

Children's Peer Selection: Experimental Examination of the Role of Self-Perceptions

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Although previous studies have examined characteristics of children selected as friends, little research has examined the role played by characteristics of the selecting child. In 2 experimental studies that examined the role of self-perceptions in peer selection, participants (91 seventh graders in Study 1 and 83 third graders in Study 2) viewed various evaluations of themselves. Participants either believed evaluations were written by unfamiliar peers (Study 1) or were asked to imagine that the views of puppets were views of unfamiliar peers (Study 2). Participants were asked to select the peers they wished to meet and interact with. When evaluations were related to specific competence domains, 7th graders preferred positive peers to negative peers, whereas 3rd graders selected peers who viewed them as they viewed themselves. When evaluations were related to global self-worth, children's selections were unrelated to views of their own global worth. Selection of a globally negative peer was associated with attachment-insecurity/maternal-rejection and depressive symptoms.

There is convergent evidence that starting at very young ages, children make choices about the peers they prefer and with whom they wish to spend time. Although young children may be placed in larger group settings about which they have no choice (e.g., classrooms, neighborhoods), young children within groups do not interact with each other equally or randomly; rather, they spend most of their time with a small number of preferred peers (Hinde, Titmus, Easton, & Tamplin, 1985; Ladd, Price, & Hart, 1990; Snyder, West, Stockemer, Gibbons, & Almquist-Parks, 1996). Thus, it is from this relatively small group of chosen peers that the bulk of children's peer experience is derived. Given the far-reaching influence of peers on child and adolescent functioning (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995), it is important to understand the processes through which children select the peers with whom they interact.

Thus far, knowledge about peer selection processes has come largely from the sociometric and friendship formation literatures

and has focused on the individual and interpersonal characteristics of the child who is selected, a focus begun with Monroe's (1899) study of desirable traits in chums. There is evidence, for instance, that children are selected as playmates and friends on the basis of inherent characteristics such as birth order, physical appearance, and intelligence (see Hartup, 1983, for a review); on the basis of behavior (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983; Gottman, 1983; Snyder et al., 1996); and on the basis of similarity to the selecting child (Kupersmidt, DeRosier, & Patterson, 1995; Rubin, Lynch, Coplan, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth, 1994; see Epstein, 1989, and Hartup & Stevens, 1997, for reviews).

Little is known, however, about how characteristics of the child who selects a peer might influence his or her choices. For instance, given two potential peers who are similar on many important domains (e.g., the two are equally prosocial), what factors of the selecting child contribute to his or her selection of one peer in preference to another? It seems likely, for instance, that the selecting child's gender may play a role. Yet although there is evidence that girls and boys identify different features of friendship as important (Parker & Asher, 1993), there has been no specific examination of whether girls and boys differ in the extent to which they consider these factors when making friendship choices. The contributions of other characteristics of the selecting child have not yet been examined. In the two experimental studies reported here, we used hypothetical peer selection paradigms to examine processes that may influence the selecting child's choices.

Several theoretical perspectives lead to the hypothesis that children's self-perceptions will guide their peer selection. Self-verification theory, for example, proposes that individuals select others who view them as they view themselves whether this view is positive or negative (Swann, 1983, 1987; Swann, Pelham, &

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Krull, 1989). According to this perspective, it is more important (and more useful) to individuals that others verify their self-perceptions than that they view themselves positively (see also Kelly's [1955] theory of personal constructs). Swann (e.g., Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2002) has proposed that this preference stems from a desire for psychological coherence and has both intrapsychic ("My perceptions about what I am truly like are validated") and interpersonal ("I know what to expect from others") value. Similarly, both attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986) and social information-processing theory (Crick & Dodge, 1994) contain the proposition that children's self-perceptions contribute to their behaving in ways (including making choices) that tend to verify these self-perceptions. Moreover, to the extent that individuals seek information that confirms their theories (see Klayman & Ha, 1987, for a review of confirmation-seeking theory), it may be that children seek out peers who confirm their theories about themselves (i.e., who confirm their self-perceptions). Thus, according to a variety of theories, most children would choose peers who agree with their views of themselves whether these views are positive or negative.

In direct contrast to this expectation that self-verification processes will play a role in children's peer selection is the expectation of self-enhancement theory, which states that a basic motivator of human behavior is the desire to be viewed positively by the self and others (e.g., Shrauger, 1975). Following the logic of this theory, one would expect most children to select peers who think positively about them and their abilities. In the two studies reported here, we were able to examine relative support for each of these perspectives.

In these first examinations of the role of self-perceptions in children's peer selection, we chose to use experimental paradigms rather than naturalistic observations. These experimental paradigms allowed precise control of the information received from peers on which the participants would base their selection decisions. Use of such experimental paradigms is important in initial investigations of peer relations, according to Newcomb and Bagwell (1995), because it permits a "focus on more circumscribed questions surrounding friendship relations and potentially provides more precise causal explanations for different phenomena" (p. 343). Our procedures were modifications of a procedure created and used extensively by Swann and his colleagues to examine the selection of "interaction partners" among adults (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992).

Study 1

In this first study of peer selection processes during childhood (i.e., before participants entered adolescence), we wanted children old enough to have had extensive and varied peer experiences and to be relatively good reporters about themselves. We therefore selected seventh graders, most of whom are at the end of childhood, just before turning 13. Moreover, it is during seventh grade that children first indicate that similarity of attitudes and values has become important for friendship formation (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1975); we were interested in exploring whether this interest in similarity might contribute to a preference for a peer who viewed the child similarly to the way in which the child viewed himself or herself.

We told seventh-grade participants that as part of a study about making friends, we would provide information about them to seventh graders from another school. Participants were told that these students from the other school would write evaluations of the participants and that the participants would have an opportunity to use these evaluations to select a peer with whom they would interact during a day-long series of activities. On a return visit, participants were presented with three pairs of evaluations (participants did not know these evaluations were actually written by the experimenters) and were asked to select one peer evaluator from each pair; participants were told that they would be matched with one of the peers they selected.

Our principal research question, which examined whether self-perceptions play a role in children's peer selection, was examined in several ways. Because self-verification processes are thought to be more evident when individuals have clear self-perceptions (see Swann, 1990, for a discussion), we created groups of children with particularly positive or negative self-perceptions rather than using continuous indices of self-perception.

First, we asked whether children would seek to verify their self-views even if those views were negative. We divided children into two groups based on their self-views on specific competence domains: children who had positive self-views and children who had negative self-views. We provided all children with the opportunity to select either (a) a peer who viewed them positively or (b) a peer who viewed them negatively. According to self-verification theory, both groups of children should self-verify, that is, choose peers who viewed them as they viewed themselves even if that view was negative. Thus, children with positive self-views should select the peer who viewed them positively, and children with negative self-views should select the peer who viewed them negatively. Self-enhancement theory, on the other hand, leads to the prediction that all children, regardless of self-perception, will prefer the positive peer.

Second, we examined children's selections when both potential peers held positive views—one on a specific competence domain on which the children too viewed themselves positively and one on a domain on which they instead viewed themselves negatively. Self-verification theory leads to a prediction that children will select the peer who shares their view of themselves. In contrast, according to self-enhancement theory, there is no reason to expect a bias toward selecting the positive peer with a view similar to that of the child. In fact, it can be argued that children principally interested in self-enhancement will prefer the peer who views them positively on a domain on which they are not already confident of their abilities, as a way of gaining *additional* positive information about themselves.

