among their peers, however, the sense of self they acquired in their families no longer suffices, and they must form new identities appropriate to the new contexts they inhabit. The child who seems fearless at home and who dominates younger siblings may find that he or she needs to be more restrained on the playground with peers.

This chapter focuses on how new forms of social control are manifested in children's changing sense of self, moral development, peer interactions and friendships, and relationships with parents.

WARMING UP

1. Think about Cassie's experience of being excluded by Becca and Kelly. What might have led to that situation? Why would Becca and Kelly treat her that way? Should Cassie's mom intervene? If so, how? How might Cassie's rejection by her friends affect her in the future?
2. In the middle childhood years, children begin to spend increasing amounts of time using digital technologies and social networking. What are the pros and cons for children's social relationships?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Describe changes in the sense of self that occur during middle childhood.

Explain how self-esteem affects the middle childhood crisis that Erikson called *industry versus inferiority*.

A New Sense of Self

On our quests to create ourselves we brown girls play dress up. What is most fascinating about this ritual of imitation is what we choose to mimic—what we reach for in our mothers' closets. We move right on past the unglamorous garb of our mothers' day-to-day realities—the worn housedresses or beat-up slippers—and reach instead for the intimates. Slip our sassy little selves into their dressiest of dresses and sexiest of lingerie like being grown is like Christmas or Kwanzaa and can't come fast enough. Then we practice the deadly art of attitude—rollin' eyes, necks, and hips in mesmerizing synchronization, takin' out imaginary violators with razor-sharp tongues. (Morgan, 1999, pp. 29–30.)

Joan Morgan's reflection on playing dress-up surely resonates with anyone who remembers clomping around in their mother's high heels, with the hems of fancy dresses trailing behind. Dress-up is a common play activity toward the end of early childhood and in the first years of middle childhood. Morgan's point that it tends to reflect glamour, success, and even power is especially interesting in light of Erik Erikson's theory that the main challenge of middle childhood is to establish a sense of *competence*. As we explained in Chapter 1 (see p. 19), Erikson believed that development throughout life involves seeking answers to the question "Who am I?" At each *psychosocial stage*, the individual faces a particular challenge in his or her quest for identity. In middle childhood, when children are expected to develop more mature forms of behavior—pitching in around the house or solving more complicated problems at school—the main challenge is **industry versus inferiority**. Children who emerge from middle childhood with a sense of industry believe that

industry versus inferiority According to Erikson's theory, the stage during which children judge themselves to be industrious and successful at meeting the new challenges posed by adults at home and school, or inferior and incapable of meeting such challenges.

they are competent and effective at activities valued by adults and peers. Those who emerge with a sense of inferiority feel inadequate, believing themselves incapable of mastering the tasks expected of them.

In addition to general feelings of competence, the transition from early to middle childhood is accompanied by equally striking developments in how children think about themselves, the emergence of a new level of sensitivity to their personal standing among their peers, and their resulting efforts to maintain their self-esteem.

Changing Conceptions of the Self

A sizable body of evidence suggests that as children move from early childhood to middle childhood and then to adolescence, their sense of self undergoes marked changes that are significantly intertwined with cognitive and social developments (Côté, Bouffard, & Vezeau, 2014; Harter, 2012). One avenue of research concerns changes over time in the *structure* of the self—that is, how the self becomes increasingly complex, encompassing multiple features. The simplest distinction is between the *I-self*, and the *me-self*. As we discussed in Chapter 9 (p. 303), the *I-self* is a person's subjective sense of being a self-aware, unique individual who experiences the world in a particular way, whereas the *me-self* is the person's sense of his or her objective characteristics, such as physical appearance, abilities, and other personal features that are easily observed. The cognitive development of younger children is such that self-descriptions focus mainly on the concrete, objective self and include highly specific, loosely connected behavior, abilities, and preferences: "I live in a big house. I have brown eyes. I like to ride my pony." Rarely are children's self-descriptions combined into generalized, more abstract traits such as "being shy," or "being smart" (Côté, 2009; Harter, 2012). In middle childhood, however, self-descriptions become more abstract and increasingly oriented toward the possibilities of the self in the future.

The development of individual self-concepts based on limited, concrete characteristics to more abstract and stable conceptions is fueled by **social comparison**, the process of defining oneself in relationship to one's peers (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Sheskin, Bloom, & Wynn, 2014). There is no mystery about why social comparison begins to play a significant role in children's sense of themselves during middle childhood. The increased time they spend with their peers in both face-to-face and digital environments, and their greater ability to understand others' points of view, lead children to engage in a new kind of questioning about themselves. They must determine their answers to questions such as "Am I good at sports?" "Am I a good friend?" "Do the other kids like me?" Such questions have no absolute answer because there are no absolute criteria for success. Rather, success is measured in relationship to the performance of others in the social group. The many comparisons children make in a wide variety of settings provide them with a new overall sense of themselves.

With greater maturity, the use of social comparison becomes increasingly complex and subtle. When deliberate and pervasive social comparison becomes important at around 8 years of age, children are initially inclined to make overt social comparisons in interactions with their peers, saying such things as, "I'm finishing the math problems a lot faster than you are"

social comparison The process of defining oneself in relationship to one's peers.



Social comparison often takes the form of asking how one's friends are doing on a school assignment.

moodboard/Getty Images

or “I bet I beat your score in the video game.” But they soon discover that this kind of comparison is perceived as bragging and is likely to evoke negative reactions. As a consequence, they begin to develop more subtle ways of making social comparisons, asking questions such as, “What problem are you on?” or “What was your highest score?”

The targets of social comparison also change across middle childhood, extending well beyond one’s immediate peers. An example is the way that children begin to compare themselves with the vast array of characters portrayed in the media (Eyal & Te’eni-Harari, 2013; Gleason, Theran, & Newberg, 2017). By 12 years of age, television characters are common targets of social comparison (Comstock & Scharrer, 2010). Indeed, as we discuss in Chapter 15, social comparison with media characters is related to the body image of adolescents, as when teens compare their bodies to those of ultra-thin super models—comparisons that may impact mental and physical health (Eyal & Te’eni-Harari, 2013; Santarossa & Woodruff, 2017).

Finally, the opportunities for social comparison expand considerably as children gain increasing access to social media through various electronic devices. Posted text and images provide fertile ground for social comparison with friends, acquaintances, and media characters (Reinecke, 2017).

The many comparisons children make in a wide variety of settings contribute to a **differentiated self**—a sense of themselves as including a number of attributes that fluctuate in significance according to particular circumstances, roles, and relationships (Cohen, Spiegler, Young, Hankin, & Abela, 2014). In middle childhood, children may describe themselves as rowdy with friends, obnoxious with parents, and polite with grandparents. They may consider themselves to be smart at languages and dumb at biology. The appearance of such multiple selves in children’s self-descriptions makes it necessary for them to deal with the fact that they are, in certain respects, different people in different contexts. Interestingly, in middle childhood, children seem unconcerned about the proliferation of selves, even when the different selves they present are inconsistent. For example, when a researcher confronted a boy who claimed to be both rude and caring, the boy replied, “Well, you are caring with your friends and rude to people who don’t treat you nicely. There’s no problem” (Harter, 2015 p. 79).

The differentiated self is also apparent in children’s ability to construct **possible selves**—that is, hypothetical possibilities about what the self might be like in the future (Hardy et al., 2014; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Such possible selves may include *ideal*, or *hoped-for*, selves (what one wishes to become) or *feared selves* (what one is afraid of becoming). Such possible selves are evidence that the child is beginning to understand that the current, actual self is but one of many possible hypothetical selves.

Some developmentalists have argued that because the construction of multiple selves and self-possibilities intersects with changing social expectations to engage in different, more mature behavior, in middle childhood the self is inherently unstable (Harter, 2012). In the context of this instability, children may be especially motivated to explore the self and experiment with different self-possibilities. Increasing access to digital media during middle childhood presents a myriad of new ways to explore self-possibilities. One fascinating study used a questionnaire to examine how and why 600 9- to 18-year-olds in the Netherlands might use chat or instant messaging to present themselves as somehow different than they really are—for example, older, more “macho,” or more attractive (Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005). They found that young adolescents (9- to 13-year-olds) were significantly more likely than older adolescents (14- to 18-year-olds) to engage in such self-experimentation. When

differentiated self A sense of self as including many fluctuating attributes.

possible selves Possibilities about what the self might be like in the future.

asked for their reasons for pretending to be someone else on the Internet, adolescents reported three general motives:

- *Social compensation*: To feel less shy; to talk more easily about certain topics
- *Social facilitation*: To make new friends; to get a date; to get to know people more easily
- *Self-exploration*: To explore how others react to me; to try out how it feels to be someone else

The researchers found that, in addition to engaging in more self-experimentation overall, young adolescents were especially more likely than older adolescents to engage in experimentation for purposes of social facilitation—that is, to make new friends or get to know people more easily. This underscores an important point regarding the relationship between self-development and social relationships: Young adolescents may experiment with possible selves in the context of pursuing possible social relationships.

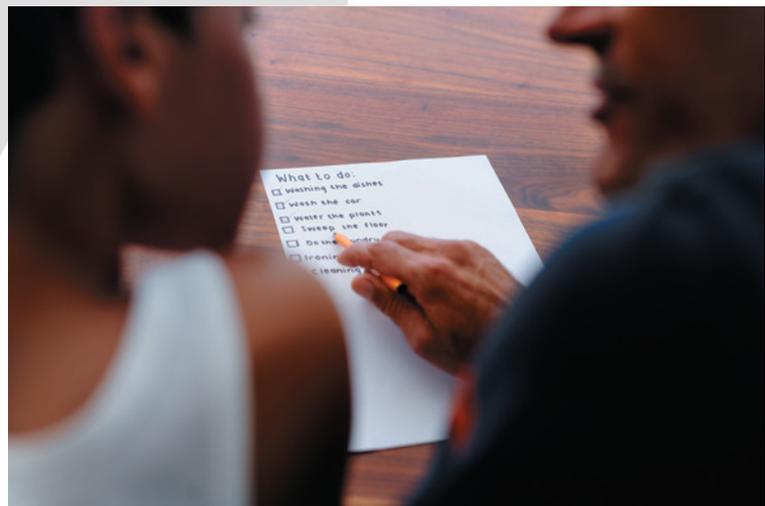
It is interesting to speculate about how recent technological advances may impact exploration and development of self. From personal Web pages and blogs to popular social networking sites—these new electronic forums are radically public and interactive, accessible to literally billions of people, any of whom may comment on the documents' contents. These personal digital expressions can be entirely rewritten to present an entirely different self—or selves—to the world.

Self-Esteem

Having and being a self is much more than an intellectual experience of comparing oneself to others or imagining future self possibilities. Indeed, one of the most powerful forms of evidence that selves exist at all is that they make trouble for us: We can lack confidence in ourselves, feel sorry for ourselves, or even despise ourselves. Selves, in other words, are important targets of evaluation that can profoundly affect how we act, learn, and experience our lives. **Self-esteem**, our evaluations of our own worth, is of considerable interest to developmentalists and clinicians precisely because of its pervasive influence on individual development and mental health.

Susan Harter, a developmental researcher and clinician, has been intrigued for decades by the question of children's development of self-esteem—that is, their evaluations of their own worth (1999). Consistent with the differentiation of self-conceptions described above, research on the development of self-esteem indicates that self-evaluations during middle childhood become similarly differentiated. During this period, children make distinctive evaluations of their competence and worth in several different areas, such as schoolwork, friendships, and sports. Self-esteem is also affected by the fact that children can now compare and evaluate their current, actual self against an ideal, hoped-for self.

self-esteem One's evaluation of one's own worth.



The positive feedback this girl receives for completing a list of tasks for the day will likely have an important impact on her developing self-esteem.

