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## Development of commitment in young children's best friendships

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DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT IN YOUNG  
CHILDREN'S BEST FRIENDSHIPS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Psychology

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Andrea L. Kemp

August 2000

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## THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University Of Nebraska,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S  
BEST FRIENDSHIPS

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University of Nebraska, 2000

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Although the amount of research conducted on children's friendships is large, the specific characteristic of friendship commitment has received little attention to date. At what age and to what extent commitment is present in children's friendships is the main focus of this study. Students in grades 2 through 7 completed a demographic questionnaire, the Commitment and Satisfaction Scale, the Children's Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale, The Network of Relationships Inventory, and they also responded to hypothetical vignettes. Of particular interest were the effects of children's age, gender, friendship reciprocity, self-efficacy and friendship satisfaction on their friendship commitment levels. Analyses of variance and regression analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between these variables. While children as young as 7 displayed commitment in their friendships, commitment levels did not vary as a function of age. However, the ability to articulate an understanding of commitment did increase with age. Levels of friendship commitment were higher for females than males. Children in reciprocal friendships displayed higher levels of commitment than those in non-reciprocal relationships. Level of friendship satisfaction as well as a child's feelings of self-efficacy were found to be significant predictors of friendship commitment levels. The findings which suggest that very young children are capable of experiencing

commitment in their friendships are new to the field of friendship research. Therefore, it is important that in future research both the quality and the predictors of commitment in these very young friendships are considered.

## Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my husband, Marty, for his patience, support and understanding as I have worked on this seemingly endless project. His willingness to allow me the time I needed to complete everything as well as his patience in dealing with me throughout have been very much appreciated. I would also like to thank my parents who have always been a source of support and inspiration for me. Without their words of encouragement and motivation, I would never have gotten to this point.

Dr. Joseph C. LaVoie deserves a great deal of credit for helping me finish this project. He has shown me the utmost patience and support the past several years. Having an advisor to whom I have always felt comfortable going with questions and concerns has been very important to me. I would like to thank Dr. Brigette Ryalls, Dr. Roni Reiter-Palmon, and Dr. Marshall Prisbell for their helpful insights and the time they have devoted serving on my Thesis Committee.

I extend my gratitude to the administrators, teachers, parents, and students at LaVista Middle, Hickory Hill Elementary and LaVista West Elementary Schools who made it possible for me to collect the data that I needed. I appreciate the time and effort they sacrificed to help me with a very important part of this project.

I would also like to thank fellow graduate students Molly Wernli and Susan Goss for helping me out with data collection. I appreciate their willingness to lend me a hand when I needed it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

The research literature on different aspects of children's friendships is relatively large. One specific aspect frequently considered is the expectations that children have concerning their friendships. Some of the more typical friendship expectations relate to: common activities, evaluation, propinquity, character admiration, acceptance, loyalty and commitment, genuineness, common interests, and intimacy potential (Bigelow, 1977). The direction of previous research has been to investigate the developmental progression of these expectations (Bigelow, 1977; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975). The present study focuses specifically on the developmental progression of the friendship expectation of loyalty and commitment because this issue has not received adequate attention in previous research. The development of commitment and loyalty deserves more attention due to the important role these qualities play in the establishment and maintenance of peer friendships (Berndt, Hawkins, & Hoyle, 1986).

The intent of this study is to show that young children experience feelings of loyalty and commitment toward their friends. Previous research (Bigelow, 1977; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975) suggested that these concepts are not present in friendships until children reach early adolescence. However, more recent studies (Clark & Bittle, 1992; Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996) have cast doubt on the earlier findings and suggest that children may have feelings of commitment and loyalty at a much earlier age than previously believed.

Hartup and Sancilio (1986) suggest that the existing knowledge on commitment needs to be expanded so that more definitive conclusions about the role that commitment plays in young children's relationships can be drawn:

Nevertheless, this characteristic of friendship interactions (i.e., commitment) is not as clearly manifest among young children as some of the others mentioned. This is not to say that fidelity and working to continue a relationship are unimportant among younger children but, rather, to underscore that our information is too sketchy to conclude very much about the dynamics of commitment in early childhood. (p. 74).

The contention of this study is that, if the participants' level of commitment and loyalty is measured in a way that allows the child to describe the behaviors that are important in their friendships and to evaluate the importance of given committed behaviors, children as young as 7 and 8 will consistently be found to possess the friendship qualities of commitment and loyalty.

The meaning of commitment. Webster's College Dictionary (1995) provides eleven different definitions for the word commit, two of which refer to the type of commitment that exists in personal relationships. The fourth listed definition is to bind or to obligate, as by pledge or assurance. The eleventh listed definition is to pledge or engage oneself. The third edition of the Webster's New World Thesaurus (1997) provides the following words as synonyms for commitment: pledge, responsibility, engagement, assurance, duty, and promise. The synonyms given for the word committed are dedicated, devoted, pledged and faithful.

There are a variety of different approaches used to operationalize the concept of commitment in relationships. Perhaps the most common conceptualization of commitment is the likelihood that a person will remain with another person and see their relationship through to its' end. Commitment is usually related to the duration of a relationship and is inversely related to the probability that a person will leave a relationship (Rusbult, 1980). Becker (1960) suggested that when committed to a relationship, individuals engage in consistent lines of activity. In other words, the behavioral characteristics of a committed individual persist over some period of time in pursuit of the goal of commitment. In this view, commitment is a stable need that all people have, and acting consistently serves to satisfy this need.

Rosenblatt (1977) referred to commitment as the avowed or inferred intent of an individual to remain in a relationship. An individual's level of commitment represents long-term orientation toward a relationship, including his or her intentions to stay in the relationship, and his or her feelings of affection (Rosenblatt, 1977). Individuals who are highly committed to their relationships feel connected to their friend, and have a long time perspective when considering the duration of their relationship. As a result, highly committed individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that will maintain their friendship. For example, when highly committed to a friendship, a person is more likely to act in the best interest of the relationship (e.g., accommodate their friend) during an argument.



## Literature Review

### Developmental Differences in Children's Friendships

Shift in description of friends. Young children primarily base their descriptions of others on overt concrete behaviors and physical attributes (Livesley & Bromley, 1973). Older children, on the other hand, make inferences from these observed behaviors and describe others in terms of underlying personality characteristics (Livesley & Bromley, 1973). Similar developmental changes occur in children's descriptions of their friends (Bigelow, 1977; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975). Young children describe friends as peers whom they like and with whom they enjoy spending time. In middle childhood, children begin to describe the admirable qualities of their friends. Adolescents, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of such internal characteristics as acceptance, loyalty, and intimacy when describing their friends. Bigelow (1977) reported that young children refer to friends as pleasurable companions, but that older children emphasize the virtue-related constructs (e.g., loyalty and genuineness) of their friends.