Third, we examined peer selection processes as a function of children's views of their global self-worth. According to self-verification theory, self-verifying peer selection processes relate not only to children's views of their competence in specific domains but also to their views of their global self-worth (see Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996, for empirical support). Thus, according to self-verification theory, if asked to select either a peer who views them in a globally positive manner or a peer who views them in a globally negative manner, children will self-verify such that those with positive global self-esteem will select the former and those with negative global self-esteem will select the latter. In

contrast, self-enhancement theory suggests that all children will select the positive peer.

Because selection of a globally negative peer is of particular conceptual and clinical interest, we were also interested in examining additional characteristics of children that might be associated with their preference for interacting with such a peer. If self-verification theory is correct, then children with characteristics associated with negative self-views will be more likely than other children to select the globally negative peer. This possibility led us to examine two variables thought to be associated with negative self-views: maternal rejection and child depression. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), children who have experienced considerable maternal rejection are at increased risk for developing a negative self-view, and there is empirical support for this proposition (Cassidy, 1988; Sroufe, 1983). Similarly, there is both theoretical and empirical support for the notion of a link between depression and negative self-views (Beck, 1972; Bowlby, 1980; Rudolph, Hammen, & Burge, 1995). In contrast, if tendencies of self-enhancement predominate, there should be no reason for maternal rejection or depressive symptoms to be associated with the tendency to select the globally negative peer.

As a final means of investigating the role of self-perceptions in peer selection, we asked children to report directly on how they would like the potential peer to view them on several dimensions. Self-verification theory leads to the expectation that children will prefer that the peer with whom they might interact view them as they view themselves. Self-enhancement theory leads to the expectation that children will prefer peers to view them positively no matter how they view themselves.

Method

Participants

Ninety-one seventh-grade students (45 girls and 46 boys) participated. Participants ranged in age from 12 to 15 years ($M = 12.9$ years, $SD = 0.71$). Participants attended a middle school serving a predominantly working- and middle-class, rural small town in Pennsylvania. All students who desired to participate and who had parental permission (71%) were included in the study. The majority of the participants were White (>85%). Sample size varies across analyses because of absenteeism and missing data.

Procedure

Two experimenters (female university students) made four visits to six classrooms. During the first visit, the experimenters described the study to the students, answered questions, and distributed permission forms. Students were told that the experimenters were interested in studying "how kids get to know each other." The study was presented to the students as containing four parts: (a) Participants would describe themselves by completing a series of questionnaires; (b) the questionnaires (with identifying information removed) would be shown to students from a different school, who would write evaluations of the participants based on what they had learned from the questionnaires; (c) the participants would have the opportunity to view these descriptions and use them as a basis for selecting a peer with whom they might have the opportunity to spend the day participating in a series of games and activities; and (d) if possible, participants and peers would spend a day together.

During the second visit, participants completed a series of questionnaires: the Self-Attributes Questionnaire—Child Version, Rohner's (1991) Parental Acceptance–Rejection Questionnaire, the Children's Depression

Inventory (Kovacs, 1981), and several questionnaires that were used as filler items. The purpose of the filler items was to give the participants a sense that they had provided enough information for other students to evaluate them.

Between the second and third visits, the experimenters created the three pairs of (individualized) evaluations for each participant by following the protocol outlined in the *Measures* section.

During the third visit, the experimenters (falsely) reminded the participants that their questionnaires had been shown to students from another school and that these students had written evaluations of the participants. Participants were shown three pairs of evaluations that they (incorrectly) believed were written by the students at the other school, and they were asked to select one peer from each pair with whom they would prefer to interact. The pairs of evaluations were not presented to the participants in the order they are described here. Rather, the two pairs of evaluations that each contained one negative evaluation were presented first.

The experimenters then followed a procedure designed to prevent participants from thinking that peers had viewed them negatively.¹ The final pair of evaluations presented contained both positive evaluations.

During the first three visits, participants were told that the experimenters were uncertain whether the opportunity to interact with the peers from the other school would actually materialize. The experimenters assured students, however, that if it did not, the experimenters would return and have an ice-cream party with the participants. During the fourth visit, which included this ice-cream party, experimenters debriefed the participants by telling them that the principal focus of the study was examination of what sorts of peers participants decided to select. Participants were told that we were interested in their choices because this knowledge could help us understand children's relationships. A debriefing letter was also sent to the parents of the participants.

Measures

Self-Attributes Questionnaire—Child Version (SAQ-Ch). The SAQ-Ch is a modified version of the Self-Attributes Questionnaire—Short Form, which Pelham and Swann (1989) designed for use with college students. As in the original version, there is one item for each of the five domains (intellectual/academic ability, social competence, artistic/musical ability, athletic competence, and physical attractiveness), each of which appears on a separate page. For each item, children are presented with a scale that uses arrows at each point instead of numbers. Each scale is anchored with *the worst few kids at* (1), *average kids at* (4), and *the best few kids at* (7). Students are asked to compare themselves to their age-mates on each domain. For instance, the scholastic competence item is as follows: "The line below stands for all the kids who are your age. Circle the arrow that shows how good you are at school work."

Evidence that SAQ-Ch scale scores reflect children's self-perceptions comes from a study of 132 seventh graders (Mehta, 1995). Four of the domains (all but artistic ability) are present in Harter's widely used Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPA; Harter, 1988), which contains five items for each domain; Mehta (1995) reported substantial correlations between SPA and SAQ-Ch scale scores ($M = .74$; range = .65–.80).

¹ An experimenter whom the participants had met on a previous visit entered the classroom carrying a large box. Following an agitated, whispered conversation with this experimenter, the principal experimenter announced that she had made a mistake. The principal experimenter apologized and distributed the third pair of paragraphs, which contained only positive evaluations. She emphasized repeatedly that the paragraphs that the participants had viewed previously had been written about students at another school where this study was also being conducted. In order to make this claim more convincing, the experimenter pointed out that only the final set of paragraphs was labeled with the "secret" code names that the participants had provided during the first experimental session.

The SAQ-Ch also contains one item assessing children's global self-perception, administered last. Separate instructions are given, and the scale uses different anchor points. Children are asked to respond to the statement "Circle the arrow that shows how much you like the way you are" using a scale anchored by *not at all* (1), *sort of* (4), and *a lot* (7). Mehta (1995) reported a correlation of .59 between this item and the 5-item Global Self-Esteem subscale of Harter's (1988) SPA.

Filler items. These items consisted of a series of questionnaires tapping children's relations with their parents, classmates, and friends; their functioning in a variety of areas; and their opinions about the nature of making friends. These items were included to contribute to the participants' belief that students at another school would have enough information to make judgments about them and that the peer had to synthesize a range of information to construct perceptions of them. None of the filler items tapped the competence domains later used in the peer selection procedure. If we had asked participants to provide a great deal of specific information about themselves in the relevant competence domains, then a peer's failure to view a participant as the participant viewed himself or herself would simply reflect the participant's failure to accurately consider the available information, making him or her a blatantly inattentive or imperceptive peer, with whom, for that reason, the participant might not want to interact.

Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ; Rohner, 1991). Two scales of the self-report PARQ were used to tap children's perceptions of two attachment-related components of the child's relationship with the mother: acceptance and rejection. Acceptance was assessed with the Warmth/Affection scale, and rejection was assessed with the Aggression/Hostility scale; items from both scales were intermixed on the questionnaire. The Warmth/Affection scale contains 20 items. Sample items include "My mother talks to me in a warm and loving way" and "My mother lets me know she loves me." The Aggression/Hostility scale contains 15 items. Sample items include "My mother ridicules and makes fun of me" and "My mother goes out of her way to hurt my feelings." Children were asked to describe the extent to which each statement was true by using a 4-point scale ranging from *almost never true* to *almost always true*. Responses for items on the Warmth/Affection scale were reverse scored and summed with responses to the items on the Aggression/Hostility scale to create a total score of perceived maternal rejection, a factor that Ainsworth has described as central to security versus insecurity of attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978).

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981, 1992). This self-report measure assesses symptomatology related to depression, including disturbed mood, vegetative states, self-evaluative thoughts, and interpersonal behaviors. There are 27 items; in the present study, the item related to suicidal ideation was deleted, leaving 26 items. For each item, children are asked to select, from a cluster of three sentences, the one that best describes them over the course of the previous 2 weeks. Scores on each item range from 0 to 2, with higher scores indicating greater depression. Scores for each item are summed to create a total score; possible total scores range from 0 to 52. Adequate reliability and validity, particularly with nonclinical populations, have been demonstrated (Kovacs, 1992).

Peer selection measures. Participants were asked to make three choices: They were asked to select a peer from each of three separate pairs of peers. For each pair, experimenters presented participants with a folder containing two sheets of paper, with evaluations written by two different potential peers. Participants were given one folder at a time. Participants were first asked to write "this one" above the evaluation written by the peer with whom they would prefer to interact. Participants were then asked to use a 7-point scale at the bottom of each page to respond to the question "How much would you like to meet this person?" The scale was anchored by *not at all* (1), *sort of* (4), and *very much* (7). Evaluations were not written about the domain of physical attractiveness. Sample evaluations are presented in Appendix A.

For one pair of evaluations, we asked whether children would seek to verify their self-views even if those views were negative. We used a

stratified random assignment procedure to place approximately half of the participants into a group for which peer evaluations referred to a domain on which participants rated themselves positively (i.e., ≥ 5 on the 7-point scale; the "high" group). We placed the remaining participants in a group for which peer evaluations referred to a domain on which participants rated themselves negatively (i.e., ≤ 3 on the 7-point scale; the "low" group). For each participant, we attempted to select the domain on which the participant's self-rating was most extreme while simultaneously attempting to include an equal number of participants in the high and low groups across domains, for both boys and girls.² Three children did not meet the criteria for placement in either group and were not included. All children were asked to select either (a) a peer who viewed them positively on a domain or (b) a peer who viewed them negatively on the same domain.

For a second pair of evaluations, we examined children's selections when both potential peers had positive views of the participant. We asked whether children would seek to verify their self-views (preferring a peer who viewed them positively on a specific competence domain on which they also viewed themselves positively) or would seek to potentially improve their negative self-views (by selecting a peer who viewed them positively on a domain on which they viewed themselves negatively). For this pair of evaluations, participants were included only if there was one of the four domains about which evaluations were written (i.e., competence in athletics, academics, peer relations, and arts and crafts) on which they rated themselves positively on the SAQ-Ch (i.e., ≥ 5 on the 7-point scale; the "high" domain) and one domain on which they rated themselves negatively (i.e., ≤ 3 on the 7-point scale; the "low" domain). For each participant, we attempted to select the domains on which the participant's self-ratings were most extreme while simultaneously attempting to include an equal number of participants in the high and low groups across domains, for both boys and girls.³

The third pair of evaluations examined peer selection processes in relation to the participant's global self-view, that is, perceptions of the self as a globally worthwhile and good person. Experimenters presented participants with (a) one evaluation that described the participant in a globally positive manner and (b) one evaluation that described the participant in a globally negative manner.

Desired Perceptions by Peers Questionnaire. In order to further test the notion that children want the peers with whom they interact to view them as they view themselves, we created a new measure by modifying the SAQ-Ch. We asked children to use 7-point scales identical to those used with the SAQ-Ch to rate how they wanted the peer with whom they might interact to view them. Children were asked to respond in relation to the same five domains of functioning (e.g., academic competence) as well as in relation to assessments of global worth. For example, in relation to academic competence, the instructions were as follows: "The line below

² For instance, for a girl with self-ratings of 7 (athletic competence), 6 (academic competence), 4 (social competence), and 2 (arts and crafts competence), use of her athletic or academic scores would place her in the high-competence group, and use of her arts and crafts score would place her in the low-competence group. The decision about which score to use was based on the number of other girls already in each of these groups and on which domains' scores were already being used; after consideration of how many other girls were already receiving evaluations related to these domains, the decision was made randomly.

³ For instance, a boy with self-ratings of 7 (athletic competence), 6 (academic competence), 4 (social competence), and 2 (arts and crafts competence) might receive evaluations in relation to either (a) athletic competence (high) and arts and crafts (low) or (b) academic competence (high) and arts and crafts (low); after consideration of how many other boys were already receiving evaluations related to these domains, the decision was made randomly.

stands for all the kids who are your age. Circle the arrow that shows how you would like your partner to rate you on school work.”

Results

All analyses were first conducted with gender included as a factor. Because no main or interaction effects of gender emerged, participants were collapsed across gender for the analyses reported here.

Self-Perceptions and Peer Selection

The first set of analyses examined children's choices between either a peer who viewed them positively or a peer who viewed them negatively on a specific domain of functioning. Most participants selected the positive peer, a finding supportive of self-enhancement theory. Nonetheless, contingency table analyses revealed an association between self-perception and peer selection, $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 49.8, p < .01$. All participants who viewed themselves positively on a domain ($n = 44$) selected the positive peer. This was true for 75% of participants who viewed themselves negatively on a domain ($n = 27$ of 36).⁴ To examine whether depressive symptoms accounted for the association between self-perception and peer choice, we conducted a logistic regression. CDI scores and SAQ-Ch scores were entered as simultaneous predictors of peer choice. According to the Wald criterion, self-perception reliably predicted choice when depression was controlled ($z = 7.33, p < .01$).

Results involving ratings of how much the participants would like to meet each peer followed a similar pattern. A 2 (positive vs. negative self-perception) by 2 (positive vs. negative perception by the peer) repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 76) = 30.93, p < .01$. Follow-up between-groups analyses revealed that whereas the positive self-perception children showed more interest than the negative self-perception children in meeting the positive peer, the reverse was true in relation to the desire to meet the negative peer: Children with a negative self-perception were more interested in meeting the negative peer than were the children with a positive self-perception. Follow-up within-group analyses revealed that children in both positive and negative self-perception groups were more interested in meeting the positive peer than the negative peer. See Table 1.

The second set of analyses examined children's choices between two peers who both rated the child positively: one on a domain on which the child also rated himself or herself highly (the “high” domain) and one on a domain on which the child rated himself or herself poorly (the “low” domain). As noted earlier, only children who rated themselves high on one domain and low on another ($n = 36$) could be included in these analyses. Almost all participants (92%; $n = 33$ of 36) chose the former peer. Contingency table analyses revealed that this percentage differed significantly from chance, $\chi^2(1, N = 36) = 25.0, p < .01$. Furthermore, participants indicated that they would like to interact with the peer who rated them positively on the high domain ($M = 6.10, SD = 1.06$) significantly more than they would like to interact with the peer who rated them positively on the low domain ($M = 4.43, SD = 2.10, t(29) = 4.48, p < .00$).