Foundations of Self-Esteem Developmentalists and clinicians agree that self-esteem is an important index of mental health. High self-esteem during childhood and adolescence has been linked to satisfaction and happiness in later life, while low self-esteem has been linked to depression, anxiety, and maladjustment in school, work, and social relationships (Harter, 2012;

Steiger, Allemand, Robins, & Fend, 2014; Sowislo, & Orth, 2013). Researchers, educators, counselors, and other developmentalists have therefore been eager to understand the foundations of self-esteem and how it can be nurtured.

Not surprisingly, self-esteem has been linked to patterns of child rearing and the quality of parent–child relationships (Khaleque, 2017; von Soest, Wichstrom, & Kvalem, 2016). In an early, extensive study of 10- to 12-year-old boys, Stanley Coopersmith (1967) found that parents of boys with high self-esteem (as determined by their answers to a questionnaire and their teachers' ratings) employed a style of parenting characterized by a mixture of firm control, promotion of high standards of behavior, encouragement of independence, and willingness to reason with their children. Coopersmith's data suggest that three parental characteristics combine to produce high self-esteem in middle childhood:

1. *Parents' acceptance of their children.* The mothers of sons with high self-esteem had closer, more affectionate relationships with their children than did mothers of children with low self-esteem. The children tended to interpret their mothers' interest as an indication of their personal importance.
2. *Parents' setting of clearly defined limits.* Parents who set and enforced strict limits on their children's activities gave their children a sense that norms are real and significant and made in the children's best interest.
3. *Parents' respect for individuality.* Within the limits set by the parents' sense of standards and social norms, the children with high self-esteem were allowed a great deal of individual self-expression. Parents showed respect for these children by reasoning with them and considering their points of view.

More recently, developmentalists have explored the relationship between parent–child relationships and developing self-esteem from middle childhood to late adolescence, and in numerous countries (Harris et al., 2015; Khaleque, 2017). A meta-analysis of more than 13,000 children in 16 countries found that children who perceived their parents as hostile or aggressive were significantly more likely to have poor self-esteem compared to peers who had no such perceptions of parents (Khaleque, 2017). Overall, this research supports the notion that parenting practices and the quality of parent–child relationships exert a positive impact on the development of self-esteem. According to a number of studies, children with lower self-esteem are more likely to define their self-worth in the context of their peer relationships and are more likely to associate with deviant peers, a topic to which we will return in Chapter 15.

APPLY > CONNECT > DISCUSS

In what ways do changing conceptions of self appear related to the cognitive developments characteristic of middle childhood (see Chapter 11)?

How might self-esteem be related to the development of self-regulation discussed in Chapter 9 (see pp. 308–317)?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Contrast moral development during middle childhood according to stages described by Piaget and levels and stages described by Kohlberg.

Explain what the social domain theory suggests about the moral development of children.

Point out the relationship between moral development and children's developing theory of mind.

Moral Development

During middle childhood, the child's new ability to internalize society's rules and standards leads to significant changes in moral development, just as it does in social development generally. Remember from Chapter 9 that as children develop, their reasoning and behaviors become less dependent on external rewards and punishments and more dependent on an internal, personal sense of right and wrong. According to Freud's *psychodynamic theory* (see Chapter 9, p. 305), this transition occurs with the development of the superego. The *superego*, remember, is the part of the personality that monitors and evaluates whether the individual's actions are morally appropriate. It is the individual's conscience—the *internalization* first of the same-sex parent's

standards and moral codes and then of society's. Once the superego has formed, the child is able to draw upon his or her own internal notions of right and wrong in making moral judgments rather than be driven by hope of reward or fear of reprisal.

Interest in the shift from external to internal control is also apparent in the *constructivist* view of moral development held by Piaget and those who follow in his footsteps (see Chapter 9, pp. 305–306). Much of their work has focused on exploring children's reasoning about what is morally right or wrong and the relationship between moral reasoning and moral behavior.

Constructivist View of Moral Development

In Chapter 9, we explained that for Piaget, moral development involves a shift from *heteronomous morality*—in which right and wrong are defined according to objective consequences of behavior—to **autonomous morality**, in which right and wrong are defined according to the person's internal motives and intentions (see p. 306). Piaget argued that the shift in moral reasoning takes place in the context of peer activities—playing games, in particular.

Around the age of 7 or 8, children begin to engage in a new form of play—games based on rules. By observing changes in how children play the game of marbles, Piaget found that young children (6 to 8 years of age) have a “mystical respect” for the rules of the game. They believe that rules are “eternal and unchangeable” because they have been handed down by authority figures such as parents, grandparents, or even God (Piaget, 1965/1995, pp. 206–207; see the box “Children's Ideas About God, pp. 450–451”). This way of thinking about rules corresponds, of course, to heteronomous morality. In contrast, and consistent with the onset of autonomous morality, older children (10 to 12 years of age) recognize that the rules are not mystical and unchangeable but are rational; and since they have been agreed upon by the players, they can be modified with the players' consent.

Piaget (1932/1965) believed that games are models of society—that is, that rule-based games have certain fundamental characteristics of social institutions. First, rule-based games remain basically the same as they are passed from one generation to the next. Thus, like social institutions, rule-based games provide an existing structure of rules about how to behave in specific social circumstances. Second, rule-based games can exist only if people agree to participate in them. There would be no religions, for example, if there were no practicing believers; there would be

autonomous morality The second and final stage of Piaget's theory of moral development, in which right and wrong are defined according to internal motives and intentions rather than objective consequences.



AFP/Getty Images

These Yemeni boys are playing street soccer. Throughout the world, children in middle childhood begin to play games based on rules, activities that Piaget considered fundamental to developing moral reasoning.



Jim West / Alamy

These members of the Michigan Grosse Pointe girls' ice hockey team know that breaking the rules is cheating. According to Piaget, participating in rule-governed games such as hockey contributes to children's moral development.

no game of marbles if children stopped playing it. In order to participate in social institutions, people must subordinate their immediate desires and behavior to a socially agreed-upon system, be it the beliefs and rituals of a religion or the rules of marbles. Piaget (1932/1965) linked this ability to play within a framework of rules to children's acquisition of respect for rules and a new level of moral understanding.

In Piaget's (1932/1965) view, it is through game-playing—that is, through the give-and-take of negotiating plans, settling disagreements, making and enforcing rules, and keeping and breaking promises—that children come to understand that social rules make cooperation with others possible. As a consequence of this understanding, peer groups can be self-governing and their members capable of autonomous moral thinking.

Whereas Piaget argued for the existence of two stages of moral reasoning, heteronomous and autonomous, Kohlberg proposed a sequence of six stages extending from childhood into adolescence and adulthood (Table 13.1). These six stages are grouped into three levels of moral reasoning: *preconventional*, *conventional*, and *postconventional* (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1969, 1976, 1984).

TABLE 13.1 Kohlberg: Six Moral Stages

Level/Stage	Doing Right	Doing Right: Reasons	Social Perspective
Preconventional Level (I)			
Stage 1—Heteronomous morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conform to rules. Obey for the sake of obedience Avoid causing physical harm to objects or people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid punishment. Follow the power of higher authority. 	Egocentric: doesn't distinguish the concerns and interest of others from one's own; actions evaluated according to their external, physical consequences rather than internal, psychological motivations
Stage 2—Instrumental morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow rules when in your best interest to do so. Act to serve your own interests and needs and allow others to do the same. Be fair, seen as an equal exchange. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow self and others to achieve their own interests and fulfill their own desires. 	Concrete individualistic: aware that each individual has personal interests that may conflict with those of others; what is "right" is relative
Conventional Level II			
Stage 3—Good-child morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live up to expectations of those who are close to you. Have good intentions and concern for others. Show trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude—all fundamental to mutual relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be a good person according to your own and others' standards. Care for others. Believe in the Golden Rule. Desire to maintain rules that enforce good behavior. 	Perspective of one's self in relation to others: awareness of shared feelings, agreements and expectations; ability to relate points of view through the Golden Rule
Stage 4—Law-and-order morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uphold the law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the community viable. 	Perspective of one's self in relation to the social group
Postconventional, or Principled, Level III			
Stage 5—Social-contract reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of the variety of values and opinions that may be held by individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a sense of obligation to obey the law due to a social contract that requires your to act for the welfare of the group. 	Perspective of one's self as a rational agent aware of the values and rights of others
Stage 6—Universal ethical principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have self-chosen ethical principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believe in universal moral principles. 	Perspective of a moral point of view that interprets the meanings and significance of social and individual actions

Information from Kohlberg, 1976.

The stages are characterized by ideas about what is right and the reasons for doing right, all of which evolve over time as egocentrism declines and is replaced by social perspective-taking. (In Chapter 14, we will discuss moral development in adolescence and evaluate Kohlberg's view as a whole.)

Kohlberg's method for studying moral reasoning was to ask children about stories in which people faced dilemmas involving the value of human life and property, people's obligations to each other, and the meaning of laws and rules. His most famous story is the "Heinz dilemma." In this story, a woman was near death from cancer. One drug might save her, but the druggist who had discovered it was charging \$2,000, 10 times what the drug cost him to make. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, borrowed money from friends but could only come up with about \$1,000. He pleaded with the druggist to sell it cheaper, or let him pay later, but the druggist refused. In desperation, Heinz broke into the pharmacy and stole the drug for his dying wife. After hearing the story, children are asked, "Should Heinz have done that? Why or why not?"

In Kohlberg's theory of moral development, individuals who are at the *preconventional level* see right and wrong in terms of external consequences to the individual for following or not following the rules. This level comprises stages 1 and 2.

Stage 1, *heteronomous morality*, coincides with the beginning of middle childhood, when children still exhibit egocentric thinking: In making judgments about right and wrong, they do not recognize the interests of others as distinct from their own. What is right or wrong for them must be right or wrong for others. Moreover, their judgments about the rightness and wrongness of an action are based on its objective outcome, which in this case is how powerful authorities would respond to the action. In stage 1, children might assert that Heinz must not steal the medicine because he will be put in jail.

Stage 2, *instrumental morality*, ordinarily is reached at around the age of 7 or 8, with a decline in egocentrism: Children can now recognize that different people have different perspectives and interests and that these may conflict with their own. Consequently, morality is seen as serving one's immediate interests and needs and letting others do the same. Similarly, fairness is understood in the context of an exchange system, of giving as much as you receive. Children at this stage might respond to the Heinz dilemma by saying that Heinz should steal the drug because someday he might have cancer and would want someone to steal it for him.

Stage 2 is the key transition associated with school-age children's ability to get along without adult supervision. Children no longer depend on a strong external source to define right and wrong; instead, reciprocal relationships between group members regulate their behavior. Sometimes the resulting behaviors are desirable ("I'll help you with your model if you help me with mine"); other times, they are less so ("I won't tell Mom you got detention today if you don't tell her I failed my math quiz"). In either case, this form of thinking allows children to regulate their actions with each other.

At the *conventional level* of moral reasoning, children's focus shifts from external consequences to society's standards and rules. The first phase of this shift occurs in stage 3, *good-child morality*, which children begin to reach around the age of 10 or 11. Children at this stage have come to see shared feelings and agreements, especially with people close to them, as more important than individual self-interest. One child quoted by Kohlberg (1984) said, "If I was Heinz, I would have stolen the drug for my wife. You can't put a price on love, no amount of gifts make love" (p. 629). Stage 3 is often equated with the golden rule (treat others as you wish to be treated), a moral rule of reciprocity found in scriptures in all major religions.

Clearly, the development of moral reasoning is closely associated with the child's increasing ability to consider the feelings and perspectives of others. In Chapter 8 (p. 278), we explained that around 4 to 5 years of age, children develop a *theory of mind*—that is, the ability to think about other people's mental states. Indeed, when judges and juries deliberate a criminal case, they devote a lot of time to understanding the mental

Children's Ideas About God

CAREN, AGE 9:

Once upon a time in Heaven. . . . God woke up from his nap. It was his birthday. But nobody knew it was his birthday but one angel. . . . And this angel rounds up all these other angels, and when he gets out of the shower, they have a surprise party for him. (Heller, 1986, cited in Barrett, 2001.)