Shift in friendship expectations. Bigelow (1977) defined friendship expectations as those beliefs, attitudes, and values that a person sees as being important qualities for a friend to possess. Similar to the developmental change in friendship descriptions, children's friendship expectations also change as they get older. Numerous researchers have found that the primary foci of preschool-aged children's friendships are companionship and shared activities (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). These early friendships serve young children's self-interests (Berndt, Hawkins, & Hoyle, 1986). The friendship

expectations of older children become less egocentric and more complex as children move from concrete to formal operational stages of cognition (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980). Older children's friendships are less self-serving and more cooperative (Berndt et al., 1986) than are younger children's friendships.

Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) found that children's friendship expectations go through age-related changes. They suggested that children's friendship expectations first make the transition from egocentric to sociocentric, and then from sociocentric to empathic. Bigelow and LaGaipa did not attempt to portray these transitions as discrete stages, but instead said that these were only the trends that they noticed in their research.

Bigelow (1977) introduced three successive stages through which children's friendship expectations pass. The first stage, concerning the most superficial friendship qualities, consists of nearness between friends and the common activities shared by friends. The second, or the normative stage, is made up primarily of moral values and character admiration. The final stage consists of empathy, understanding, and self-disclosure. Dispositional personality factors are of primary importance in this final stage.

In Bigelow's (1977) research, the first stage of friendship expectations began in first grade children and the expectations characteristic of the third stage begin around the sixth grade. However, Bigelow did notice that when a child made the transition to the next stage of friendship expectations, he or she did not then disregard the expectations of the previous stages. In other words, children carry the expectations of the first stage with them as they progress through the remaining two stages.

Increase in self disclosure. One of the largest distinctions between children's and teenager's friendships is the increase in the amount of intimacy and self-disclosure in the relationship as children enter adolescence (Berndt, 1982; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Friendships change from primarily play-focused to talk-focused (Smollar & Youniss, 1982). Youniss and Volpe (1978) stated that, to young children, a friend is a person with whom material items or fun activities are shared, whereas to older children, a friend is a person with whom you share private feelings and thoughts as a result of feeling respect and affection for that person. Interpersonal exchange is not common in friendships prior to grade six (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980). When asked about friendship expectations, there is a dramatic increase in references to the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings from middle childhood to adolescence (Berndt, 1981; Bigelow, 1977; Furman & Bierman, 1984). In fact, teenagers indicate that the mutual disclosure of secrets and personal feelings is the defining feature of friendships (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990).

Smollar and Youniss (1982) found that the sharing of personal problems with a best friend started in early adolescence for females and in late adolescence for males. During the adolescent years, children begin to distance themselves from their parents and increase their dependence on friends. As a result of this shift in dependence, teenagers increasingly look to friends as intimate confidants. Self disclosure is so important in adolescent friendships that those teenagers who do not view friendship as an appropriate forum for revealing personal information often have trouble establishing and maintaining friendships (Buzzelli, 1988).

Increased levels of intimacy and trust. Teenagers have made the shift from seeing friendship primarily for companionship and shared activities to seeing the importance of loyalty and intimacy in friendship (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Newcomb and Bagwell's (1995) meta-analytic review of the vast amount of friendship research confirmed that intimacy, trust, and commitment are more common in the friendships of early teenagers than in those of children. There is an increased need for more intimate relationships in adolescence because of the risk and vulnerability associated with the disclosure of personal information. Adolescents define a true friend as a trusted confidant who will not make fun of you, and who will loyally keep your disclosures secret (Rawlins & Holl, 1987; Rotenberg, 1991). Adolescents seek true and loyal friends with whom they can be confident that their disclosures will be kept secret.

Rotenberg (1980) reported that a shift in the bases of trust occurs with age. In younger children, trust is based solely on a person's overt behaviors, whereas in older children and teenagers trust is based on the consistency that is shown between promises and subsequent behavior. Damon (1977) suggested that from the ages of 9 to 11 children begin to display reciprocal trust in their friendships. When reciprocal trust is present, children assume that their friends will provide help, goods or kind words as needed (Damon, 1977). According to LaGaipa (1979), the foundations for building trust in others are laid in childhood, but adolescent experiences serve to reinforce or strengthen the trust that has been built previously.

When individuals choose to disclose personal information to a friend they are making themselves vulnerable to betrayal. The possibility of betrayal is the price that one

pays for the benefits of intimacy. It is only possible to be betrayed by someone that you are close to and in whom you trust (Jones, Cohn, & Miller, 1991). An individual's willingness to engage in the risky behavior of sharing secrets depends on their confidence that the recipient of the secret will keep his or her word. If the recipient does keep his or her word, the secret sharer's confidence and trust in that person increases, which can foster friendship (Rotenberg, 1991). Trust is largely mutual or reciprocal in that an individual's trust in another person affects the opportunity for engaging in trust-building behaviors (Rotenberg, 1991). In other words, if a child does not trust a peer, he or she will likely not share any secrets with that peer, making it impossible for any future trust to be established.

Friendship stability. Past research (Berndt & Hoyle, 1985; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980) contains conflicting reports concerning whether or not developmental changes occur in the stability of children's friendships. One assumption common in the past was that children's friendships are low in stability, but that this stability increases regularly with age (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1980). The rationale for this assumption was that, as children increase in age they also mature in the areas of social cognition and social skills. Therefore, it was believed that as children gain social maturity, the friendships that they engage in become more stable. However, by simultaneously looking at the stability of old friendships and newly formed friendships, Berndt and Hoyle (1985) found evidence that raised questions about this previous belief that friendship stability increases with age. Using first-, fourth-, and eighth-grade participants, Berndt and Hoyle found that friendships do not necessarily increase in stability as children get older. In general,

friendships were found to increase in stability from the first grade to fourth grade. However, no significant increase in stability was found between fourth and eighth grades. This finding casts doubt on the suggestion that children's relationships become more stable as a result of the children's increased cognitive skills. If this were the case, the stability of the eighth graders would most certainly be higher than that of the fourth graders.