The third set of analyses involved global evaluations of the participants. Children were asked to select either a peer who

Table 1

Mean Scale Scores of Desire for Meeting Peer as a Function of Self-Perception and Peer's Perception of the Participant's Competence (Study 1)

Self-perception	Peer's perception of participant's competence	
	Positive	Negative
Positive ($n = 44$)		
<i>M</i>	6.23 _a	1.75 _b
<i>SD</i>	0.88	1.12
Negative ($n = 34$)		
<i>M</i>	4.92 _c	3.33 _d
<i>SD</i>	2.00	1.97

Note. Possible range = 1–7. Row and column means with differing subscripts are significantly different from each other, $p < .01$.

viewed them in a globally positive manner or a peer who viewed them in a globally negative manner. For these analyses, because of the positively skewed distribution of children's SAQ-Ch global self-perception scores, children were included whose scores were either 7 ($n = 24$; the high group) or ≤ 4 ($n = 16$; the low group) (i.e., the top and bottom 20% of the sample). In contrast to findings in research with adults (Giesler et al., 1996), children's global self-perceptions did not relate to peer selection. Both positive and negative global self-perception children—in fact, all but 4 children in the entire sample—chose peers who provided positive global assessments, $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 0.09, ns$. When ratings of how much participants would like to meet each peer were examined, a 2 (positive vs. negative self-perception) by 2 (globally positive vs. globally negative peer evaluator) repeated measures ANOVA yielded a nonsignificant interaction, $F(1, 38) = 0.41$. Follow-up analyses revealed that high and low self-perception groups did not differ on how much children wanted to meet the peer who rated them positively, $t(40) = 1.55$, or the peer who rated them negatively, $t(38) = 0.33$. Both groups of children preferred to meet the peer who viewed them positively: $t(22) = 7.34, p < .01$, and $t(16) = 5.10, p < .01$, respectively. See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.

Finally, we compared the 4 students who selected the globally negative evaluator with the remaining students on self-reported maternal rejection and on child depression.⁵ The children who selected the negative evaluator reported significantly more maternal rejection ($M = 2.42, SD = 0.86$) than did other children ($n = 76, M = 1.61, SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 78) = 9.35, p = .01$. In addition, the children who selected the negative evaluator reported significantly greater depressive symptoms ($M = 18.00, SD = 6.98$) than did other children ($n = 74, M = 8.05, SD = 5.98$), $F(1, 76) = 10.36, p < .01$. Three of the four children who chose the negative global evaluator had depression scores

⁴ Similar results emerged when even more extreme groups of children were examined (the top and bottom 20% of children; $n = 38$). Again, all high-group children selected the positive peer, as did 62% (10 of 16) of low-group children, $\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 9.8, p < .01$.

⁵ For the entire sample, maternal rejection and child depression were significantly correlated ($r = .56, p < .01$).

greater than 1 standard deviation above the mean (i.e., > 17); this was true for 5 of 74 (7%) of the children who selected the positive global evaluator, $\chi^2(1) = 19.20, p < .01$.

Self-Perceptions and Desired Perceptions by Peers

To further test the notion that children want the peers with whom they interact to view them as they view themselves, we examined the correlations between children's views of themselves on specific competence domains and their desired ratings by peers on these domains. Strong positive correlations emerged ($r_s = .56-.77$, all $p < .01$). Contrary to these significant associations, no association emerged between self-perception and desired peer perceptions for evaluations of global worth. See Table 3.

Discussion

When children's peer selection was related to specific competence domains (e.g., athletic competence, scholastic competence), children's selections were guided by their self-perceptions of competence in these domains. When asked to choose between a positive and a negative peer, all children with positive self-perceptions selected the peer who viewed them positively; significantly fewer of the children with negative self-perceptions (75%) selected the positive peer. These findings provide evidence of both self-enhancement and self-verification tendencies. For children in the positive self-perception group, both tendencies led to the same choice (i.e., to selection of the positive peer), and thus it is not possible to differentiate between these two tendencies for this group of children. It was for children in the low self-view group that the opportunities for self-enhancement and self-verification diverged (i.e., selection of the positive peer indicated a tendency to self-enhance, and selection of the negative peer indicated a tendency to self-verify). Most children even in the low self-view group selected the positive peer, providing evidence that most children show self-enhancement tendencies. Nonetheless, it is also clear that a substantial minority of children (25%) preferred not a positive peer but rather a peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves even though this view was negative. Support for the claim that children want peers to view them as they view themselves also came from the findings of significant correlations between children's views of themselves in relation to specific

Table 3

Correlations of Participants' Self-Perceptions (SAQ-Ch Scores) and Participants' Desired Perceptions of Themselves by Peers (DPPQ Scores) (Study 1)

Domain	<i>r</i>
Scholastic competence ($n = 87$)	.56*
Athletic competence ($n = 89$)	.75*
Arts and crafts ($n = 87$)	.68*
Social acceptance ($n = 88$)	.77*
Physical appearance ($n = 89$)	.65*
Global worth ($n = 79$)	.16

Note. *Ns* differ across different domains because of missing data. SAQ-Ch = Self-Attributes Questionnaire—Child Version; DPPQ = Desired Perceptions by Peers Questionnaire.

* $p < .01$.

domains and their ratings of how they would like the potential partner to view them.

When children with negative self-perceptions select a negative peer, they pass up an opportunity to associate with a person whose positive view of them challenges their own view, even though such an association might contribute to a reevaluation and enhancement of their negative self-view. A similar lack of interest in associating with a peer who viewed them more positively than they viewed themselves again emerged when children were asked to select between two positive evaluators—one who viewed them positively on a domain on which they too viewed themselves positively, and one who viewed them positively on a domain on which they viewed themselves negatively. In this case, nearly all children (93%) passed up the opportunity to select a peer who might improve their self-views (i.e., a peer who viewed them more positively than they viewed themselves) in favor of a peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves.

In contrast to children's perceptions about specific competence domains, children's perceptions of their global worth did not relate to the selection of peers. Children with relatively negative self-perceptions were just as likely as children with relatively positive self-perceptions to select the peer who viewed them in a globally positive manner. Furthermore, there was no significant correlation between children's views of their global self-worth and their ratings of how they would like the potential peer to view them in this regard. In fact, (fortunately) only 4 of 80 children selected a peer who viewed them in a globally negative way. Thus, for nearly all children, self-enhancement tendencies were evident: Children selected the peer who viewed them in a globally positive light. It may be that the wish to be viewed as, in essence, a globally worthwhile person is so important that selection of a negative evaluator would be excessively painful. Given the small number of children who selected the globally negative peer, discussion of these children must be viewed as preliminary. Nonetheless, our finding that the globally negative evaluator was chosen only by relatively troubled children (i.e., by those with considerable maternal rejection or depression) suggests that it may be the most vulnerable children who put themselves at further risk by selecting such negative peers.

Table 2

Mean Scale Scores for Desire to Meet Peer as a Function of Self-Perception and Peer's Global Evaluation (Study 1)

Self-perception	Peer's global evaluation	
	Positive	Negative
Positive ($n = 23$)		
<i>M</i>	6.00 _a	2.52 _b
<i>SD</i>	1.35	1.75
Negative ($n = 17$)		
<i>M</i>	5.35 _a	2.35 _b
<i>SD</i>	1.73	1.41

Note. Possible range = 1–7. Row means with different subscripts are significantly different from each other, $p < .01$.