An adult:

God is infinite, pervasive, and man finite and limited to a locality. Man cannot comprehend God as he can other things. God is without limits, without dimensions. (Ullah, 1984, cited in Barrett, 2001.)

The quotes above would seem to support the conclusion shared by many developmentalists that children's understanding of God moves from primitive, anthropomorphic conceptions—God has birthdays, naps, and showers—to abstract concepts that refer to God's infinite knowledge and power and existence beyond the realm of physical and natural laws.

This was certainly the view held by both Freud and Piaget, who believed that, early on, children's conceptions of God are similar to their conceptions of parents. Freud, for example, argued that the idea of God is a projection of our need for a protective parent figure. Piaget, as you would expect, adopted an approach that links children's changing conceptions of God to their changing cognitive systems. In particular, children initially attribute godlike properties to both God and their parents. Once they realize that their parents are fallible—vulnerable to errors in judgment and knowledge—they differentiate the divine from the merely human,

granting ultimate supremacy to God alone. Not until adolescence and the advent of abstract reasoning do children begin to understand God in terms of "infinite knowledge" and being "without limits."

Children's developing conceptions of God have been studied using a variety of methods. Children have been asked to describe God, or to draw pictures of God or the house that God lives in. In general, the studies suggest that major cognitive shifts occur across childhood. For example, Dimitris Pnevmatikos (2002) asked first- through fifth-grade Catholic and Greek Orthodox children living in Luxembourg to draw the house where God lives. He found a tendency for first- and second-graders to draw real houses or churches on Earth, sometimes next door to their own homes. Many third-graders, however, located the buildings in clouds, suggesting a more heavenly neighborhood. With increasing age, material buildings became less frequent in the drawings, which began to include symbolic elements, including heaven's gates, angels, and planets. Not until fourth grade did a very few children, perhaps on the threshold of adolescent abstract reasoning, begin to depict God as coexisting with qualities such as goodness, love, peace, and so on rather than as residing in tangible structures.

On the other hand, some developmentalists have argued that the differences between younger and older children's views of God, or even between children's and adults', are not as robust or dramatic as once believed and depend greatly on the demands of the task used to elicit those views. Some studies have found evidence that under certain circumstances, adults are prone to anthropomorphize God, much as children do. In one such study, adults of several faith traditions in the United States and India were told a story in which a boy was swimming in a swift and rocky

state of the accused: Did he or she intend to commit the crime? Was it premeditated? What was the motive? Research conducted with children in a number of countries indicates that the way that children judge someone's moral behavior may depend on their ability to understand the person's mental state (Ball, Smetana, & Sturge-Apple, 2017; Cowell et al., 2017; Fu, Xiao, Killen, & Lee, 2014; Sokol & Chandler, 2004).

Social Domain Theory

Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg all shared the view that young children rely on external consequences and authority in order to determine right and wrong. However, as we indicated in Chapter 9 (see p. 307), research within the social domain perspective has suggested that a relatively strong sense of fairness and others' welfare, as well as an ability to question the legitimacy of authority, may emerge at earlier ages than developmentalists once thought (Turiel, 2010). In this research, children often are presented with stories that create a conflict between authority on the one hand and fairness or others' welfare on the other. For example, children might be told of a situation in which two children are fighting on the school playground. A peer tells the two to stop fighting; however, a teacher says that it is okay for the fight to continue. Researchers find that children as young as 5 or 6 years of age will insist that



(a, b) Young children's drawings of the house where God lives often depict real houses, whereas (c) older children's drawings link God's house to abstract ideas such as "happiness," "love," and "peace."

river. His leg became caught between two rocks, and he began to struggle and pray. Although God (or Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, or Krishna, depending on the adult's faith) was answering another prayer in another part of the world when the boy started praying, before long God responded by pushing one of the rocks so the boy could get his leg out. The boy then struggled to the riverbank and fell over, exhausted (Barrett, 2001).

When asked to interpret the story, most adults reported that God had been busy answering another prayer and attended to the drowning boy as soon as business allowed. Attributing to God such qualities as limited attention suggests that adults, like children, are quite capable of anthropomorphizing God. The discrepancy between the findings that in some situations adults will anthropomorphize God but in others will describe God as infinite and without limits suggests that adults' conceptions of God are complex and depend at least in part on the context of reasoning.

Yet another challenge to the idea of a dramatic shift in conceptions of God comes from evidence that young children, like adults, are capable of distinguishing between merely human knowledge and

abilities and the infinite knowledge and power associated with God. In a version of the "false-belief task" (see Chapter 8, p. 278), 3- to 6-year-old children saw a closed cracker box that, when opened, revealed rocks. The children were asked what their mother, in another room, would think was in the closed box if she were to come in and see it on the table. Consistent with much of the theories-of-mind research, the youngest children replied "rocks," not appreciating that their mother could have a different point of view, whereas the 5- and 6-year-olds replied "crackers." However, when asked what God would think was in the box, children of all ages were equally likely to say "rocks." Similar results have been found for both U.S. and Mayan children (Barrett, Richert, & Driesenga, 2001; Knight, Sousa, Barrett, & Atran, 2004). Thus, the 5- and 6-year-olds seemed to understand that a "God's-eye view" is much different, and less limited, than their mother's.

Evidence that children's and adults' understanding of God may not be as different as once supposed suggests that anthropomorphic and abstract conceptions of God are not mutually exclusive but interact and remain relevant to the ways in which individuals try to make sense of the divine.

the peer's position to stop the fight is more legitimate than the teacher's position to allow it to continue (Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995).

The priority that children give to the morality of a particular act over the status of the authority figure has been found even in cultures, such as in Korea and China, that are assumed to attach great weight to authority (Helwig et al., 2011). This suggests that instead of deferring to rules and authority, children rely on concepts of harm and welfare in judging moral behavior. This fact led Elliot Turiel (2010) to conclude that reasoning about moral issues is quite different from reasoning about authority and social conventions.

Considerable evidence supports the claim that children distinguish between the moral domain and the social conventional domain when they judge how people should and should not behave (Killen, Elenbaas, & Rutland, 2016; Nucci, Creane, & Powers, 2015). Consequently, researchers have begun to look at the development of children's reasoning in the two separate domains. They have found that, while the bases for reasoning are different in the two domains, in both cases the pattern of reasoning develops from more concrete to more abstract.

Despite sometimes getting into fights, even young children know that fighting is generally wrong. This suggests that they are able to use concepts of harm and welfare in judging moral behavior.



Steven Gottlieb/Getty Images

In the moral domain, research indicates that young children's judgments are based on concepts of harm or welfare, whereas the judgments of older children and adolescents make use of the more abstract concepts of justice and rights. Children of all ages, however, are unlikely to judge moral transgressions, such as hitting or stealing, according to rules, the dictates of authority, or common practices. Hitting, for example, is wrong even if there is no rule against it, even if the school principal says it is okay, and even if hitting is a common behavior in a particular context.

In contrast to judgments in the moral domain, reasoning about social conventions takes into account rules, authority, and custom. However, whereas young children's reasoning about social conventions tends to emphasize social rules, that of older children tends to emphasize more abstract concepts such as social roles and the social order. For example, a young child might argue that it is wrong to call a teacher by her first name because there is a rule against it, but an older child might express concern that the students would begin to treat the teacher as a peer rather than as someone in authority (Turiel, 1983). Over the course of middle childhood, children become increasingly concerned with social group roles and effective group functioning (Killen et al., 2016). As you will discover later in this chapter, age-related changes in reasoning in the social conventional domain influence children's interpretations of peer rejection and social exclusion.

A current controversy among the developmental psychologists who study moral reasoning concerns cultural variations in distinguishing between the moral and social conventional domains. Using culturally appropriate versions of Turiel's stories, researchers have replicated his basic findings in a wide variety of societies (Fu et al., 2014). Other researchers, using slightly different methods to elicit judgments, have concluded that certain issues North Americans tend to see as matters of social convention may in some other cultures tend to be considered moral issues (Shweder et al., 2006). We will discuss the question of cross-cultural variation in this area again in Chapter 14 because most of the relevant data have been collected from adolescents and adults.

APPLY > CONNECT > DISCUSS

Academic integrity is a "hot button" issue on many high school and college campuses.

Review your school's definition of academic integrity.

To what extent does your school emphasize academic integrity as a moral issue rather than a social conventional issue?

Do you think middle-school children are more or less likely to view cheating as a moral or social conventional issue? Why?

Drawing on the theoretical insights of Piaget and Kohlberg, describe how middle schools might encourage the development of academic integrity in their students.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Describe social structures that emerge during middle childhood, along with the influence on these structures by dominant children.

Distinguish among children who are classified as popular, rejected, neglected, and controversial, as well as those affected by bullying.

Explain the role of cooperative experiences and competition in the development of children.

Provide examples of gender differences through gender relationships that often occur during middle childhood.

Explain the role of friendship in the lives of children during the middle childhood years.

Peer Relationships

Once children begin to spend significant amounts of time among their peers, they must learn to create a satisfying place for themselves within the social group. Their greater appreciation of social rules and their increased ability to consider other people's points of view are essential resources for this developmental task. But no matter how sensitive or sophisticated children may be about social relationships, there is no guarantee that other children will accept these children. In creating a life for themselves among peers, all children must learn to deal with issues of social status, come to terms with the possibility that they may not be liked, and deal with the peer conflicts that inevitably arise.

Peer Relationships and Social Status

Whenever a group of children exists over a period of time, a social structure emerges. **Social structures** are complex organizations of relationships among individuals. Developmentalists describe children's social structures in a couple of ways: One focuses on degree of *dominance* (who does and does not hold power over group members); the other focuses on degree of *popularity* (who is liked or disliked).

Dominance As is true for many other species, dominance hierarchies contribute to the functioning of human social groups, including those of children (see Chapter 9, pp. 318–319). Dominance hierarchies are usually established through a repeated pattern of fighting or arguing and then making up (Roseth et al., 2011). Over time, individuals who are skilled at managing the conflict–reconciliation pattern establish dominance within the group. **Dominant children** are those who control “resources”—toys, play spaces, the determination of group activities, and so forth.

Although dominance hierarchies are evident even in preschool social groups (Grueneisen & Tomasello, 2017), there are critical moments in development when children work hard to negotiate their positions with each other. One such moment is the transition between elementary and middle school, when new social groupings are being formed. In a longitudinal study that followed more than 100 students from fifth through seventh grades, Andrew Pellegrini and Jeffrey Long (2002) found that, while bullying is used by elementary and middle school children to influence the dominance hierarchy, its incidence peaks during the sixth grade, the first year of middle school, when children are working to establish dominance in new social groups, and then diminishes significantly during seventh grade, once the dominance patterns have been fully formed.

Popularity Beyond their relative position in a dominance hierarchy, children acquire social status based on how well they are liked by their peers. The importance of being popular with peers increases substantially during middle childhood (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010). In this period, children become keenly aware of their social structures and may attempt to influence their social standing among peers by seeking or avoiding relationships with particular individuals. So, for example, children of low social status will try to increase their status by befriending higher-status peers, while high-status individuals will attempt to distance themselves from their less-popular classmates (Dijkstra, Cillessen, & Borch, 2013). Who are the popular children? Who are the outcast or excluded children? What effect does having a particular peer status have on a child's development? Researchers who study the relative social status of group members usually begin in one of two ways. Using a *nomination procedure*, they may ask children to name their friends or to name children whom they would like to sit near, play with, or work with. Using a *rating procedure*, they may ask children to rank every child in the group according to a specific criterion, such as popularity within the group or desirability as a friend or as a teammate in sports. Data obtained through these techniques can then be used to construct *sociograms*, graphic representations of each child's relationship to all others in the group (Figure 13.1).