### Commitment and Loyalty in Friendships

The investment model. Rusbult (1980) introduced the investment model, in which commitment level is influenced by an individual's level of satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size. According to this model, satisfaction occurs when the rewards of a relationship are high and the costs are low. Rusbult suggested that the two possible alternatives to a friendship are another friendship and solitude. An individual's commitment level will be higher if these alternatives are perceived to be lower in quality than the present relationship. Investments refer to any resources put into a relationship that would be lost if the relationship were to end.

Rusbult (1980) asked undergraduate students to fill out a friendship questionnaire based on one of the student's close friendships. The results provided support for the investment model's prediction for the causes of satisfaction and commitment in friendships. The participants' satisfaction in their friendships was a function of the perceived costs and rewards of the relationship. Commitment, on the other hand, was best explained by a combination of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments. Individuals who had high levels of satisfaction, large investments, and low

quality alternatives were more likely to be committed to their friendships. These findings cast doubt on the previous belief that satisfaction and commitment are one and the same and that if a person is satisfied in a relationship, then they automatically will seek to maintain the relationship.

Past research on developmental differences in commitment. In one of the first studies to explore children's descriptions of their friendships, Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) asked children in grades one through eight to write an essay about a same sex best friend. The children were instructed to write about what they expected from these best friends and how these expectations differed from those they had for other acquaintances. Bigelow and LaGaipa identified 16 friendship expectation dimensions that increased significantly as the participants increased in age. Loyalty and commitment was one of these dimensions and the onset of this expectation occurred during the fifth grade. Bigelow and LaGaipa defined onset as the first age at which 7 % of the sample mentioned the expectation in their written essays. Therefore, Bigelow and LaGaipa concluded that commitment and loyalty did not appear as friendship expectations until children reached the ages of 11 or 12.

In a later study, Bigelow (1977) again found that loyalty and commitment occur rather late in the developmental progression of friendship expectations. Bigelow asked his 6- to 14-year-old participants to write an essay about what they expect from their best friend. By coding the participants' responses to this prompt, Bigelow was able to determine the developmental sequence of the friendship expectations. The following is a

list of the eight friendship expectations in rank order beginning with those formed earliest: (a) common activities; (b) evaluation; (c) propinquity, character admiration; (d) acceptance; (e) loyalty and commitment; (f) genuineness; (g) common interests; and (h) intimacy potential. For the participants in Bigelow's (1977) study, loyalty and commitment expectations first emerged at age 9 or 10, but were not frequently mentioned until age 11 or 12 and older. As Bigelow pointed out in his conclusion, there is not a direct relationship between friendship expectation development and intellectual growth. Bigelow noticed that children who were 13 and 14 years old, and likely capable of mastering formal operational thought, were still using "prelogical" friendship expectations. The likely reason for the discrepancy between children's intellectual level and their reported friendship expectations is that the more concrete "prelogical" expectations are more salient in children's minds than are the more idealistic higher-level expectations (Bigelow, 1977). This age discrepancy is a good example of a problem that can occur with an open-ended measure like that used in Bigelow's study. The investigator is bound by what the participant wants to include in the essay. As a result, the investigator is uncertain whether the participant has higher level friendship expectations that were not mentioned in the essay.

Weiss, Smith, and Theeboom (1996) conducted a study with a different emphasis than the previously cited studies. They were primarily interested in children's conceptions of their friendships in the sports domain. The children ranged in age from 8 to 16 years old and were required to have participated in a wide range of team and individual activities at both the recreational and competitive levels. The participants were asked to



identify their best friend in one of these sport-related activities and to consider this best friend while answering questions designed to tap their conceptions of friendship. In the analysis of the children's responses to the interview questions, Weiss et al. identified 12 friendship dimensions. One of the dimensions was loyalty, defined as a sense of commitment to one another, or "being there" for each other. This dimension was mentioned by 71% of the participants, and included the themes of sticking up for one another, picking each other to do things, and depending on one another. The developmental progression of the loyalty dimension in this study was very different than the progression found in previous research (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977). Weiss et al. found that the two younger groups (ages 8-9 and 10-12) cited loyalty dimensions more frequently than did the older group (ages 13-16).

Additional data casts doubt on the previous belief that children's feelings of commitment and loyalty in their friendships increases significantly as children enter late childhood and adolescence. Clark and Bittle (1992) asked their third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade participants to complete the Children's Friendship Expectancy Inventory (LaGaipa & Wood, 1973) which measures four expectancy areas: mutual activities, conventional morality, loyalty and commitment, and empathic understanding. The inventory consists of seven behaviors or qualities in each of the four expectancy areas. The participants decided how important each of the behaviors or qualities were to them in choosing a best friend, and in a variation on this inventory, they were also asked to determine how well the 28 behaviors and qualities pertained to their current best friendships. Clark and Bittle found that the third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade participants did not differ significantly in

their ratings of the importance of the loyalty and commitment behaviors and qualities. Commitment did, however, become more important in comparison to the other three friendship expectancies as the age of the children increased. The third graders considered loyalty and commitment to be the least important of the four friendship expectancies, but these characteristics moved up slightly to the third most important expectancy for the seventh graders. Unlike the findings of previous studies (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977), loyalty and commitment did not significantly increase in importance from the age of 9 to 13.

The Weiss et al. (1996) and the Clark and Bittle (1992) results contradict previous research (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977) which suggested that children do not begin to consistently mention loyalty and commitment expectations until the ages of 11 or 12, and that these expectations become stronger with age. Weiss et al. suggest that the reason for the discrepancy in their results and in those of previous findings may be that the qualities defining loyalty and commitment in a sport setting tend to portray more overt characteristics of peer behaviors than do the qualities used in nonsport settings. Therefore, because younger children use overt characteristics to describe friends, their descriptions of friends' behaviors in the sport setting may more easily be categorized into the loyalty and commitment dimension than their descriptions of friends' behaviors in a nonsport setting.

The method used in the Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) and the Bigelow (1977) studies consisted of having the children write an essay about what they expect in their best friends that differs from what they expect from other acquaintances. However, in the

Weiss et al. (1996) study, the children were asked a series of questions requesting specific behaviors that their friends engage in that other acquaintances do not. In sport settings the dimensions of loyalty and commitment are more likely to be characterized as overt behaviors than in nonsport settings, therefore, the young children were able to display more loyalty and commitment expectations in the Weiss et al. research than in the Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) and the Bigelow (1977) studies.