Study 2

Given evidence that some self-perceptions (that is, perceptions of competence but not of global worth) are related to peer selection in seventh graders, we decided to examine these processes in even younger children. As in Study 1, we examined peer selection as a function of individual differences in self-views of competence and global self-worth. We again set up several direct comparisons of self-verification and self-enhancement tendencies. Our aim was to examine these processes in children as young as possible. Because important changes in children's capacities of self-perception occur with the acquisition of concrete operations at approximately age 8 (Harter, 1999), we decided to examine peer selection in third graders. With even younger children, limitations of cognitions about the self would have made interpretation of findings particularly difficult. Because self-verification processes are thought to be more evident when individuals have clear self-perceptions (see Swann, 1990, for a discussion), we again created groups of children with particularly positive or negative self-perceptions rather than using continuous indices of self-perception.

Because the attentional and cognitive capacities of these young children differ from those of seventh graders, we decided to use a different methodology to tap peer selection processes from the one we used with seventh graders. We administered questions verbally to avoid difficulties with children's reading limitations. We also used individual assessment sessions to ensure that each child understood the procedure and so that we could vary each protocol in light of children's self-perceptions. With these younger children, we based the peer selection procedure in the present (rather than focusing it on a future time) and made it simpler to understand. To make the assessment more gamelike, we used a puppet show format.

In order to further understand peer selection processes, we asked children to provide reasons for each of their selections. Even though these children were quite young, we expected them to be able to provide coherent justifications for their choices. We based this expectation on findings from research showing that by this age, children are aware of their feelings and preferences, can discuss them in relatively sophisticated ways, and can provide reasonable explanations for them (e.g., Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Denham & Zoller, 1991; Dunn & Hughes, 1998). If self-enhancing tendencies emerged, we expected that children, regardless of self-perception, would voice a wish to be viewed positively. If self-verification tendencies were evident, we expected children's justifications to reflect this tendency. More specifically, as noted earlier, a central tenet of self-verification theory is that individuals self-verify in order to increase their perceptions of psychological coherence. Having others share one's self-views increases perceptions of coherence in two ways: one intrapsychic and epistemic, one interpersonal and pragmatic. According to Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992), when people are viewed as they view themselves, they are reassured that their self-views are truthful and reliable and that they understand the way they truly are; their belief in a coherent self is supported. In addition to such epistemic concerns, pragmatic concerns may motivate individuals to prefer others who view them as they view themselves. When a peer shares a view of an individual's strengths and limitations, the peer may be considered perceptive, and troublesome misunderstandings may be less likely to occur (see Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and

Giesler, 1992, for empirical evidence that adults do, in fact, provide these predicted justifications). On the basis of the Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler findings with adults, we expected that when children selected peers who viewed them as they viewed themselves (both positive and negative peers), they would offer largely epistemic and pragmatic reasons. Our expectations for when children did *not* select the peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves were again based on the Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler findings with adults. For negative-view children who selected the positive peer, we expected justifications to reflect a wish to be viewed positively. For positive-view children who selected the negative peer (which we expected to happen rarely), we expected no consistent pattern of justifications to emerge.

Method

Participants

Eighty-three third-grade students (45 girls and 38 boys) participated. Participants ranged in age from 8.1 to 9.8 years ($M = 8.6$ years, $SD = 0.31$). Participants attended three elementary schools serving a predominantly working- and middle-class suburban area of a large metropolitan area. All students who desired to participate and who had parental permission (approximately 50%) were included in the study. The majority of participants were White (57%); the remaining children were principally African American (18%), Asian American (8%), and Hispanic (7%). Sample sizes across analyses reflect the number of children viewing each puppet show, which varied according to children's perceived competence in each domain of functioning (see the description of puppet shows below).

Measures

Perceived Competence Scale for Children (PCSC; Harter, 1982). Four 6-item subscales were used to tap children's perceptions of their competence in scholastic activities, physical skills, behavioral conduct, and peer acceptance. We also used the 6-item subscale designed to tap children's global self-esteem. For each item, children were read descriptions of two types of children and were asked which description was "most like" themselves. Children were then asked if the description was "really true" or "sort of true" of them. Each item was scored from 1 to 4, with 4 reflecting the most perceived competence; the 6 items on each subscale were averaged to create a competence score in each domain and a global self-esteem score. Sample items include "Some kids feel that they are very good at their school work BUT Other kids worry about whether they can do the work assigned to them" and "Some kids do very well at all kinds of sports BUT Others don't feel that they are very good when it comes to sports." A sample item from the Global Self-Esteem subscale is "Some kids are very happy being the way they are BUT Other kids wish they were different." This widely used measure has been shown to have strong psychometric properties (see Harter, 1999, for a review). The subscale alphas for the present sample ranged from .63 to .76 ($M = .70$).

The Security Scale (Kerns, Klepac, & Cole, 1996). This measure assesses self-reported attachment security with the mother. The same response procedure used with the PCSC was used with this measure. Children were asked to indicate the statement more characteristic of them and then to state whether it was "really true" or "sort of true," a format that yielded a 4-point scale. Sample items include "Some kids find it easy to trust their mom BUT other kids are not sure if they can trust their mom" and "Some kids go to their mom when they are upset BUT other kids do not go to their mom when they are upset." Each child received a security score that was the mean of the child's responses across the 15 items. The mean and standard deviation of the present sample ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.42$)

were nearly identical to those in the Kerns et al. sample ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.57$). The alpha was .74. Good psychometric properties (internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and predictive validity) have been reported (Kerns et al., 1996).

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981, 1992). This measure was used in Study 1, and has already been described. In Study 2, the item related to suicidal ideation was again deleted, as were three items related to school work, leaving 23 items; thus, possible total scores in Study 2 ranged from 0 to 46. Actual scores ranged from 0 to 21. Alpha was .73. Adequate reliability and validity, particularly with nonclinical populations, have been demonstrated (Kovacs, 1992).

Puppet selection measure. After completion of questionnaires, each child watched three puppet shows, each with a different theme, relating to either (a) global self-esteem, (b) competence in the domain on which the child viewed himself or herself most positively (i.e., the domain for which his or her PCSC score was highest), or (c) competence in the domain on which the child viewed himself or herself most negatively (i.e., the domain for which his or her PCSC score was the lowest). In each puppet show, two identical animal puppets (e.g., two blue dinosaurs or two brown horses) described the same child: a child the puppet knew who was of the same gender and had the same name as the participant. For the domains of perceived competence (e.g., scholastic and athletic competence), one puppet described a child who was competent in the domain, and the other puppet described a child who was not competent. For the domain of global self-esteem, one puppet described a child with feelings of high global self-worth, and one puppet described a child with feelings of low global self-worth.⁶ Each description consisted of 3–4 sentences and lasted approximately 1 min. Sample puppet show scripts (girls' versions) are provided in Appendix B.

Puppet shows were not always presented in the same order. Four presentation orders were created and randomly presented. Furthermore, because of the importance of guarding against a bias related to the order of speakers within each show, the positive puppet spoke first two times and the negative puppet spoke first two times within each order. In addition, because of the importance of guarding against a left/right side bias, within each order the positive puppet was seen twice on the right and twice on the left. Finally, order of puppet show, order of positive/negative puppet, and left/right side presentation were all counterbalanced in relation to each other.

After each puppet show, the child was asked, "If these were real kids talking, which one would you like to play with and maybe become friends with?" The experimenter noted the choice on a response sheet. Children seemed to understand and enjoy the task.