As you can imagine, an enormous amount of research has focused on children's social status and its implications for development. What follows is a summary of that work, grouped according to the four main *popularity statuses* that have been identified (Asher & Coie, 1990; Ladd, 1999; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006).

social structures Complex organizations of relationships between individuals.

dominant children In reference to social hierarchies, those children who control “resources” such as toys, play spaces, and decisions about group activities.

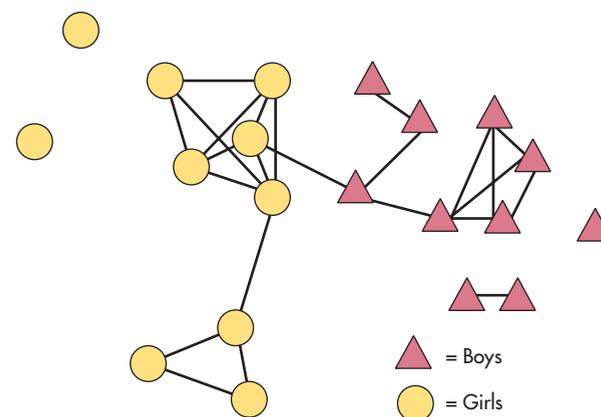


FIGURE 13.1 This sociogram shows the relationships among a group of fifth-grade boys and girls. Notice that the one boy who has a friendship with a girl has a friendship with two other boys but is not part of the larger group of boys, whereas the girl in this friendship is part of a group of girls. Two girls and one boy are social isolates. (Data from Gronlund, 1959.)

Popular Children. *Popular children* are those who receive the highest numbers of positive nominations, or the highest rankings, from their peers. In general, popular children tend to be rated as more physically attractive than children with other statuses, more skilled at social relationships, and, consistent with our discussion of social dominance, more aggressive (Kornbluh & Neal, 2016; Rubin et al., 2006). There are, however, important cultural differences in what constitutes “popular.” For instance, a study comparing Chinese and U.S. fifth-graders’ perceptions of what makes a peer popular found that Chinese children emphasized the importance of prosocial behaviors and academic competence and had unfavorable perceptions of aggression (Li, Xie, & Shi, 2012). The U.S. children, in contrast, emphasized the positive impact of social connections and appearance, as well as aggression and interactions with the opposite gender.

Rejected Children. *Rejected children* are those who receive few positive nominations or receive low rankings from their peers. They are actively disliked. Studies conducted in the United States, the Netherlands, and Korea found

that some children are rejected because they are shy and withdrawn (Parke et al., 1997; Shin, 2007). These children are often aware of their social failure, an awareness that makes them lonelier and more distressed about their social relationships. Other children may be rejected because of their appearance—particularly in the case of severe obesity (Harrist et al., 2016). Children who are not accepted or who are actively rejected by their peers are also at greater risk for being the victims of bullying, a topic we address in the following pages (Elledge, Elledge, Newgent, & Cavell, 2016). Interestingly, one of the most common reasons for rejection is aggressive behavior; children quite naturally do not like to be around others who behave unpleasantly or hurt them (Dodge et al., 2003). Aggressive rejected children overestimate their social skills and competence and underestimate how much their peers dislike them (Bellmore &

Cillessen, 2006; McQuade et al., 2016). They are also more likely to misinterpret various innocuous behaviors by peers (joking remarks, accidental bumping) as deliberate and hostile and to retaliate.

Rejected children experience difficulties that extend beyond the classroom into everyday life. They show higher levels of delinquency, substance abuse, and psychological disturbances compared with children who are accepted by their peers. Not surprisingly, they are almost twice as likely to be arrested as juvenile delinquents (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Howell, 2004).

Neglected Children. *Neglected children* are those who receive few nominations of any kind (McQuade et al., 2016). These children seem to be ignored by their peers rather than disliked. Neglected children, like rejected children, are less sociable than their peers, but they are neither aggressive nor overly shy and appear less concerned about their social status. Whereas severely obese children are at risk for peer rejection, children who are overweight are at risk for being neglected by their peers (Harrist et al., 2016). Neglected children also perform better academically



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Peer rejection is not only emotionally painful but is also associated with a number of difficulties that can extend well into the future, including delinquency, substance abuse, and psychological disturbances.

than rejected children, are more compliant in school, and are better liked by their teachers (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Controversial Children. As the label suggests, *controversial children* are those who receive both positive and negative nominations. Controversial children tend to behave even more aggressively than rejected children. However, they compensate for their aggression by joking about it or by using other social and cognitive skills to keep their social partners from becoming angry enough to break off the relationship (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993). Children who engage in high levels of relational aggression often generate a mixture of liking and disliking in their peers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rose, Swenson, & Carlson, 2004). Like neglected children, controversial children tend not to be particularly distressed by their relative lack of social success. The reason may be that such children are usually liked by at least one other child—and this may be sufficient to prevent loneliness. As we discuss below, chronically friendless children are at risk for a variety of psychosocial problems (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003).

Bullies and Their Victims

When 12-year-old Rebecca Sedwick leapt to her death, apparently in response to being bullied physically and on Facebook (some of the postings said, “Drink bleach and die”; “kill yourself because you’re ugly”), she brought national attention to the terrible consequences that can come from aggressive peer relationships. There is, in fact, mounting evidence that associates bullying with a variety of poor psychological and academic outcomes throughout childhood and adolescence and into adulthood (Cornell & Bradshaw, 2015; Copeland et al., 2013; Geoffroy et al., 2016; Salmivalli, Sainio, & Hodges, 2013). Bullies engage in unprovoked aggression intended to harm, intimidate, and/or dominate. Their attacks can be physical—pushing and hitting, for example—or verbal, as in teasing and name-calling. Children’s access to communication technologies—cell phones and the Internet, in particular—creates a whole new world in which bullies can intimidate through text messages and social media such as Facebook, ASKfm, Instagram, Twitter, and so on, anytime, anywhere (Tokunaga, 2010).

Because bullying is instrumental—that is, a means of controlling other people and getting one’s way—developmentalists consider it a form of **proactive aggression** (Pellegrini et al., 2010). Proactive aggression is distinguished from **reactive aggression**, which is usually impulsive and displayed in response to a perceived threat or provocation. Research on aggression in middle childhood finds that proactive aggression may even be valued in some peer groups and a basis for friendship and group formation, especially among middle school boys (Sentse et al., 2013). In the same vein, some researchers argue that bullies often have quite well-developed social skills (Peters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010) and are sometimes considered to be most popular by their 11- to 12-year-old classmates (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000).

The U.S. Department of Justice conducted a nationwide survey of schoolchildren in grades 6 through 12 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017) and found that boys are somewhat more inclined than girls to report bullying; bullying is reported more often by children from rural communities than by those from urban or suburban communities; and reports of bullying are highest among sixth-graders and then drop off dramatically between seventh and eighth grades. This last finding is consistent with the results of longitudinal studies showing that bullying reaches a peak during the transition between the elementary and middle school years, perhaps due to children’s need to establish dominance in their new peer groups (Pellegrini & Long, 2002).

proactive aggression A form of aggression, common to bullying, used as a means of controlling other people and getting one’s way.

reactive aggression A form of aggression that is usually impulsive and displayed in response to a perceived threat or provocation.

peer victimization The experiences of children who are chronically harassed, teased, and bullied by peers.

Bullies often target the same children in their attacks. In middle childhood, victims of chronic bullying are known by other children as the kids most often teased, bullied, and “picked on.” Developmentalists use the term **peer victimization** to describe the experiences of children who are chronically harassed, teased, and bullied at school, as was certainly the case for Rebecca Sedwick. Studies indicate that boys are more often victimized than girls, probably because they tend to hang out with other boys, and across a number of countries, boys are more likely to bully (Casper & Card, 2017; see Figure 13.2). And while bullies engage in proactive aggression, their victims are most likely to engage in reactive aggression—that is, retaliate against their aggressors (Lamarche, Brendgen, Boivin, Vitaro, Dionne, & Perusse, 2007; Ettekal & Ladd, 2017).

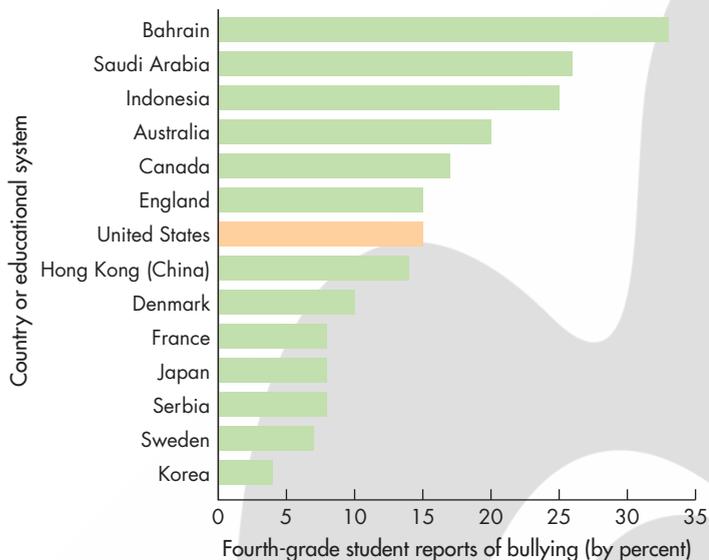


FIGURE 13.2 All too common for children in many countries, bullying is associated with a number of social and psychological problems, especially when it is experienced repeatedly over time. This figure presents experiences of bullying that occurred at least once a month in 2015, as reported by fourth-graders. (Data from Musu-Gillette et al., 2017.)

Victimized children experience a variety of social difficulties in addition to the mistreatment they receive directly from their peers. In general, they lose their tempers easily and are prone to depression, have difficulty in school, and act in an immature and dependent way (Schwartz, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 2015; Prinstein, Cheah, & Guver, 2005; Sweeting, Young, West, & Der, 2006). It isn’t clear, however, whether bullying causes these social difficulties or merely exacerbates preexisting problems that may make children easier targets of peer aggression. For example, a longitudinal study of fourth-through sixth-graders found that children who exhibited more symptoms of depression in fourth grade were more likely than their less-depressed counterparts to be victims of peer aggression in fifth grade and then more likely to be disliked by peers in sixth grade (Kochel, Ladd, & Rudolph, 2012). Peer victimization decreases from the middle school years through adolescence in part because bullying decreases but also because children learn to ignore, avoid, and/or retaliate against their aggressors (Pellegrini & Long, 2003).

The longitudinal research on bullies and victims has important implications for the timing and content of prevention and intervention efforts. It would seem that the early

elementary school years are a ripe time to introduce prevention measures that help children recognize and respond to bullying behaviors. However, intervention efforts may be most effective if applied during that part of early adolescence when children experience the major social transition from primary to secondary schools (Goodman, Stormshak, & Dishion, 2001; Pellegrini et al., 2010). With the understanding that a major function of bullying is to establish status and relationships in the peer group, some researchers have suggested that schools devise ways to help children foster more varied and closer peer relationships as they move from the socially more intimate context of elementary school to the larger, hard-to-navigate social scene of secondary school (see the box “Now Trending in Practice: Katy Butler Takes on Hollywood”).

Competition and Cooperation Among Peers

Spending significant time with one’s peers creates conditions for both competition and cooperation, facets of social life that bear importantly on children’s relationships with others. As you will see, the extent to which children are competitive or cooperative in their interactions and the effects of such interactions on peer relationships depend on both the contexts and cultures in which they occur.