Developmental differences in friendship commitment levels. In 1953, Sullivan stated that children do not form true friendships until their pre-teenage years (i.e., age 9 or 10). Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) found that older children expect more loyalty, intimacy, and genuineness from their close friends than do younger children. In contrast, younger children expect more sharing and general play from their friends. Therefore, Bigelow and LaGaipa suggested that commitment is probably not important to children before the age of 10. Similarly, Smollar and Youniss (1982) contended that between the ages of 6 and 9, children lack the ability to view their friendship as an ongoing bond that will transcend periods of no contact or disagreement. Instead, they described pre-teenage friendships as being episodic and opportunistic.

Several different explanations have been advanced to describe why children presumably do not experience commitment in their friendships until the ages of 11 or 12. One suggestion attributes the late emergence of commitment to the fact that formal operational thinking does not begin until adolescence (Elkind, 1984). Once children are capable of using formal operations, they are able to consider abstract possibilities and ideals, and can introspect on their own thoughts. During early adolescence, children shift

from thinking in the present to thinking about the future. Therefore, the concept of a lasting and committed relationship is less likely to be considered by children who are thinking only in terms of the present and not yet of the future.

A second explanation focuses on social perspective-taking. Social perspective-taking allows adolescents to consider several viewpoints at one time. Therefore, adolescents are more likely to look at a situation through the eyes of others, whereas younger children tend only to consider their own perspective. These advances in adolescents' cognitive abilities allow them to see their friends, themselves, and their problems in a longer time perspective (Reisman, 1981). Smollar and Youniss (1982) contend that teenagers assume that they have an obligation to view friendships in a long time perspective.

Although it is widely believed that commitment in friendships does not occur until children reach early adolescence, anecdotal evidence suggests that fidelity (i.e., loyalty) may occur in children's friendships well before the age of 8 (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1986). Children as young as three have been found to construct long-lasting friendships (Gottman, 1983). Hartup (1996) suggests that commitment and trust likely play a role in friendships even before children are able to articulate these expectations. Most children in elementary school think that their current best friendships will last indefinitely (Levinger & Levinger, 1986). Hartup (1989) suggests that young children can rarely describe the mutuality and commitment that adults consider essential to "being friends." But Hartup contends that in interviews young children often display an understanding of the essential themes of friendships.

Newcomb and Bagwell's (1995) meta-analysis of friendship research suggests that the methodology used in investigations of children's friendships influences the findings about the intimate properties of the relationship. Therefore, using one type of method may yield no evidence of commitment in a relationship, whereas another method may reveal that in the same friendship commitment does exist. For this reason, Newcomb and Bagwell stress the necessity of using multiple methods when assessing the intimate aspects of friendships.

Friendship expectations preceding commitment and loyalty. Previous research (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977) suggests that the friendship expectations of commitment and loyalty are not found in children until at least the age of 10 but that other expectations form prior to this age. Bigelow and LaGaipa found that the friendship expectations of playing and sharing, common activity, helping, and admiration all precede the emergence of loyalty and commitment. All of these preceding expectations were found to be present at or before the age of nine.

According to Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975), young children see friendship as a behavioral relationship, and therefore value such things as joint activities and territorial proximity. However, as children increase in age, their friendships become more sociocentric and less egocentric, and expectations such as fidelity and mutual help become more important. Finally, teenagers begin to value empathy, understanding, and self-disclosure in their friendships. Based on this account by Bigelow and LaGaipa, children expect loyalty and commitment to be present in their friendships before they begin to feel empathy and self-disclose to their friends. Because individuals put

themselves at risk of betrayal when they disclose personal information to friends, it is likely that a sense of loyalty and commitment precedes the act of self disclosure.

### Gender Differences in Friendship Commitment and Loyalty

One large gender difference in children's friendships is that girls place a high priority on the building of interpersonal connections in their relationships, whereas boys are more interested in enhancing their individual status in a relationship (Maccoby, 1990). Another related gender difference in friendships is that boys' friendships tend to be oriented toward a group of peers, whereas girls' friendships tend to be more intensive, focusing on dyadic relationships (Waldrop & Halverson, 1975). Maccoby also addressed how boys' and girls' friendships differ in the types of relationship needs that are pursued and discouraged. Girls' friendships tend to encourage and foster self-disclosure and emotional support, while discouraging competition. Boys' friendships, on the other hand, are more likely to encourage competition and status differences while discouraging intimate and sentimental connections between the friends. Clark and Bittle's (1992) exploration of children's friendship expectations showed that girls' friendships possessed a higher level of loyalty and commitment and empathic understanding than did the friendships of boys. Sharabany, Gershoni, and Hofman (1981) found that for children in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11, girls reported higher levels of loyalty and closeness with their friends than did boys. Furman and Buhrmester (1985) have suggested that girls rely on their best friends more heavily than do boys. Furman and Buhrmester found that, compared to boys, girls reported more intimacy, affection, and enhancement of worth in their best friendships. Because these qualities are more characteristic of friendships as

children grow older, Furman and Buhrmester assert that girls' best friendships may be more developmentally mature than the best friendships of boys. Boys also tend to share their thoughts and feelings with friends less often than girls do (Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981; Buhrmester, 1990). Jones and Dembo (1989) suggest that this gender discrepancy in intimacy levels increases as children go through adolescence.

### Reciprocal and Non-Reciprocal Friendships

A reciprocal dyad is one in which the members express mutual liking for each other. In other words, two children in a reciprocal dyad would name each other as their best friend. A non-reciprocal dyad, on the other hand, is one that contains a one-sided, non-mutual friendship selection. An example of a non-reciprocal friendship is where Sally names Jane as her best friend, but Jane names Susan as her best friend. Therefore, Sally's feeling that she and Jane are best friends is not reciprocated by Jane.

Hartup (1989) stated that reciprocity and commitment are the two essentials needed for the existence of a friendship. Clark and Ayers (1988) pointed out the importance of reciprocity for both friendship selection as well as friendship stability. Children involved in a reciprocal friendship are free to elaborate and extend their play with one another, whereas those in a non-reciprocal relationship tend to spend the majority of their efforts in negotiations to determine whether or not interactions can occur at all (Hartup, 1989). Similarly, Howes (1983) found that nursery school children involved in reciprocal friendships engage in behaviors that elicit continued interaction, but continued interaction between non-reciprocated individuals is low.