Explanations for peer selection. After the child selected a puppet, the experimenter asked the child, "Can you tell me why you picked that one?" The experimenter wrote down the child's response verbatim. Responses were coded with the seven categories for coding explanations of partner selection used by Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992; see Numbers 1–7 below), along with five additional categories created for this sample:

1. Epistemic: The puppet agreed with the child's view of himself or herself.
2. Positivity: The puppet described the child positively.
3. Self-improvement: The child hoped to improve himself or herself through the puppet's feedback.
4. Similarity: The child felt the puppet was similar to himself or herself.
5. Perceptiveness: The puppet seemed perceptive and intelligent.
6. Pragmatic: The speaker expected that he or she and the puppet would interact smoothly.
7. Win converts: The child wanted to prove that the puppet was incorrect.
8. Niceness: The child described the puppet as nice or as having some other positive quality (being "cool" or friendly).
9. Puppet likes child: The puppet liked the child.
10. Insufficient information: The response could be coded as either epistemic or positive; the information provided did not make it evident which of these was most appropriate.
11. Doesn't know
12. Other

A coder who had no additional information about the children coded all children's responses from verbatim transcripts. A second coder, who also had no information about the children, coded a randomly selected 25% of the transcripts. Inter-coder agreement (kappa) was .86. Disagreements were resolved through conferencing. Because of their conceptual similarity, the categories of positivity, niceness, and puppet likes child were combined for data analysis.

Results

Because self-verification theory emphasizes that having strong self-views facilitates the emergence of self-verifying tendencies, we used only children with such perceptions. All analyses were first conducted with gender included as a factor. Because no main or interaction effects of gender emerged, participants were collapsed across gender for the analyses reported here.

Self-Perceptions and Peer Selection

We first asked whether children used their self-perceptions of competence in making their peer selections and whether self-verification tendencies or self-enhancement tendencies were evident in these young children. Children were asked to select either (a) a peer who viewed them positively on a domain or (b) a peer who viewed them negatively on the same domain. To create the two groups of children used in this analysis, we used a stratified random assignment procedure. One group contained participants whose puppet show related to a domain on which participants rated themselves positively (i.e., > 3 on the 4-point scale; the "high" group). The other group contained participants whose puppet show related to a domain on which participants rated themselves negatively (i.e., < 2 on the 4-point scale; the "low" group). For each participant, we attempted to select the puppet show for which the participant's self-rating was most extreme while simultaneously attempting to include an equal number of participants in the high and low groups across domains, for both boys and girls (following the procedure used in Study 1). Contingency table analyses revealed an association between self-perception and peer selection, $\chi^2(1, N = 61) = 32.06, p < .01$. All participants who viewed themselves positively on a domain ($> 3; n = 43$) selected the peer who viewed them positively on that domain. In contrast, 11 of 18 (61%) participants who viewed themselves negatively on a domain (< 2) selected the peer who viewed them negatively on that domain. This finding that children selected the peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves, even when that view was negative, is in keeping with the predictions of self-verification theory.

⁶ A fourth puppet show, in which contrasting descriptions were presented not of the child but of the mother, was also presented. Because the focus of this article is on direct descriptions of the self, that puppet show is not discussed here; details are available from Jude Cassidy.

To examine whether depressive symptoms accounted for the association between self-perceptions of competence and puppet choice, we conducted a logistic regression examining the same two groups of children described above. CDI scores and PCSC scores were entered as simultaneous predictors of puppet choice. According to the Wald criterion, self-perceptions of competence reliably predicted puppet choice when depression was controlled ($z = 8.36$, $p < .01$).

Next, in order to examine the connection between global self-esteem and peer selection, we followed the procedure used in Study 1 and divided children into a positive self-esteem group (children whose PCSC Global Self-Esteem subscale scores fell in the highest 20%) and a negative self-esteem group (children whose PCSC Global Self-Esteem subscale scores fell in the lowest 20%). In the "global worth" puppet show, most children in both groups selected the positive puppet; only 8 children (3 boys and 5 girls) selected the puppet who described the child in the globally negative manner. Nonetheless, puppet selection was significantly related to self-esteem, with 5 of 18 children in the negative self-esteem group (28%) selecting the negative puppet, compared with none of the children in the high self-esteem group, $\chi^2(1, N = 41) = 7.28$, $p < .01$. A logistic regression revealed that children's global worth marginally predicted peer choice when depression was controlled (Wald criterion; $z = 3.12$, $p < .08$).

Finally, we compared the 8 children who selected the negative puppet in the global-worth puppet show with other children on attachment security and childhood depression.⁷ The children who selected the globally negative puppet reported significantly less secure attachment ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.54$) than did other children ($n = 75$, $M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.40$), $t(81) = 2.51$, $p < .05$. In addition, the children who selected the negative puppet reported significantly greater depressive symptoms ($M = 12.50$, $SD = 4.60$) than did other children ($n = 75$, $M = 5.60$, $SD = 3.92$), $t(81) = 4.66$, $p = .01$. Four of the 8 children who chose the negative global puppet had depression scores greater than 1 standard deviation above the mean (i.e., > 11); this was true for 9 of 75 (12%) of the children who selected the positive global evaluator, $\chi^2(1) = 7.90$, $p < .01$.

Explanations for Peer Selection

We examined the reasons that both positive and negative self-perception children gave for selecting both positive and negative puppets in relation to perceived competence domains. First we asked what explanations children gave for selecting the puppet who viewed them as they viewed themselves. When children who viewed themselves positively on a domain selected the positive puppet, the explanations were as follows: 46% epistemic, 28% positive, 22% other, and $< 1\%$ each for all other categories. When children who viewed themselves negatively selected the negative puppet, the explanations were as follows: 69% epistemic, 7% perceptive, 17% other, and $< 5\%$ each for all other categories.

Second, we asked what explanations children gave for selecting the puppet who viewed them differently from the way they viewed themselves. When children with negative self-views selected the positive puppet, the explanations were as follows: 40% epistemic, 32% positive, 25% other, and $< 5\%$ each for all other categories. It rarely happened that children with a positive self-perception

selected the negative puppet (3 puppet shows). The explanations in those cases were one each of epistemic, perceptive, and pragmatic.

Discussion

Findings indicated that young children's puppet selection varied as a function of their self-perceptions. When asked about specific areas of competence, evidence of self-verification emerged. High self-view children selected the positive peer—though this tendency alone could reflect either self-enhancing or self-verifying tendencies. For low self-view children, self-verification and self-enhancement tendencies led to differing choices: Selection of the negative peer would reflect self-verifying tendencies, and selection of the positive peer would reflect self-enhancing tendencies. Findings supported the predictions of self-verification theory: Negative-perception children preferred a (hypothetical) peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves even though this view was negative. Thus, both low self-view and high self-view children selected the peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves. As such, our findings converge with longstanding notions that adults seek social contexts from which they will receive self-verifying information (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965; Swann, 1983; Swann et al., 1989; Wachtel, 1977). These findings indicate that children with negative self-perceptions pass up an opportunity to associate with a person whose positive view of them challenges their own, even though such an association might contribute to a reevaluation and enhancement of their negative view.

A different pattern of results emerged in relation to selection of the globally evaluating puppet. As in Study 1, very few children ($n = 8$) selected the globally negative puppet, a finding supportive of self-enhancement theory. Yet within this general tendency to self-enhance, there was evidence of meaningful individual differences in the tendency to select a globally negative peer. Children with less secure attachment and greater depressive symptoms were more likely than other children to select the negative peer. From a clinical perspective, it is worrisome that children would prefer a peer who viewed them in a negative way, and in fact, this preference seems to reflect problematic social and emotional functioning.