Now TRENDING in PRACTICE

Katy Butler Takes on Hollywood

For Katy Butler, seventh and eighth grades were horrible. When she was 12, she came out as a lesbian to her best friend, who betrayed Katy's trust, spreading news about her sexual orientation throughout the school. Katy was devastated by the betrayal of someone she'd been close to for so many years. She also was profoundly affected by the bullying she experienced by her peers when they learned of her sexual orientation.

Katy attended a fairly large school, with more than 200 students in her grade. When homosexuality came up, which wasn't often, it was discussed in negative, disparaging terms. As word of Katy's sexual orientation spread, students began talking behind her back and would even approach her directly in hallways and classrooms to tell her that being gay was "gross" and "wrong," and call her names such as a "fag" and a "dyke." Katy often heard the expression, "That's so gay," used in casual conversation, which deeply offended her. The bullying Katy experienced wasn't only verbal. On several occasions, students physically pushed her into walls. One time, her hand was slammed into her locker, breaking her finger.

Katy decided to work with anti-bullying legislators on a better anti-bullying bill. She joined a lot of anti-bullying listservs and one day received an e-mail about a new movie focused on bullying. When she first watched it, she cried. The eye-opening and controversial documentary *Bully* provides a stark and honest account of five students who are mercilessly bullied at school. Two of the victims, both boys, killed themselves as a consequence of the relentless bullying. Katy easily identified with the students and felt that the movie had great value as an educational tool in schools. Victims would see that they are not alone in being bullied, and bullies might see and understand the profound social and emotional consequences of their behavior—more so than when they are simply lectured to by adults.

When *Bully* (directed by Lee Hirsch) was first released in 2011, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rated it as R, meaning that it couldn't be viewed by anyone younger than 17 years of age unless accompanied by a parent or an adult guardian. Katy realized that with the R rating meant that the film was unlikely to reach those most likely to be bullies or victims:

middle schoolers. So she took action. She went on Change.Org, a Web site that allows individuals to start their own petitions in the interest of human rights and social justice. Katy set up a petition demanding that the MPAA change the rating to PG-13. A PG-13 rating doesn't prohibit children from viewing a film; it simply cautions parents that the film may include material that may be inappropriate for children younger than 13 years of age. The petition garnered approximately 500,000 signatures. More importantly, it convinced the MPAA to adjust the rating from R to PG-13 (though the film had to be stripped of all expletives). Now the film is being used in middle schools across the country just as Katy had hoped: to educate kids about the devastating effects of bullying.

Katy's extraordinary experiences as a victim of bullying and an advocate for bully prevention and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) rights, shaped her goal of becoming a political activist. Her experiences and advocacy also led to her meeting and being mentored by the television talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres—which Katy described as "Awesome!"



(a)



(b)

"Katy Butler (a) led a crusade to change the rating of the movie *Bully* (b) so that it could be used for antibullying education in middle school."

The Role of Context A classic series of studies by Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Sherif (1956) provides the best evidence to date about the role of context in fostering cooperation and competition in children's social groups. In the most famous of these studies, 11-year-old boys, who were from similar backgrounds but were all strangers to one another, were divided into two groups and brought to two

separate summer camps in Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma. To ensure that the boys at each encampment formed a cohesive group, the adults arranged for them to encounter problems they could solve only by cooperating. They provided the ingredients for each day's dinner, for example, but left it to the boys themselves to prepare and apportion the food. By the end of the week, friendships had formed, and leaders had emerged within each group. Each group had adopted a name: the *Rattlers* and the *Eagles*.

When it was clear that both groups had formed a stable pattern of interactions, the adults let each group know about the other. The two groups soon expressed a keen desire to compete against each other, and the adults arranged for a tournament between the two, with prizes for the winners. On the first day of competition, the Eagles lost a tug-of-war with the Rattlers. Stung by their defeat, they burned the Rattlers' flag. In retaliation, the Rattlers seized the Eagles' flag. Scuffling and name-calling ensued. After 5 days in which hostility escalated, the experimenters took steps to reverse it by introducing a series of problems requiring cooperation between the groups. For example, they arranged for the food delivery truck to get stuck in mud (imagine kids at summer camp without food!). When efforts to push the truck failed, the boys came up with the idea of using their tug-of-war rope to pull out the truck, resulting in what Sherif and Sherif (1956) described as “jubilation over the common success” (p. 323). After the two groups had banded together to solve several other problems requiring cooperation, the boys' opinions of each other changed significantly. Mutual respect largely replaced hostility, and several of the boys formed intergroup friendships.

As developmentalists interested in peer-group relationships, Sherif and Sherif intentionally manipulated the contexts of children's interactions in ways that encouraged competitive or cooperative behavior. But as a moment's reflection will no doubt reveal, such context manipulations by adults are far from unusual in children's lives. Take your own educational experiences as an example. If you attended school in a Western culture, it is likely that you were part of educational practices that foster interpersonal comparisons and competition in which children who show themselves better than their peers are publicly praised and rewarded: Their papers and tests are showcased on classroom bulletin boards; they make honor roll; and their parents display bumper stickers proclaiming their academic excellence.

In the face of growing criticism of competition in U.S. classrooms, some educators have made efforts to manipulate the contexts of children's schooling through *cooperative learning programs*. These programs, which focus on students' working together on projects, sharing information, studying together for tests, and developing respect for each other's particular strengths, are meant to foster children's appreciation for their peers' successes as well as their own (Choi, Johnson, & Johnson, 2011). Research suggests that cooperative experiences in school promote prosocial behaviors and decrease bullying and aggression.

Sherif and Sherif's classic experiment and the research on cooperative learning environments carry an important lesson. Cooperation and competition are not fixed characteristics of individuals or of groups but are heavily influenced by the context in which they occur. The research also carries an important but controversial message—that competition is detrimental to peer group relationships, whereas cooperation nurtures relationships and children's sense of belonging. This message has been called into question, however, by research documenting cultural differences in the extent to which competition is valued and rewarded (Schneider et al., 2006).

The Role of Culture Most studies of cultural differences in children's tendencies to behave competitively or cooperatively with peers involve bringing children

together to play games that have been specifically designed to distinguish between children's use of competitive and cooperative game strategies. In one such example, two children play a board game in which they move tokens toward a goal. In some instances, the player who reaches the goal first gets a toy as a prize. In other instances, one player is given a toy before the game begins, and the children are told that if the child who was given the toy loses the game, the experimenter will take the toy away, and neither child will have a prize. Playing such games, children can, for example, play competitively, trying to maximize their own "wins" at the other child's expense, and even choose to compete when the only consequence for winning is to see the other player lose a toy. Alternatively, children can play cooperatively, allowing their opponents to win when there are no consequences for their own losses.

Using such experimentally designed games, researchers find that North American children tend to adopt competitive strategies, whereas children from Asia, Latin America, and other cultures that emphasize interdependence and the well-being of the group over individual success tend to adopt cooperative strategies (Domino, 1992; Kagan & Madsen, 1971; Shapira & Madsen, 1969).

At present there is no overarching explanation for which cultural factors in particular foster cooperation over competition. One leading possibility is that societies that value interdependence over independence also foster collaboration over competition (Kagitçibasi, 2013). However, a study of more than 1,000 preadolescent seventh-graders in Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Spain suggests a more complicated picture. In this study, Barry Schneider and his colleagues (Schneider et al., 2006) reasoned that a cultural emphasis on interdependence or independence would tend to be reflected at the individual level in children's *basic social goals* and that these goals would influence the extent to which children were inclined to be competitive in peer interactions. The researchers divided goals into three types, and to assess how strong each type was for the children, they had them fill out a questionnaire indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with particular statements, such as:

1. *Ego-oriented goals*—"I feel really successful when I can do better than my friends."
2. *Task-oriented goals*—"I feel really successful when I keep practicing hard."
3. *Cooperation goals*—"I feel really successful when my friends and I help each other do our best."

The researchers also distinguished between two forms of competition, which they assessed through a second questionnaire.

1. *Hypercompetitiveness* (the desire to win at any cost as a means of maintaining feelings of self-worth, often with manifestations of aggressiveness)— "[Friend's name] and I often compare our school marks to see who did better, and he [she] gets upset if I do better in our tests or assignments."
2. *Nonhostile social comparison* (friendly competition with little emotional investment in who wins)— "[Friend's name] and I often play sports or games against each other; we see who's better, but we don't really care who wins."



Schools are important sources of cooperative and competitive experiences with peers.

Hero Images/Getty Images

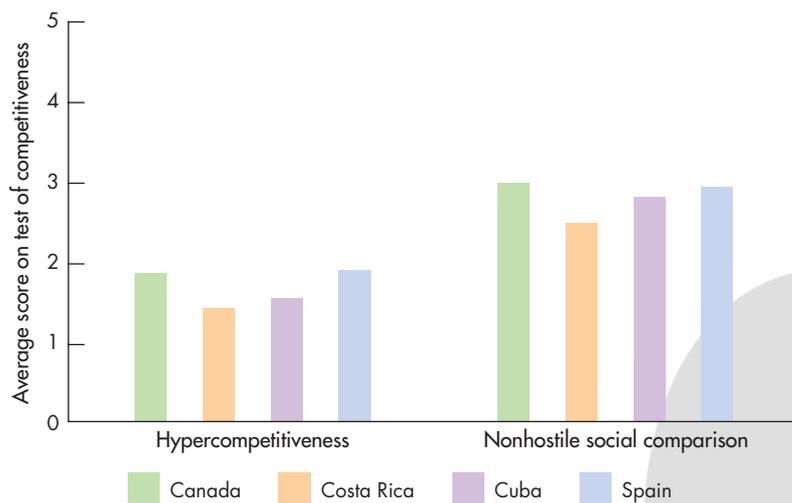


FIGURE 13.3 Hypercompetitiveness—that is, the desire to win at any cost—is significantly more common in the friendships of Canadian and Spanish children than in the friendships of Costa Rican and Cuban children. In contrast, nonhostile social comparison—that is, friendly competition—is not significantly different across the four cultures. (Data from Schneider et al., 2006.)

As shown in Figure 13.3, there was much more hypercompetitiveness in the friendships of Spanish and Canadian children than there was in the friendships of the Costa Rican and Cuban children. The researchers also found significant gender differences, with boys of all the cultures scoring significantly higher than girls in hypercompetitiveness. On the other hand, there were no significant cultural differences in nonhostile social comparison. As expected, competitive behavior correlated strongly with children's social goals. Across all four cultures, children with high ego orientation also tended to be more hypercompetitive and less cooperative. Importantly, the researchers found significant cultural differences in the effects of hypercompetition on children's relationships. In particular, whereas friendly competition seemed to enhance the closeness of Latin American boys, hypercompetition correlated with friendship termination. In the case of Canadian boys, a moderate amount of hypercompetition was associated with closer relationships, but higher levels threatened friendship bonds.

In short, this research suggests that certain kinds of competition among children are common across cultures and are not detrimental to peer relationships. It also suggests that even hypercompetitiveness may not necessarily be detrimental, depending in part on the culture in which it occurs.

Relationships Between Boys and Girls

During middle childhood, children of all cultures spend a great deal of time in sexually segregated groups (Fouts, Hallam, & Purandare, 2013; Pellegrini & Long, 2003). Studies in several countries have found that preferences for same-sex friends dominate children's social interactions both at home and in school, and they strengthen across the years of middle childhood, perhaps because of gender differences in activity preferences (Munroe & Romney, 2006; Neal, Neal, & Cappella, 2014; Poulin & Pedersen, 2007). In particular, the *male-style play* preferred by boys includes high levels of physical activity, such as horseplay and play fighting, whereas the *female-style play* preferred by girls includes more cooperative and prosocial forms of play, such as clapping and jump-rope games.