Previous research (e.g., Ayers, 1985; Clark & Ayers, 1988) investigated differences in various friendship qualities of reciprocal and non-reciprocal dyads. Clark and Ayers (1988) used the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale (Ayers, 1985) to explore differences in reciprocal and non-reciprocal friendships of adolescents in the seventh and eighth grades. They found that the participants in mutual relationships felt a greater amount of commitment for their best friend than did the adolescents in one-sided non-reciprocated relationships. Clark and Ayers also reported that more female relationships were reciprocated than male relationships. This finding is consistent with Waldrop and Halverson's (1975) suggestion that boys' friendships are more often oriented toward a group of peers, whereas girls' friendships tend to be more intensive and focused on a dyadic relationship. Because girls focus more on dyadic, intense relationships, their friendships should be more frequently reciprocated than the friendships of boys.

Ayers (1985) also used the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale and the Children's Friendship Expectancy Inventory (LaGaipa & Wood, 1973) to investigate the differences that exist between reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships in friendship expectations as well as in real-life friendship assessments. Ayers also focused on participants in the seventh and eighth grades. No significant differences were found between non-reciprocal and reciprocal dyads in the area of friendship expectations. That is, in their expectations of conventional morality, mutual activities, loyalty and commitment, and empathic understanding, individuals in reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships did not differ significantly. Reciprocal friends were found to be quite similar in friendship



expectations, but individuals in non-reciprocal relationships were found to have equally similar friendship expectations.

When the seventh and eighth grade participants in Ayers' (1985) research were asked to assess their actual friendships, reciprocal dyads were more similar in assessing conventional morality and empathic understanding than were non-reciprocal dyads. However, there were no significant differences between reciprocal and non-reciprocal dyads in their assessments of mutual activities and loyalty and commitment in their real-life friendships. This result contrasts with the finding by Clark and Ayers (1988) that reciprocal dyads were more similar in their real-life friendship assessments of loyalty and commitment than non-reciprocal dyads. In sum, Ayers found that friendship expectancies are not related to friendship reciprocity or to friendship satisfaction. However, individuals in reciprocal dyads are more similar in the way that they assess their present friendships than are those in non-reciprocal dyads.

A methodological difference between the two studies may account for their discrepant results on reciprocal and non-reciprocal friendships. Clark and Ayers (1988) collected commitment and loyalty data using the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale, whereas Ayers (1985) used a revised version of the Children's Friendship Expectancy Inventory (CFEI) to gather commitment ratings. The modified CFEI contains seven loyalty and commitment statements whereas the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale has 12 commitment statements. The items in the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale more accurately capture characteristics of friendship commitment while the CFEI contains

some items (e.g., Share and share alike, Praise me when I do something well) that appear to be assessing qualities other than commitment.

### Friendship Satisfaction

According to Ayers (1985), friendship satisfaction is the result of a comparison of behaviors expected from friends versus behaviors actually experienced with friends. Rusbult's (1980) research on college friendships revealed that an individual's level of friendship satisfaction increased as the number of rewards in the relationship increased and the number of costs in the friendship decreased. In Solano and Ayers' (1983) study of tenth-grade friendships, satisfaction increased as rewards, equity, proximity between friends, and friends' physical attractiveness increased. However, in contrast to Rusbult's results, satisfaction in the Solano and Ayers' study increased as friendship costs increased.

More recent research has also uncovered a connection between the level of satisfaction and the level of commitment in friendships. In assessing the real-life friendships of seventh and eighth grade participants, Ayers (1985) found that friendship satisfaction increased as levels of loyalty and commitment increased. Further, friendship satisfaction was more highly correlated with the two more advanced friendship characteristics (i.e., loyalty and commitment, and empathic understanding) than with the two more basic areas of mutual activities and conventional morality. Therefore, teenagers were more satisfied with friends that possessed the qualities characteristic of more advanced friendship stages.

### Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the belief that one can successfully perform behavior required to produce desired outcomes. Research by Goetz and Dweck (1980) suggests that a child's self-perceptions of social competence may affect his or her behavior, which can in turn affect the quality of that child's peer relations. Despite the purported importance of children's feelings of social competence, there were no tools specifically designed to measure this concept at the time of Goetz and Dweck's study. Wheeler and Ladd (1982) were the first to develop such a scale, the Children's Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale (CSPI). The operational definition for self-efficacy used by Wheeler and Ladd for this measure is a child's perception of his or her ability to enact prosocial verbal persuasive skills in specific peer situations.

Wheeler and Ladd suggested that children who are more confident in their social abilities may be more likely to utilize these abilities when interacting with their peers than would children who have less social confidence. If this contention is accurate, it follows that children with more social self-confidence will have more success at initiating and building friendships than children with lower levels of social self-confidence. A logical progression of this scenario is that children who more successfully establish friendships (i.e., children with higher social confidence) will also be more likely to maintain these friendships than will their peers with lower social confidence. In other words, because of their initial increased ability to interact with their peers, children with high social self-confidence may, over time achieve higher levels of commitment in their friendships than children who have low social self-confidence.

### Aim of the Present Study

A review of the research conducted on the developmental progression of children's friendships reveals that there has been an insufficient investigation into the friendship quality of commitment. This statement is especially true for research conducted in the past 20 years. In the 1970's, Bigelow and his colleagues concluded that, before the age of 10, children do not possess or display commitment in their friendships. The intent of the present study is to reexamine this claim using a methodology more conducive to the developmental abilities of young children. Because the measures to be used ask the participants to rate the importance of specific behaviors and feelings (rather than simply asking them to list what qualities are important in a friend), these measures are expected to display evidence of commitment in their friendships well before the age of 10.

### Hypotheses

Based on the previous review of the literature on commitment and expectations in the friendships of children and adolescents, the following hypotheses are advanced.

Hypothesis one. The friendship expectation of commitment and loyalty can be found in children much younger than previously reported. Even the youngest age group, the 7-year-olds, are expected to show responses and feelings indicative of commitment and loyalty in their current best friendships.

Commitment is expected to be found in children as young as 7 because the measures to be used in the proposed study will allow the participants to describe and rate specific behaviors that can actually demonstrate their feelings of commitment. Previous

research (e.g., Livesley & Bromley, 1973) has shown that young children describe the overt concrete behaviors of others (e.g., my friend sticks by me) as opposed to describing others' underlying personality characteristics (e.g., my friend is committed to me).

Therefore, a young child may be capable of identifying commitment in their friendship by describing overt behaviors that they or their friend displays, but this same young child may not be able to state that they are committed to their friend or even know what commitment means.