The justifications for their choices provided by the young children in this study reveal a coherence and thoughtfulness in their decision making. Furthermore, it is remarkable how similar the children's justifications were to the justifications of the adults in the Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) study. First we examined the justifications that children provided for self-verifying (i.e., for selecting the puppet who viewed them as they viewed themselves). Of the negative-view children who picked the negative puppet, 71% provided an epistemic explanation (e.g., "Because it's kinda right that I don't really do my schoolwork right and not that fast"). The epistemic explanations provide support for the notion that children's feelings that the peer views them as they view themselves is an important part of the reason why they select a peer (i.e., that self-verification processes are indeed at work for these children). In the Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) sample of adults, negative-view individuals who selected the neg-

⁷ For the entire sample, attachment security and child depression were significantly negatively correlated ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$).

active partner also provided epistemic reasons most often, followed by pragmatic reasons. For positive-view children, it was also the case, as expected, that most children who selected the positive puppet (52%) provided epistemic justifications (e.g., "Because the other one said I don't like myself and [the] way I'm leading my life, and I do like the way I'm leading my life."). A substantial number of these positive-view children (28%) provided a justification coded as positivity (e.g., "He said nicer things about me" and "He started to say things that he liked about me"). These responses of positive-view children also converge with the responses of adults: Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler found that epistemic, positive, and pragmatic justifications were the most common justifications for adults in this group. Like Swann and his colleagues, we interpret these results as indicating that when individuals who view themselves positively select a peer who also views them positively, they are motivated both by the desire to be seen in a positive light and by the desire to be seen as they believe they are. Unlike adults, children rarely used pragmatic justifications. It may be that young children do not have sufficient cognitive capacities of forethought to imagine the difficulties that could arise from interacting with a person whose view of them differed from their own. Alternately, the use of puppets—with whom children obviously could never actually interact—may have shifted children's attention from pragmatic considerations.

The reasons for not self-verifying given by these children were in some ways convergent with and in some ways divergent from the reasons provided by adults in the Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) study. When negative-view children selected the positive puppet, a substantial number (32%) provided positivity justifications; this was the category of responses most commonly provided by adults. These children showed self-enhancing rather than self-verifying tendencies by selecting the puppet who viewed them more positively than they viewed themselves, and they provided justifications that showed that their selection was based in this perceived positivity. Surprisingly, the largest number of negative-view children who selected the positive puppet (40%) gave epistemic reasons (e.g., "Because that's the way I am") even though earlier they had not described themselves in positive terms in that domain. This finding reflects some fluidity in self-concept among some of these young children—at least as assessed with the measures in this study. Children may respond to individual questionnaire items with ratings of low competence, yet when considering assessments of themselves in global terms, they may consider positive descriptions to be more accurate. The reasons for not self-verifying given by positive-view children (which happened in only 3 instances) were, as was the case with adults, spread equally across categories.

General Discussion

Although characteristics of the child being chosen as a peer have been examined extensively in previous research, the characteristics of the child selecting the peer have been largely ignored. The two studies presented here provide intriguing preliminary insights into this neglected area. The findings of both studies contribute to an understanding of peer relationships through providing experimental data about how one factor—children's self-perception—is associated with peer selection.

Both studies allowed examination of the role of self-verification versus self-enhancement processes. The most rigorous test of the extent to which self-verification processes influence peer selection comes when individuals are asked to choose between a peer who views them positively and a peer who views them negatively. In relation to self-perceptions of competence, third graders were similar to adults in that a clear preference emerged for the peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves. All of the positive-view children selected the positive peer, and 62% of the negative-view children selected the negative peer. Of particular interest are findings that, like negative-view adults, negative-view third graders actively preferred a peer who also viewed them negatively.

This pattern of self-verification did not, however, emerge for seventh graders. For these children, the results were mixed. Although negative-view seventh graders picked the negative peer significantly more often than did positive-view seventh graders, even negative-view children preferred the positive peer to the negative peer. Thus, although evidence emerged that self-perceptions played a role in peer selection for seventh graders, the desire to interact with a peer who viewed them positively outweighed the desire to interact with a peer who viewed them as they viewed themselves. Thus, for seventh graders, self-enhancing tendencies were more prominent in the peer selection task. However, self-verification tendencies were evident when children were asked to report how they would like the peer to view them; substantial correlations between self-views and desired peer views emerged, indicating children's wish to be viewed as they viewed themselves. It may be difficult to believe that a child would select a peer who viewed him or her negatively, but in both studies children made such selections, and selection decisions were related to self-perceptions. These findings—which emerged in experimental studies where individual components could be examined—underscore that it cannot be assumed that the wish for self-enhancement is the default mechanism in peer selection, because it is clearly not for all children. Rather, in selecting a peer, sometimes self-verification is more of a factor than self-enhancement.

In contrast, in neither study did self-verification processes emerge in relation to perceptions of global worth; instead, self-enhancement tendencies were evident. These findings also differed from findings with adults in previous studies (e.g., Giesler et al., 1996). For children, selection of the globally negative peer was rare. Only 8 third graders (10%) and 4 seventh graders (5%) selected the globally negative peer. For both groups of children, selection of the globally negative peer appears to be a marker for social risk: Associations emerged with attachment-insecurity/maternal-rejection and depressive symptoms. Although drawing conclusions about children who selected the globally negative peer is risky given the small number of students who made this choice, the consistency of findings across studies is compelling.

Third- and seventh-grade children were both similar to and different from each other in their peer selection. They were similar in that very few children selected the globally negative peer and in that such selection was associated with greater rejection/insecurity and depression. They differed in that third-grade children, like adults, showed self-verification tendencies when making choices based on evaluations of specific competencies, but seventh-grade children did not. Instead, the older children, although using self-perceptions in their decision making and wanting peers to view them as they viewed themselves, generally showed self-

enhancement tendencies when choosing between peers, preferring the peer who viewed them positively. It is difficult to understand why third graders but not seventh graders would be similar to adults in their self-verification tendencies. One possibility is that the different methodologies used across studies played a role. Another possibility is that self-verification tendencies present in young children are temporarily suppressed during late childhood and emerge again in late adolescence.

What could account for a suppression in self-verification tendencies in seventh graders? One possible explanation relates to what Swann and his colleagues have referred to as the "relationship relevance" of feedback (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). These authors provided data showing that when the trait under consideration is highly relevant to a relationship with a particular person, people suspend their self-verification strivings when seeking feedback from that person. For example, when seeking feedback from dating partners, college students with negative views of their own physical attractiveness prefer and seek evaluations on that dimension (but not on other dimensions) that far exceed their self-views. In the present studies, this perspective may relate to the age-related shift as follows: During the exceptionally peer-conscious preadolescent stage of development, most, if not all, of the appraisals that individuals receive from peers become "relationship relevant," with an accompanying shift toward preferring more positive evaluations. This possibility that self-verification and self-enhancement tendencies could be manifested differently at different periods in ways other than purely linearly is intriguing and speculative. More research is needed: replication studies, studies exploring the contribution of different methodologies, and experimental and observational studies examining the role of "relationship relevance" in the self-enhancement and self-verification tendencies of children.