As children increasingly play with same-sex peers, they amplify each other's gender-typed behavior, further socializing gender-typed activity preferences. Eleanore Maccoby, a pioneer in the field of the development of gender differences, pointed out, however, that these two styles of play can be moderated depending on the extent of gender differentiation in the culture (Maccoby, 1998). That is, gender-typed play styles may be more subtle in children growing up in cultures that make few distinctions between males and females in terms of work, activities, and status but more evident in children in cultures that draw strict lines around male and female behavior. In many Western-style schools, for example, boys and girls are not seated or grouped together by gender, providing more opportunities for cross-gender interaction in the context of the classroom. These same children, however, are likely to be segregated on sports teams. Other cultures, in contrast, draw strict lines around boys and girls, perhaps sending only boys to school or sending boys and girls to separate schools. Regardless of how it might be moderated, gender segregation in

middle childhood is so common, and its consequences for socialization are so large, that Maccoby famously proposed the existence of “two cultures of childhood”—one for boys, the other for girls (Maccoby, 1998, p. 32; see the box “In the Field: Gender Politics on the Playground, p. 462”).

The role of culture in gender segregation and socialization has become increasingly visible in questions about the rights and needs of **gender-variant (transgender) children**—that is, children whose gender identity and/or preferences regarding clothing, activities, and/or playmates do not match what is culturally normative for the gender assigned at birth (Gray, Sweeney, Randazzo, & Levitt, 2016; Pfeffer, 2012; Rahilly, 2015). In the United States, for instance, questions of whether public schools should provide gender-neutral bathrooms or whether transgender individuals should serve in the military have recently risen to national prominence and sparked nationwide protests both for and against. Although research on the causes of gender variance is relatively new and inconclusive, much discussion centers on the constraints of what has been dubbed the **gender binary**—the cultural belief system that there are two “opposite” categories of gender (boys and girls). Developmentalists, educators, and parents seeking to provide safe and nurturing environments for gender-variant children suggest that the gender binary is an overly simplistic belief system that fails to capture the diversity of gender identity development, and it consequently creates profound difficulties for children whose emerging gender identities are misaligned with cultural norms (Dierckx, Motmans, Mortelmans, & T’sjoen, 2016; Pullen Sansfacon, Robichaus, & Dumas-Michaud, 2015; Steensma & Cohen-Kettenis, 2015). It is interesting to note in this context that the gender binary is not universal across cultures. In Samoa, for instance, individuals may identify as *fa’afafine*, a gender that is neither boy nor girl (Bartlett & Vasey, 2006). Increasingly, especially among young people, the cultural belief in the gender binary is eroding and being replaced with a view that gender identity is more of a continuum than a collection of opposing categories, as we discuss in more detail in Chapter 15.

Friendship: A Special Type of Relationship

Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), an American psychiatrist, proposed that the formation of close, one-on-one relationships, which he called *chumships*, is key to the development of social skills and competencies during middle childhood. In Sullivan’s words:

If you will look very closely at one of your children when he finally finds a chum . . . you will discover something very different in the relationship—namely, that your child begins to develop a new sensitivity to what matters to another person. And this is not in the sense of “what should I do to get what I want,” but instead “what should I do to contribute to the happiness or to support the prestige and feeling of



Jeongmee Yoon

Advertising and popular culture feed the pervasive notion that “pink is for girls; blue is for boys.” But children’s gender-based color preferences often change with age. Despite her years-long attachment to pink, 8-year-old Maia’s preferences have expanded to include purple.

gender-variant (transgender) children Children whose gender identity and/or preferences regarding clothing, activities, and/or playmates do not match what is culturally normative for the gender assigned at birth.

gender binary The cultural belief system that there are two “opposite” categories of gender (boys and girls).



LYNN JOHNSON/National Geographic Creative

Dancing with friends and family members, these best friends identify as *fa’afafine*, a gender other than boy or girl.

In The Field

Gender Politics on the Playground

Name:	MARJORIE GOODWIN
Education:	B.A. in Spanish (junior year in Spain), Lake Erie College; Ph.D. in anthropology, University of Pennsylvania
Current Position:	Professor of anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles
Career Objectives:	Study the culture and development of girls in the contexts of their relationships with each other and their position in society

MARJORIE GOODWIN, WHO DOES RESEARCH ON language, gender, and children's social organization, is taking notes during lunchtime at an elementary school in southern California. The children are gulping down their food in order to rush off to play. They understand that whichever group is first to occupy a particular area—the soccer field, the jungle gym, the basketball courts—is the group allowed to use the space. But the competition for space isn't overwhelming; this is no free-for-all. Although girls might argue over who gets the hopscotch area first, and boys might quarrel over the basketball court, there are traditions about which groups gain access to different play areas. Research on children's play (Thorne, 1993)—and probably your own personal memories of your elementary school days—indicate that boys and girls occupy different territories on elementary school playgrounds. Boys control large spaces intended for team sports. They occupy the grassy soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and basketball courts. In contrast, the space controlled by girls is only a small portion of that controlled by boys and tends to be cemented and closer to the school building.



Courtesy Marjorie Goodwin

Marjorie Goodwin

But as Goodwin is about to discover, today is different. A group of fifth-grade girls who like to play soccer is beginning to challenge the idea that the playing fields are an exclusively male space (Goodwin, 2002). Today these girls have rushed through lunch in order to beat the boys to the soccer field. Once they have secured the space, they begin to organize their teams. Soon, however,

two boys arrive, demanding their right to the field.

Amy: We have it today.

Paulo: We play soccer every day, okay?

Mark: It's more boys than girls.

Amy: So? Your point?

Mark: This is our field.

Amy: It's not your field. Did you pay for it? No. Your name is not written on this land.

Kathy: Mine is. K-A-T-H-Y. [as she writes her name]

The boys move away but return moments later with the male playground aide, who confronts the girls:

Male aide: Girls. Go somewhere else! The boys are coming to play and you took over their field. I think I'm gonna go and tell the vice principal. . . . When the boys are coming out here to play soccer, okay? You have no right to kick them off the field. Listen, I've seen it happen more than once. . . . You can go over there and play soccer [pointing to the jungle gym area]. You girls can go anywhere to do what you're doing.

worth-whileness of my chum." So far as I have been ever able to discover, nothing remotely like this appears before the age of, say, 8½, and sometimes it appears decidedly later. (pp. 245–246)

Sullivan believed that children's tendency to pick out one or a few other children with whom they feel this kind of special affinity is the childhood precursor of the need for interpersonal intimacy that will be called love when it is encountered again in adolescence. He further claimed that the failure to form such friendships in childhood creates a social deficit that is difficult to remedy later.

Laura: Why can't they go anywhere?

Male aide: They can't go on the black-top and play soccer. Somebody's gonna fall and hurt their knee.

Kathy: Well neither can we!

In her analysis of the dispute presented above, Goodwin argued that in negotiating access to the territory, the girls resisted and challenged not only the arguments of the boys ("Your name is not written on this land") and those of the male aide ("Why can't they go anywhere?") but also the very social structure of the playground. Historically the field had indeed belonged to boys. In all probability, this had been the case for generations of children attending the school.

True to his word, the aide summoned the vice principal, who, after hearing from all parties, formulated the problem in terms of exclusion, asking, "At school do we exclude anyone?" The girls responded with a long list of exclusionary practices typical of the boys' behavior: "They hog the ball," "Boys are always team captains," "They always pick boys first and then girls last." Apparently taking the girls' complaints to heart, the following year the school administrators instituted a rotating system for using the fields that allowed boys and girls equal access. Yet, despite the changes, Goodwin found that "boys continued to favor passing the ball to other boys; when they did pass to girls they did it with such force that girls often stopped playing. In addition, during the sixth grade, girls had to contend with boys grabbing their breasts in the midst of the game." The playground aides responsible for supervising the children's activities often looked on the boys' rejection of the girls on the playing field as



At many schools, including this one in the United Kingdom, girls tend to play on small, paved places close to the school building, whereas boys tend to occupy large fields.

Photofusion Picture Library / Alamy

part of a natural order. One even suggested that it prepared girls for their "appropriate" and "eventual" adult sex roles as sports spectators rather than participants.

Traditions by definition resist change. However, Goodwin's research indicates that some girls on some playgrounds are staging microevolutions, challenging the status quo, and working to define a new moral order on their own terms. In addition to providing insight into transformation in cross-gender relationships, Goodwin's research also challenges the idea, proposed by some, that girls, compared with boys, are less concerned about matters of justice and fairness and

instead tend to be more cooperative and focused on preserving harmony and cohesion (Goodwin, 2011). Goodwin argues that a narrow view of girls and women as nurturing and noncompetitive prevents us all—developmental scientists included—from seeing and studying girls and women as wielders of power and instruments of change (Goodwin, 2015). A broader view, Goodwin contends, permits the understanding that "we can not only obtain a better picture of children's worlds but also attempt to implement equity policies which promote children's fundamental democratic right to be spared oppression and humiliation in school" (Goodwin, 2006).

Sullivan's general view of the importance of friendships is widely shared by developmentalists who find that children with best friends score higher on measures of self-esteem and positive feelings of self-worth, whereas children with fewer or no friends tend to be timid, lacking in emotion regulation, and at risk for later psychological problems and bullying (Blair et al., 2015; Rubin et al., 2006; Burgess et al., 2006). Expanding on Sullivan's early work, researchers have identified several developmental functions of friendships (Adams, Santo, & Bukowski, 2011; Ciarrochi et al., 2017):

- *Companionship and play.* Children of all ages recognize that friends do fun things together. However, only in middle childhood does the developing

person appreciate that friends enjoy each other's company not only because they have interesting toys to share or live conveniently nearby to one another but because they share values and interests.

- *Conflict.* In middle childhood, friends become concerned with resolving conflict equitably, in a way that will repair and preserve the relationship. Thus, conflict provides opportunities to develop conflict resolution and communication skills, as well as an understanding of other points of view.
- *Help and support.* From loaning clothes or athletic equipment to defending against gossip or rumors, friends provide each other with many forms of help and support. Friends are also counted on to stick up for each other in the face of social threats or peer aggression.
- *Security and trust.* Security and trust are widely regarded as central features of friendships. Despite quarrels and conflicts, friends trust that their relationship is strong enough to transcend current difficulties and will endure over time.
- *Closeness and intimacy.* Compared to friendships of young children, those of middle childhood are marked by closeness and intimacy. Friends share feelings of acceptance, validation, and attachment. Self-disclosure and the sharing of secrets become defining features of close friends, especially among girls (Berndt, 2007).

Given the importance of friendships for children's feelings of well-being and social success, developmentalists are naturally interested in understanding the processes through which children form and maintain close relationships with their peers.

Friendship Stability Having close friends is critically important to children's development and well-being. Research indicates, however, that only about one-half of all close friendships are stable over the course of a school year (Bowker, 2004). What characteristics distinguish friendships that endure over time and those that fall apart? And is the ability to keep friends any more or less important than the ability to make friends?

It makes sense that the reasons for one's initial choice of friends would have a bearing on whether the relationship is likely to endure. Indeed, a key characteristic of a lasting relationship is the degree to which two new friends are similar to each other at the start of their friendship. Developmentalists find that similarity promotes equality in the relationship, positive reinforcement, and cooperative interactions—all factors associated with friendship stability (Poulin & Chan, 2010). Thus, friendship-keeping is enhanced when children share similar behavioral characteristics, even when those characteristics are maladaptive. For example, the stability of shy, withdrawn children's friendships is as high as that of non-shy peers *if* their friends are also shy and withdrawn (Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor et al., 2006).