Hypothesis two. The second hypothesis has been broken down into three subparts because the first two parts are put together to form the final part. The first subpart states that significant age differences will be found in the commitment levels of the participants. The older participants are expected to display higher degrees of commitment in their best friendships than are the younger participants.

The second subpart of hypothesis two states that gender differences will be found in the participants' commitment levels. Girls will display higher degrees of commitment than boys. Previous research suggests that girls' relationships are more committed, loyal, and intimate than boys' relationships.

The final subpart of the second hypothesis states that an interaction will occur between gender and age. The levels of commitment of girls are expected to be higher than that of boys at all age groups, but this discrepancy between the commitment levels of girls and boys is expected to increase as the participants increase in age.

Hypothesis three. Reciprocal dyads are expected to show higher levels of loyalty and commitment in their friendships than are non-reciprocal dyads. This expected

difference is consistent with the results of a previous study that also used the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale to assess commitment level (e.g., Clark & Ayers, 1988).

Although the Clark and Ayers' participants (seventh and eighth graders) were older than the majority of the participants in the proposed study, the important concept, whether or not a friendship is reciprocal, should have the same effects on younger children's feelings of loyalty and commitment. However, because friendship commitment is expected to increase with age, the difference in commitment levels between the children in reciprocated friendships and those in non-reciprocated friendships will also increase with age.

Hypothesis four. The level of satisfaction in a friendship will have a significant effect on the level of commitment and loyalty in that friendship. It is further hypothesized that this effect of satisfaction will increase with the participants' age. Previous research using the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale (Clark & Ayers, 1988) has suggested that this relationship should be present. Based on Clark and Ayers' research, satisfaction is expected to have an effect on commitment in the friendships of the older participants and, to a lesser extent, in the friendships of the younger participants as well.

## CHAPTER 2

### Method

#### Participants

The sample consisted of 37 second graders, ages 7-8 (20 males, 17 females); 36 third graders, ages 8-9 (18 males, 18 females); 30 fourth graders, ages 9-10 (16 males, 14 females); 30 fifth graders, ages 10-11 (13 males, 17 females); 39 sixth graders, ages 11-12 (18 males, 21 females); and 51 seventh graders, ages 12-13 (17 males, 34 females). The students were selected from an elementary school and a middle school in a suburb of Omaha, Nebraska. The sample was predominantly Caucasian, and from middle socioeconomic status families.

#### Measures

The following five measures were used to assess loyalty and commitment in best friendships:

Demographic questionnaire. The children were asked to provide some information pertaining to age, sex, grade, name of best friend, and length of time they have been with this friend (See Appendix A). A child's response to the name of his or her best friend was used to determine whether each participant's friendship was reciprocated or non-reciprocated. The students were also asked to list three behaviors that best show that a friend is loyal or committed to them (e.g., sticks with them, likes them, etc.). The students were told to make no response to this question if they had no idea what commitment means. This questionnaire was the first measure that the participants completed so that they could not respond to this question by simply listing behaviors

mentioned in other measures. This procedure forced the participants to come up with some of their own ideas about loyalty and commitment.

Interrater reliability. An additional coder recoded the responses of a randomly selected 20% of the responses given to this question. The interrelater reliability between the two coders on these responses was 90%.

Satisfaction and commitment scale. This scale developed by Ayers (1985) consists of 12 phrases which address the participants' level of commitment in their current best friendships and 10 statements which focus on their satisfaction in these friendships (See Appendix B). The children rated whether or not each statement described their current friendship using a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale ranged from 1 (no) to 5 (yes). A rating of 3 was used if the participant was not sure whether or not the statement described their feelings toward their friendship. A rating of 2 represents probably not and 4 represents probably yes.

The internal consistency of the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale, using Cronbach's Alpha is .88 for the satisfaction items and .75 for the commitment items (Ayers, 1985). For the present study, the coefficient alpha was .83 for the satisfaction items and .60 for the commitment items.

Hypothetical vignettes. Each student responded to nine hypothetical scenarios which were constructed for this research (See Appendix C). There were three scenarios representing each of three relationship issues: loyalty and commitment, trust, and minor friendship betrayal. Each of the scenarios gave an example depicting one of the three relationship issues. For example, one of the commitment scenarios describes a situation



in which the child is faced with the decision between keeping his or her best friend and spending time with another new friend. The child is asked what he or she would do if placed in this situation, and how hard or easy it would be to make the decision. Each of the scenarios and their subsequent questions were read aloud to the students in grades two through six. The seventh-grade students were given instructions and then asked to read the items and answer the questions independently.

This measure was intended to place the participants in a realistic situation in order to assess their levels of commitment and trust as well as their reactions to minor friendship betrayals. Trust is important because it is likely a quality that is necessary for commitment. The friendship betrayals were included in the measure in order to determine whether the participants' actual commitment to the friendship accurately reflected their statements of commitment in the relationship.

Children's self-efficacy for peer interaction scale (CSPI). The CSPI (Wheeler & Ladd, 1982) assesses children's social self-efficacy for persuasive skills in a variety of peer situations (See Appendix D). This scale was used to detect any individual differences that exist between participants in their feelings of self-efficacy. Based on the participant's ratings on this measure, it can be determined whether children's commitment levels to a best friend are in any way related to their self-perceptions of social competence.

The scale consists of 22 statements that describe a social situation. Each item is followed by an incomplete sentence which the child must complete indicating his or her ability to perform the stated behavior. Half of the items depict conflict situations while

the remaining half depict non-conflict situations. In order to finish the incomplete statements, the children had to choose between four responses: (1) HARD!, (2) hard, (3) easy, and (4) EASY!. The higher the total sum of all of the items, the greater the child's self-efficacy is in peer relations.

Wheeler and Ladd (1982) provide the following psychometric information on the CSPI. The internal consistency of the CSPI, based on Cronbach's Alpha, is .85 for the entire scale. The internal consistency for the 11 conflict items alone is .85, and for the 11 non-conflict items .73. The correlation between the two parts is .43, indicating that the two clusters represent distinct but related components. The test-retest reliability over a 2 week period is .90 for males and .80 for females. For the present study, the reliability (coefficient alpha) was .88 for the entire CSPI scale.