It may be useful to consider these data in the context of Scarr and McCartney's (1983) call for considering children's contributions to creating their own environments ("niches") in a process they call "niche-picking." According to Scarr and McCartney, two of the processes through which niche-picking occurs are evocative and proactive processes. It has long been recognized that children contribute to the quality of their peer environments by evoking responses from others: through both their inherent characteristics (e.g., gender, physical appearance, and IQ) and their behavior (e.g., disruptive, aggressive, and cooperative behavior). The findings from the present study provide information about an additional way in which children may contribute to creating their peer environment—what Scarr and McCartney refer to as the proactive process of actively selecting the peers with whom they wish to interact.

It is interesting to speculate on whether the peer selection processes that we have identified contribute to stability in children's development. It is possible that when children select a peer who views them as they view themselves, they play a "gate-keeping" role, screening the self-relevant information that they are likely to receive. By selecting a peer who agrees with their self-views, they thereby reduce the likelihood of receiving disconfirming information about themselves and increase the likelihood of receiving confirming information. Such manipulation of information seems likely to reduce the possibility that children will encounter information that could cause them to change their self-views. In a similar vein, Caspi (1993) argued that any contributor

to the stability of the self-concept—including biased expectations, selective attention to confirming information, evoked reactions from others, environmental stability, and peer selection (where "the personality-sustaining effects of proactive interaction are the most intriguing," p. 354)—would, in turn, promote the stability of behavior congruent with that self-concept "across time and circumstance" (p. 354).

Several important caveats should be considered in relation to the findings of these studies. First, it is important to clarify what these studies do not address. These studies are useful because they give insight from the point of view of the choosing child, not the chosen child. That is, the findings should not be considered to offer guidance for helping children learn to increase the likelihood of being chosen as a peer (e.g., one would never counsel a child to first identify areas in which another child views himself or herself negatively and then agree with those negative views!). The contribution of these studies is not the identification of ways to help children become selected (cf. the extensive social skills training literature; e.g., Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996), but rather the provision of basic research about understanding how characteristics of the selecting child play a role in the selection process.

Second, these studies address only children's initial selection of peers, and children's selection is only one aspect of the many processes involved in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers. To begin with, in order for a relationship to form, the child who selects a peer must, in turn, be selected by that peer. Next, the two children must be able to negotiate the tasks involved in developing and maintaining a relationship, and as Hallinan (1981) has noted, the processes involved may differ from those involved in initial peer selection. In cases in which the relationship is based partly on a shared negative view of one child, the relationship then has to survive any resulting strife. It would be interesting to examine the longevity of relationships formed when children with negative self-views select peers who view them negatively. It may be that these relationships do not last as long as other relationships; conversely, it may be that they are particularly stable and satisfying (Swann, Hixon, and De La Ronde, 1992, found evidence of this in adults).

Third, these studies examined children's choices when children were selecting peers with whom it was unlikely (or impossible) that they would become friends (in Study 1, children selected peers from another school for a 1-day interaction; in Study 2, children selected one of two puppets). The increasing evidence of the differing processes involved in friendships versus more general peer relationships (e.g., Parker et al., 1995) suggests that the peer selection processes involved when making decisions about people unlikely to become friends may differ from those involved in relation to potential friends.

Finally, and most important, the extent to which our findings are generalizable to children's actual peer selection processes is unknown. In our attempt to gain precise control over the content of the information that children had available when making their peer selections, we created a situation that children are unlikely actually to encounter. In children's daily lives, much of their peer selection involves making choices not among strangers, as in these studies, but among a larger group of familiar peers. Also, we examined peer selection in response to peer evaluations on individual domains, and children, of course, do not receive evaluations on single domains but on a variety of complexly intertwined domains. Fur-

thermore, in their daily lives, children are not presented with peers' written (or spoken) evaluations of them, and when making assessments of generalizability, one must consider how much children know about how others view their strengths and weaknesses before choosing to associate with them. Children within classrooms, sports groups, or neighborhood contexts make active choices about the smaller subgroups with whom they will mostly interact, and it is likely that children have developed some idea, based on interactions in the group setting, of how each of the others in a group views them. Even among strangers, it is not unreasonable to expect that children do hold some ideas of how they are perceived, ideas based, perhaps, on previous interactions with similar people. Yet there are limits to this knowledge, and it is certainly not always presented in the direct format used here. It is also important to note that children's views of themselves are only one factor guiding their selection of peers and may account for only a small percentage of the variance. Further research needs to examine how children use their self-perceptions in real everyday selection decisions and how self-perceptions interact with other characteristics of the selecting child as well as with characteristics of the child who is considered for selection.

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Appendix A

Sample Peer Evaluations: Study 1

Evaluations Related to Athletic Competence

Positive: "I think this person would catch the ball a lot and hit pretty well. They seem like they would be a good leader on sports teams and help everyone have fun. I think this person is good at sports."

Negative: "This person seems like they are pretty bad at sports. I think they might not do well when the team needs them to. I do not think they would be that much fun in a game."

Evaluations Related to Academic Competence

Positive: "When tests come, I bet this person always does really well. I think they are probably good at school. I think they get good grades and ask a lot of questions."

Negative: "It seems like this person is not very good at school. I think they don't understand stuff really fast, and sometimes don't do their homework. This person probably thinks school is hard."

Evaluations Related to Global Worth

Positive: "I think this is a good person, and I bet they're pretty happy. I bet this person does things well. A lot of other people might think this is a really cool person, and I bet this person likes themselves."

Negative: "This person doesn't seem like a very happy person. I think this person messes up sometimes. This person probably wishes they were different than they are. Other people might be disappointed in this person."

(Appendixes continue)

Appendix B

Sample Peer Evaluations (Puppet Show Scripts): Girls' Version in Study 2

Physical Competence Puppet Show

"Hi! I just met a girl named _____. Let me tell you what I think. I think that she is good at all sports and that she feels that she plays them well enough. She isn't afraid to try a new outdoor activity because she is sure she will do it well. In fact, she thinks that she is better than the other kids her age at most sports and would rather play them than watch them. I think that she is really good at sports."

"Hi! I just met a girl named _____ and this is what I think of her. I think that she doesn't play all sports well and wishes she could be a lot better at sports. She is afraid to try new outdoor activities because she isn't sure she can do them well. She just doesn't feel that she plays sports as well as other kids her age and would rather watch than play. No, I don't think that she is too good at sports."

Scholastic Competence Puppet Show

"Hi, I just met a kid named _____ and this is what I think of her. I think that she feels that she is very good at her school work and that she is just as smart as the other kids her age. Yeah, she can do her school work very quickly and usually gets it right. She can also remember things easily. On hard problems she can almost always figure out the answers. Yeah, I think that she does well in school."

"Hi, I just met a kid named _____ and this is what I think. I think that she worries whether she can do the school work assigned to her and isn't sure if she is as smart as other kids. She is pretty slow in finishing her school work and sometimes forgets what she has learned. Yeah, she doesn't do so well on her assignments and has trouble figuring out the answers. No, I don't think she does too well in school."

Global Self-Worth Puppet Show

"Hi. I know a girl named _____. Let me tell you what I think about her. I think she is usually pretty pleased with herself and likes the way she is leading her life. Yeah, she is happy with herself most of the time and likes the person she is. She is happy being the way she is and thinks that the way she does things is just fine. That's what I think."

"Hi. I know a girl named _____. Let me tell you what I think about her. I think that she often gets mad at herself and just doesn't like the way she is leading her life. She isn't always happy with herself and often wishes she were someone else. Yeah, she wishes she were different and that she did things differently. That's what I think."

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