The role of behavioral similarity in friendship stability is further illuminated in a short-term longitudinal study conducted by Wendy Ellis and Lynne Zарbatany (2007) that involved more than 600 children in fifth through eighth grades. Over the course of the first 3 months of a school year, the researchers collected information on the children's friendships, as well as on their behavioral characteristics, such as engaging in overt aggression (harming through physical or verbal actions such as hitting or threatening), engaging in relational aggression

(harming by disrupting social relationships or self-esteem), and being bullied by peers. They found that behavioral similarity tended to predict friendship stability and that some of the most unstable relationships were those in which the children were behaviorally mismatched. For example, children's relationships were more stable when both friends scored either high or low on a measure of relational aggression than when they were mismatched on this measure. The same was true when the characteristic was being bullied. New friendships between girls who had not been bullied by peers and those who had been bullied tended to falter quickly. The researchers speculated that girls face negative social consequences for hanging out with unpopular (bullied) peers and may abandon these new friends at the first sign that their relationship with them may be diminishing their own social status. In contrast, when both girls were victims of bullying, the friendship was relatively stable, probably because the girls could provide each other with much-needed comfort and support, with little risk of further drop in social status.

Importantly, the one exception Ellis and Zarbatany found to the pattern involved children who were high in measures of overt aggression. That is, when an aggressive child became friends with another aggressive child, the relationship was no more likely to endure than when the aggressive child became friends with a nonaggressive child. Although aggressive children had no trouble making new friends, they were at a distinct disadvantage in holding on to the friendships for any length of time.

A Constructivist Approach In addition to becoming skilled at making and keeping friends, during middle childhood, children develop a more sophisticated understanding of their friendships and the unique needs, motives, and goals of their friends. According to Robert Selman and his colleagues, this more complex understanding, which is a crucial ingredient for successful relationships, arises as a consequence of the higher levels of *perspective-taking* and declining *egocentrism* associated with the transition from preoperational to concrete-operational thinking (see Chapter 11, pp. 383–384). Based on extensive studies of children with and without friendship problems, Robert Selman and his colleagues (Selman, Levitt, & Schultz, 1997) proposed that friendship involves three general spheres of influence that are affected by the development of perspective-taking: friendship understanding, friendship skills, and friendship valuing.

Friendship understanding refers to the child's developing knowledge of the nature of friendship. Selman describes children as young philosophers who have theories about how to make friends, sustain relationships, and manage conflicts. For example, an immature friendship philosophy, typical of preschoolers, is "a friend is someone who gives me toys." Somewhat more mature, and typical of the early elementary school years, is the idea that "a friend is someone who always does what you want." With increasing interpersonal understanding and decreasing egocentrism, children will eventually come to define friendships with reference to balancing, and even cherishing, different perspectives as a means of ensuring both personal autonomy and intimacy in relationships. (We discuss this aspect further in Chapter 15.)

The second influence on friendships, *friendship skills*, refers to the specific action strategies that children use in developing their relationships. Like friendship understanding, friendship skills become increasingly sophisticated over time. The action strategies used by preschoolers are often impulsive and

focused on getting immediate needs met. In a conflict over a toy, for example, there may be grabbing and crying. In just a few years, however, children develop a capacity to take turns. Later, they manage conflicts by using complex strategies such as compromise, with each side agreeing to give up something in order to achieve a goal.

The final influence, *friendship valuing*, is the child's ability to make a personal commitment to a relationship and be emotionally invested and motivated to maintain it. As Selman and his colleagues observed, "to know friendship and practice friendship one must be involved in the process of being a good friend—one must take the risk of investing oneself in meaningful friendship experiences" (Selman, Levitt, & Schultz, 1997, p. 44). To see the development of friendship valuing, consider a girl who breaks a play date with a close friend because a new acquaintance invited her to go to the circus. If the girl is in the early years of middle childhood, she may defend her decision in a way that is dismissive of the relationship, saying something like "Well, I love the circus." An older child would be more likely to consider her action in light of the relationship and the needs of her friend, reasoning "Alex's feelings may be hurt if I go to the circus with Janine, so I'll invite her for a sleepover this weekend." Selman argues that friendship valuing depends on children's increasing capacity to take responsibility for their own contributions to the friendship and to see the personal consequences of their actions for the relationship.

Overall, middle childhood is a time during which children acquire a variety of resources for managing their relationships. This is particularly apparent when friends argue and fight. Whereas younger children rely on coercion to resolve their conflicts, as children progress through middle childhood, they become aware of several alternatives. In a major review of research on children's conflict resolutions, Danielle Popp and her colleagues (2008) found that, in middle childhood, children are more aware of the importance of **social repair mechanisms**, strategies that allow friends to remain friends even when serious differences temporarily drive them apart. Examples of social repair mechanisms include negotiation, disengaging before a disagreement escalates into a fight, staying nearby after a fight to smooth things over, and minimizing the importance of a conflict once it is over. Each of these strategies increases the likelihood that when the conflict is over, the children will still be friends. Social repair mechanisms take on importance in middle childhood because of children's changed social circumstances. When no caregiver is present, children must settle conflicts on their own.

social repair mechanisms Strategies that allow friends to remain friends even when serious differences temporarily drive them apart.

APPLY > CONNECT > DISCUSS

Refer to the story of Cassie and Becca, at the beginning of the chapter. Using concepts presented in this section, explain what might have motivated Becca and Kelly's behavior toward Cassie.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Describe parent–child relationships and changes in those relationships that may happen during middle childhood.

Point out some impacts of divorce on children and their development.

The Influence of Parents

In addition to monumental shifts in the nature and influence of peer relationships and friendships, middle childhood is a time of significant change in the relationship between children and their parents. As you will see, the new patterns of interaction that emerge in the family are felt also in other social arenas, including children's peer relationships.

Changing Interactions

As children grow older, the nature of parent–child interactions changes in a number of ways. For one thing, there is a marked decline in the amount of time that children and parents spend in each other’s company, and there is an increase in the time children spend with their peers. This reflects a process of **social reorientation** that begins in middle childhood, when children expand their focus and engagement from the family to the peer group. Social reorientation takes place in the context of significant changes in the ways that children and family members interact and communicate. As the child progresses through middle childhood, parents increasingly share control over their children’s lives with the children themselves (Lancaster et al., 2015; Martinez, Perez, & Cumsille, 2014). This sharing of responsibility between parents and children, called **coregulation**, is built on parent–child cooperation. It requires that parents work out methods of monitoring, guiding, and supporting their children when adults are not present; using the time parents are with their children to reinforce their children’s understandings of right and wrong, safe and unsafe, and when children need to go to adults for help. For coregulation to succeed, children must be willing to inform their parents of their whereabouts and activities and talk about their problems (Stattin, Kerr, & Tilton-Weaver, 2010).

Some other changes that take place in parent–child interactions are due to cognitive developments. Beginning in middle childhood, children undergo a process of **de-idealization** with respect to their parents—that is, they come to understand that their parents are not all-knowing or perfect but, rather, have faults; parents can make mistakes, miscommunicate, misunderstand, overreact, or underreact. Many children begin to take issue with the way their parents dress, their manner of speaking, or their behavior. A friend of ours reported that her 10-year-old once complained that she walked “like a nerd.” When children reach middle childhood, many parents—once revered and idolized—become not only mere humans but annoying sources of embarrassment. It is during this time that children begin to question the legitimacy of their parents’ authority and desire higher levels of autonomy in what they do, where they go, and with whom.

Parents, for their part, continue to consider their authority more legitimate than do their children. They also want to grant autonomy at later ages than their children desire. Parents worry about how involved they should become in their child’s schoolwork, what they should do if a child has academic problems, and how they should deal with behavior problems at school. Parents also wonder how much they should monitor their children’s social life and whether they should require their children to do chores around the house and, if so, what standards of performance to expect from them. In less developed countries, where a family’s survival often depends on putting children to work as early as possible, parents may be more likely to worry instead about their children’s ability to take care of younger siblings in the absence of adult supervision and to help with important economic tasks such as caring for livestock, hoeing weeds, or selling goods at the market (Weisner, 2014).

Cultural differences in parents’ standards of performance and the ways that parents monitor and control their children’s behaviors, reflect different *parental ethnotheories*.

social reorientation A process that begins in middle childhood, when children expand their focus and engagement from the family to the peer group.

coregulation A form of indirect social control in which parents and children cooperate to reinforce the children’s understandings of right and wrong and what is safe and unsafe when they are not under direct adult control.

de-idealization Children’s understanding that their parents are not all-knowing or perfect but, rather, have faults and can make mistakes.



These girls are being taught to weave tapestry in China’s Nawei Village. In this cultural context, it is likely that their parents’ expectations and standards for behavior center on the quality of their work.

TAO Images Limited / Alamy

parental ethnotheories Parents' values, beliefs, and goals about the development and care of children that reflect the traditions of their cultural communities.

Parental ethnotheories are parents' values, beliefs, and goals about the development and care of children that reflect the traditions of their cultural communities (Harkness & Super, 1996; Martinez et al., 2014). Different cultural traditions motivate parents to adopt particular parenting practices and prioritize particular goals in raising their children.

Parental ethnotheories are an example of how the macrosystem of the culture affects the microsystem of the family. As we would expect from Bronfenbrenner's theory (Chapter 1, p. 28), parental ethnotheories are not set in stone but respond to changes in other components of the ecological system. A case in point is how Chilean parental ethnotheories have transformed as a consequence of dramatic social and political changes associated with globalization (Martinez et al., 2014). For many generations, Chile was an authoritarian state characterized by limited personal freedoms. In such a context, promoting the development of children's autonomy made little sense. But Chile experienced radical social and political transitions in the 1970s and 1980s, and a democratic government was instituted in 1990. Parents who grew up in the context of democracy, which values the importance of individuals rights and responsibilities, were considerably less likely than their own parents to use controlling, authoritarian practices with their children (Martinez et al., 2006). Modern-day Chilean parents emphasize agency and autonomy as critical aspects of development that require careful give and take of freedom and control, geared to the developing competencies of their children (Martinez et al., 2014).



Peter Cavanagh / Alamy

Although parent-child relationships change dramatically during the middle childhood years, parents continue to play an important and influential role in their children's lives and development.

Parents and Peers

While family life and peer relationships sometimes appear to be two separate social worlds, they are linked in several important ways. As we explained in our discussion of parents' roles in *niche construction* (see Chapter 2, pp. 70–71), parents have considerable power in determining the contexts in which their children spend their time. They choose, for example, the neighborhood in which they live and where their children go to school (and, hence, who their children have as potential playmates and schoolmates). They also provide or deny their children opportunities to interact with other children in specific activities during nonschool hours, although this form of managing their children's social contacts with peers begins to decline during middle childhood (Schneider, 2000). The influence of parents on children's peer relationships is also apparent in the way parents monitor where their children are, whom they are with, and what they are doing. In general, when parents know about and monitor their children's activities and whereabouts, their children are less likely to engage in rule-breaking, delinquent behavior, and other forms of antisocial behavior (Ahmad, Smetana & Klimstra, 2015; Hadley et al., 2015; Marceau et al., 2015).

In addition to these very direct ways of organizing their children's social lives, parents affect peer relationships indirectly by providing working models of the ways people should interact with each other. There is ample evidence that interactional patterns established between parents and children influence peer relationships. Aggressive behavior is a good case in point. As noted in Chapter 9, parents may unwittingly encourage their children to behave aggressively when they themselves engage in coercive, power-assertive modes of discipline and socialization. Such *coercive family interaction patterns* have been linked to aggressive behavior in peer relationships, gang involvement, and sexual coercion in middle childhood and adolescence (Dishion & Snyder, 2016; Van Ryzin & Dishion, 2013).

Developmentalists have proposed a *developmental cascade model* to explain the relationship between coercive family interaction patterns and later peer relationships (Eiden et al., 2016; Waller et al., 2016). In general, coercive or callous, unemotional

parenting practices result in low levels of behavioral control and social competence and higher levels of aggression in early and middle childhood. These behaviors, in turn, result in peer rejection, further limiting children's opportunities for positive peer socialization. Consequently, children are more likely to seek relationships with other rejected, aggressive peers, who reinforce aggressive, antisocial behaviors.