Network of relationships inventory. Furman and Buhrmester (1985) designed the Network of Relationships and provided the following psychometric analyses (See Appendix E). The following three subscales were used from this measure: (a) companionship, (b) satisfaction, and (c) intimacy. Each of these subscales consists of 3 questions about best friendships which the participants answered using a 5-point Likert scale. The satisfaction subscale was used in order to get a second assessment of the child's satisfaction with his or her best friendship. The intimacy and companionship subscales provided a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the child's best friendship.

Furman and Buhrmester (1985) found the internal consistency of the scale scores to be satisfactory, M Cronbach's Alpha = .80. The Alphas for all of the scale scores were

above .60. For the present study, the reliability coefficient alpha for the three subscales used was .60.

### Procedure

The children were brought together and introduced to the researcher(s) with whom they would be working. The investigator then explained to the children that they were going to be involved in a study that explores the importance of commitment and loyalty in children's best friendships. The children were also told that the study is looking for differences in the friendships of children who are younger and older, and in the friendships of boys and girls. Because the children were asked to provide information on several different forms, it was stressed that everyone needed to listen carefully to make sure that directions are understood and correctly followed. The children were encouraged to ask for help whenever they did not understand any part of the directions.

The demographic questionnaire was completed first. All of the questions were read to the children and explanations about how to answer each of the questions were provided. Special care was taken to point out that the answers to the questions "What is your name?" and "What is the name of your best friend?" would be removed from the questionnaire (i.e., blackened out) after the reciprocation coding occurred. This information was intended to alleviate any fears that the child would have about anonymity.

Next, the researcher discussed with the entire group how to respond correctly using a Likert scale. The children were shown a large depiction of a 5-point Likert scale

on a piece of poster board. The depiction had a sad face drawn above the 1, a neutral face drawn by the 3, and a happy face drawn by the 5. The children were told that an answer of 1 means that you really disagree with the statement and 5 means that you really agree with the statement. An answer of 3 was described to be a good answer if you are not really sure whether you agree or not. The numbers 2 and 4 were explained as good answers if you kind of disagree or kind of agree. A sample statement (e.g., I like bananas) was read to the whole group and the investigator explained what number she would pick and why. Several children were called on to give their answers and explanations. Depending on whether the children appeared to understand the use of a Likert Scale, the researcher opted to do more examples as a group or to move on to the next measure.

The children next answered the questions on the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale. The children were told to respond to the statements in the same way as was done for the examples. All of the Likert scales used the same types of faces on each of the responses that the children saw on the poster board. Each of the items was read to the children and they were reminded that an answer of 1 means "No" and 5 means "Yes". The children were asked to circle the answer which best showed how they feel about each statement. When all of the answers were completed, the materials for the Satisfaction and Commitment Scale were collected.

The materials for the CSPI were handed out next. The only change that needed to be explained for this measure was that an answer of 1 now stands for "Hard" and 5 stands for "Easy". The items were read and the students were reminded of how to answer each question using the scale. Upon completion of the CSPI, the materials were collected

and the materials for the Network of Relationships Inventory were handed out. For this measure the students were told that 1 stands for "Little or None" and 5 stands for "The Most".

Because the hypothetical scenario instrument was quite different from the four other measures, this measure was given to the participants last. The students were told that they would hear a very short story and that they were to pretend that the story was about them and their best friend. Following the reading of the story, the children were asked to complete some questions about the story. Upon completion of this measure, the materials were collected and the children were praised for how well they listened and followed directions. Each of the children was given a pencil to take home.

#### Friendship Assignment

The students were placed in either the reciprocated or the non-reciprocated friendship category using the following procedures. If two children mutually named each other as a best friend, they were both placed in the reciprocated friendship group. However, if one child named another child as a best friend (e.g., Jane names Sue), but the child named as the best friend named another child as her best friend (e.g., Sue names Sally), the first child (i.e., Jane) was placed in the non-reciprocated friendship category. The second child's (i.e., Sue) placement was determined by whether or not her name was given by the child that she named as her best friend (i.e., Sally). Therefore, each child was placed in the reciprocated or non-reciprocated friendship group based on whether the child on their best friend list reciprocated and named the child as his or her best friend.

Children that named a best friend who was outside of this study were not placed in either the reciprocal or non-reciprocal friendship category because it was impossible to know whether their best friendship was reciprocated or not because their best friend was not a participant in the study. The children not placed in either of the two friendship categories were not included in the analysis using friendship types.

## CHAPTER 3

### Results

#### Commitment Scale Score

The primary aim of this study was to explore the extent to which young children are committed and loyal to their best friendships. The first hypothesis states that seven-year-old children have feelings and display behaviors that are indicative of commitment and loyalty to their best friends. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether age differences occur in children's commitment levels. The dependent variable was the commitment score from the Commitment Scale. The analysis of variance revealed no significant age differences in children's commitment levels,  $F(5, 217) = 1.285$ ,  $MSE = 37.613$ . Figure 1 shows children's level of commitment to a best friend by grade.

#### Age and Gender Differences in Commitment

A 6 (grade) x 2 (gender) ANOVA with Commitment Scale score as the dependent variable was used to analyze the three subsections of the second hypothesis. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1. The first part of the second hypothesis states that older children will display higher levels of friendship commitment. However, the analysis revealed that there were no significant age differences in children's level of commitment to their best friendships,  $F(5,211) = 1.046$ ,  $MSE = 35.67$ .

According to the second part of the hypothesis, the commitment levels of females will be higher than those of males. A significant gender effect was found in commitment level,  $F(1,211) = 9.795$ ,  $MSE = 35.67$ ,  $p < .05$ . The commitment scores of females ( $M =$