In light of overwhelming evidence for the developmental cascade model, developmentalists have been eager to establish interventions that disrupt the process (Shaw et al., 2016). Whether or not this developmental cascade actually takes place depends critically on the stability of the environmental conditions and the extent to which they permit or disrupt parent-child interaction patterns. One very common example of such instability is the case of divorce.

Divorce

Although divorce rates in the United States have been declining over the past two decades, they remain among the highest in the world. Divorce impacts tens of thousands of children annually (Anderson, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In contrast, divorce rates are rising in many other countries, including in Asian, Eastern European, and other areas undergoing major social and economic transitions associated with globalization (Antonov & Medkov, 2007; Bourreau-Dubois & Doriat-Duban, 2016).

A range of problems has been associated with divorce. Children whose parents have divorced are twice as likely as children whose parents are still together to have problems in school, to act out, to be depressed and unhappy, to have lower self-esteem, and to be less socially responsible and competent (Amato, 2010). As adults, they are also more likely to have unstable romantic relationships, and their marriages are more likely to end in divorce or separation (Amato & Patterson, 2017).

Divorce leads to several changes in children's life experiences that might be expected to contribute to these negative outcomes. First, divorce often brings changes in children's economic status, often plunging families into poverty, especially for households headed by divorced women (Ananat & Michaels, 2008). Moreover, in the United States, nearly 25 percent of the custodial parents (more than 80 percent of whom are mothers) who are due child support receive no money at all from their former spouses, and roughly 30 percent receive only a portion of what is owed to them (Grail, 2009). As a consequence, about 25 percent of all custodial parents in 2007 found themselves living below the poverty threshold—twice the rate of the overall population. The changes in economic status often mean that after their parents' divorce, children have to move away from their friends and neighbors to poorer neighborhoods with different schools and lower-quality child care. These changes are difficult for children to deal with.

Second, parents raising children alone are trying to accomplish by themselves what is usually a demanding job for two adults. Both fathers and mothers who have sole custody of their children complain that they are overburdened by the necessity of juggling child care and household and financial responsibilities by themselves (Amato & Patterson, 2017). Divorce forces many parents to enter the workforce at the same time that they and their children are adapting to a new family configuration. In the United States, approximately 80 percent of custodial parents are in the labor force; most of them work full time (Grail, 2009). Because of the many demands on their parents' time, children of divorce not only receive less guidance and assistance but also tend to lose out on important kinds of social and intellectual stimulation (Hetherington, Collins, & Laursen, 1999).

In studying the consequences of divorce, some developmentalists employ a *crisis model* that views divorce as a time-limited disturbance to which parents and children

gradually adjust. Recently, however, developmentalists have created a *chronic strain model*, which recognizes that ongoing hardships, including financial insecurity and continuing conflict between parents, may affect children's lives and adjustment for many years to come. Paul Amato (2006) has attempted to capture the insights of both models—representing both the short-term trauma associated with divorce and its long-term effects—with the *divorce-stress-adjustment perspective*. This more inclusive model views marital dissolution not as a discrete event but as a complex process that varies depending on the specific stressors and protective factors influencing the short- and long-term adjustment of the family as a whole and of its individual members.

Although it makes intuitive sense that the losses associated with the breakup of a family are the cause of the various behavioral and social problems exhibited by children of divorce, a number of studies that collected data about children before their parents divorced have cast doubt on this idea.

An alternative to the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective, in which child problems begin with the divorce itself, is the *selection perspective*. According to this model, most of the negative effects of family disruption may be accounted for by problems that predate the divorce (Kim, 2011; Sun & Li, 2008). Several large longitudinal studies indicate that long-standing dysfunctional family patterns and inherent characteristics of parents, such as antisocial personality traits, create unhealthy environments for children, thereby contributing to their adjustment problems (Hetherington, 2006; Sun & Li, 2008).

There is, of course, a range of individual differences in how children adjust to divorce. In his comprehensive review of research in the area, Amato identified factors that have been found to affect adjustment (Amato, 2010; Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Factors that facilitate adjustment include active coping skills such as seeking social support; support from peers; and access to therapeutic interventions, including school-based support programs. Factors that impede adjustment include avoidant coping mechanisms, a tendency toward self-blame, and feelings of lack of control.

Amato, among others, realizes that research on the consequences of divorce fuels a contentious debate. Some see divorce as a source of a variety of social ills and child problems. Others, however, see it as a benign force that allows parents to seek happiness in new relationships and provides an escape for children otherwise trapped in dysfunctional families. On the strength of several decades of research, Amato concludes that “divorce benefits some individuals, leads others to experience temporary decrements in well-being that improve over time, and forces others on a downward cycle from which they might never fully recover” (Amato, 2000, p. 1285). Given the high divorce rates in the United States and the rising ones in other countries, continued research on the consequences of divorce remains a high priority.



UpperCut Images/SuperStock

One effect of high rates of divorce is high rates of remarriage, resulting in “blended families.” This photograph includes children from their parents’ previous marriages who were blended into a new family.

APPLY > CONNECT > DISCUSS

This section has presented evidence that coercive parenting practices are associated with the development of aggressive behavior and peer rejection in children. Review the previous section on peer relationships and suggest how parents might interact with children in ways that promote their ability to form successful friendships.

Looking Ahead

Sigmund Freud described the years of middle childhood as a period of *latency*, during which the sexual instincts that drive development lay dormant and the child experiences relative stability. Freud's idea that not much happens during middle childhood no doubt accounts for the lack of attention he devoted to the period. As documented in this and the previous two chapters, however, a host of significant changes occur between the ages of 6 and 12. Surveys of the world's cultures make it clear that adults everywhere assign 6- and 7-year-olds to a new social category, characterized by new responsibilities and by expectations for higher levels of independence, autonomy, and self-control.

Another universal characteristic of middle childhood is the rise of the peer group as a major context for development. For the first time, children must define their status within a group of relative equals without the intervention of adults. In many cultures, interactions with peers become coordinated, with games governed by rules serving as substitutes for adult control. The experience of negotiating these interactions and comparing themselves with peers contributes to children's mastery of the social conventions and moral rules that regulate their communities. Peer interactions also contribute to changing conceptions of self, providing crucial contexts within which children arrive at a new, more complex, and global sense of themselves. The significance of peer interactions is especially revealing in the damage they cause when characterized by rejection and bullying.

The new cognitive capacities that develop at this time are less obvious than changes in the social domain but are no less important. As we discussed in Chapters 11 and 12, thought processes in middle childhood become more logical, deliberate, and consistent. Children become more capable of thinking through actions and their consequences; they are able to engage in concentrated acts of deliberate learning in the absence of tangible rewards; they keep in mind the points of view of other people in a wider variety of contexts; and they learn to moderate their emotional reactions in order to facilitate smooth relationships with their parents and their peers. As we have emphasized several times, these cognitive changes must be considered as both cause and effect of the social changes discussed in this chapter.

Least visible are the biological changes that underpin children's apparent new mental capacities and modes of social interaction. The fact that children are bigger, stronger, and better coordinated is obvious enough. But only recently has modern anatomical and neurophysiological research provided evidence of such subtle changes as the proliferation of brain circuitry, changing relationships between different kinds of brain-wave activity, and the greatly expanded influence of the brain's frontal lobes. Without such biological changes, the cognitive and social changes we have reviewed would not be possible. By the same token, when children are severely deprived of experience, such biological changes are disrupted.

The existence of a universal pattern of changes associated with middle childhood in no way contradicts the fact that there are significant cultural variations in the particular ways that 6- to 12-year-old children's lives are organized. The beliefs and values of a culture shape and are transmitted through parenting practices, parental ethnotheories, and school curricula. Both interpersonal (family and peers) and institutional (schools) practices contribute to the *niche construction* of middle childhood and position children for their next developmental step: adolescence.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Summarize the new responsibilities and expectations that occur for children at around ages 6 and 7.

INSIGHT AND INTEGRATION

1. Consider the progression of moral development during the middle childhood years (from the preconventional through the conventional levels). How does this progression relate to children's social relationships and friendships?
2. Explain how identity development and social status might be connected. What is the role of culture in this connection?

SUMMARY

A New Sense of Self

- In middle childhood, there is a shift from self-concepts based on limited, concrete characteristics to more abstract, stable conceptions arrived at through social comparison.
- For Erikson, the crisis of middle childhood is that of industry versus inferiority. Positive self-esteem is associated with a sense of self as industrious.
- According to Harter, in middle childhood, self-evaluations become more differentiated, more integrated into an overall sense of self-worth, and more in keeping with judgments made by others. Children measure themselves against an “ideal self.”
- High self-esteem may be linked to an authoritative parenting style. However, cross-cultural research suggests a more complicated picture of both self-esteem and the role of parenting practices.

Moral Development

- According to Piaget, in middle childhood there is a shift to autonomous morality, in which judgments of right and wrong are based on people's intentions rather than on the objective consequences of their behavior. Experience with rule-based games makes possible this shift and the emergence of self-governing peer groups.
- Kohlberg proposed six stages of moral reasoning, with children in middle childhood moving from the stage of heteronomous morality, based on authority and objective consequences, to the stage of instrumental morality, based on one's own and others' self-interests, and then to good-child morality, characterized by concern about others and their expectations and needs.
- Social domain theory suggests that even young children distinguish between moral and social conventional domains, basing moral judgments on concepts of harm and welfare, a basis that shifts, over time, to more abstract concepts of justice and rights.
- The shift in moral reasoning from objective consequences to internal motives may be made possible by children's developing theories of mind, especially with respect to their increasing ability to interpret other people's behaviors in light of their mental states.

Peer Relationships

- Whenever a peer group forms, a social structure emerges. These structures are often described in one of two ways:
 - In terms of dominance hierarchies, which are often influenced by bullying.
 - In terms of relative popularity, with children often falling into one of four popularity statuses—popular, rejected, neglected, or controversial.
- Bullies engage in proactive aggression, intending to control and dominate others; victims often experience social and psychological problems; bullying peaks between the elementary and middle school years.
- Contexts may promote cooperation or competition in children's interactions. The extent, nature, and effects of competition may be influenced by culture.
- In middle childhood, gender differences in play style increase gender segregation, although the boundaries between boys and girls are far from impermeable.
- Friendship becomes important in middle childhood, and close friendships may contribute to self-esteem, providing models and contexts for developing social skills.
- Children tend to choose friends who are similar to themselves and with whom they interact well.
- Friendship stability is promoted by similarity, including in behavioral characteristics. Overly aggressive children have difficulty maintaining friendships.
- The changes in friendship of middle childhood may be possible because declining egocentrism and increased perspective-taking lead to increases in children's understanding of friendship, friendship skills, and commitment to friendships.

The Influence of Parents

- Associated with the social reorientation that takes place during middle childhood, parents and children spend less time together, and parents increasingly share control over their children's lives with the children themselves—a process called *coregulation*.

- Parental ethnotheories, that is, parents' beliefs and goals about how children should be raised, reflect cultural traditions and impact how parents interact with their children.
- Children whose parents divorce are more likely than other children to have problems in a range of areas. According to the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective, these problems stem from both the short-term trauma of divorce and its long-term effects. The selection perspective attributes problems not to

divorce but to long-standing family patterns and to parents' characteristics that children have inherited.

Looking Ahead

- Around the world, despite considerable cultural variations, the ages of 6 and 7 mark the beginning of new responsibilities and expectations. Closely associated with these changes are the rise of the peer group as a context for development and new cognitive capacities.

Key Terms

industry versus inferiority, p. 442
 social comparison, p. 443
 differentiated self, p. 444
 possible selves, p. 444
 self-esteem, p. 445
 autonomous morality, p. 447
 social structures, p. 453

dominant children, p. 453
 proactive aggression, p. 455
 reactive aggression, p. 455
 peer victimization, p. 456
 gender-variant (transgender) children, p. 461
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social repair mechanisms, p. 466
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