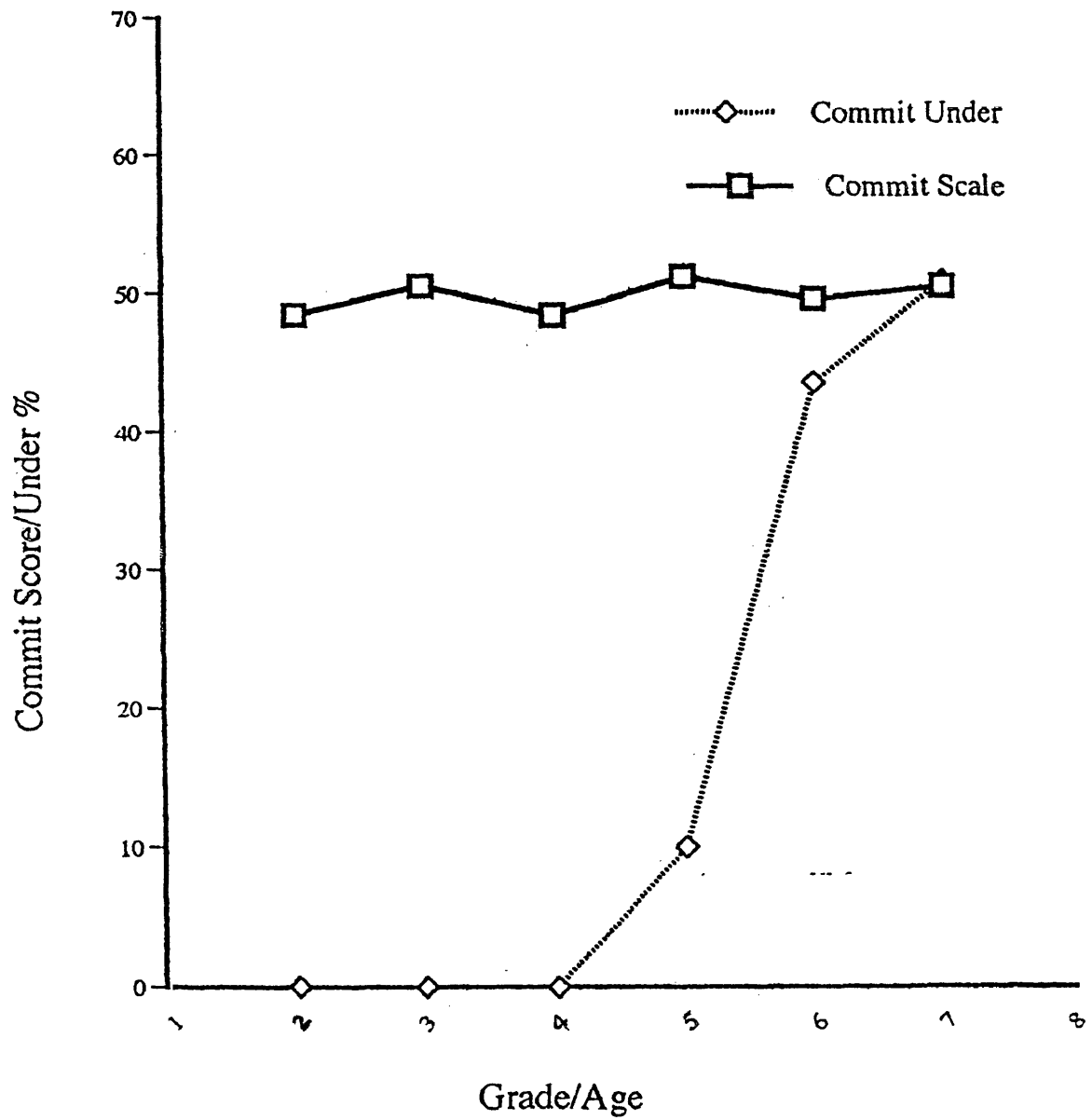


Fig. 1 Grade/Age Differences in Commit Score/Understanding



Table 1

ANOVA for Effect of Grade and Gender on Commitment

Source	<u>df</u>	MS	<u>F</u>
Main Effects	6	98.519	2.762
Grade	5	37.294	1.046
Gender	1	349.373	9.795 *
2-Way Interaction			
Grade & Gender	5	57.247	1.605
Error	211	35.67	

Note. \*p< .05.

51.12,  $SD = 5.143$ ) were significantly higher than those of males ( $M = 48.41$ ,  $SD = 6.912$ ).

The final part of the second hypothesis states that the discrepancy between the commitment levels of males and females will increase as the children increase in age. This 2-way interaction between grade and gender was not significant,  $F(5,211) = 1.605$ ,  $MSE = 35.67$ .

### Friendship Reciprocity and Commitment

The reciprocity analysis included only the children who named a best friend that was also a participant in this study. Children who named a best friend who was not a part of this study were removed from this analysis because it was impossible to determine whether or not their friendships were reciprocal. Of the children who named a best friend in the current study ( $N=110$ ), 48 friendships were reciprocated and 62 were not reciprocated. Due to small cell sizes, the six grades were collapsed into three age/grade groups for this analysis. Second and third grade students were in the first group ( $N = 44$ ), fourth and fifth grade students were in the second group ( $N = 31$ ) and sixth and seventh grade students comprised the third group ( $N= 35$ ).

No significant gender differences were present for the number of reciprocal best friendships. There were 24 males and 24 females in reciprocal friendships and 32 males and 30 females in non-reciprocal friendships.

The third hypothesis states that friendship reciprocity will moderate the level of commitment of the individuals involved in the relationship. Commitment level of children in reciprocal friendships was hypothesized to be higher than those in non-

reciprocal relationships. The results of the 3 (age) x 2 (friendship type) x 2 (gender) ANOVA support the hypothesis,  $F(1,98) = 5.011$ ,  $MSE = 32.443$ ,  $p < .05$  (See Table 2). The means and standard deviations for this analysis appear in Table 3. The commitment scores of children in reciprocal friendships ( $M = 50.44$ ,  $SD = 6.07$ ) were significantly higher than the commitment scores of children in non-reciprocal relationships ( $M = 47.79$ ,  $SD = 6.39$ ). Gender also exerted a significant main effect, but the Gender by Grade and Gender by Friendship Type interactions were also significant (See Table 2).

Subsequent simple effects analyses of the Gender x Friendship Type interaction,  $F(1,98) = 4.785$ ,  $MSE = 32.443$ ,  $p < .05$ , showed that Friendship Type was significant for females,  $F(1,52) = 13.822$ ,  $p < .01$ . Females in reciprocated friendships had significantly higher scores on the Commitment Scale ( $M = 53.00$ ) than females in non-reciprocated friendships ( $M = 48.27$ ). There was no difference in commitment scores of the two male friendship types.

The simple effects analysis also revealed that Gender was significant for Reciprocal friendships,  $F(1,46) = 10.220$ ,  $p < .01$ . The Commitment Scale scores of females in reciprocated friendships ( $M = 53$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of males in reciprocated friendships ( $M = 47.88$ ).

It was also expected that the discrepancy in commitment scores between children in reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships would increase with age. However, this 2-way interaction between age and reciprocity was not significant,  $F(5,98) < 1$ ,  $MSE = 32.443$ .

Table 2

ANOVA for Effect of Grade, Gender and Reciprocity on Commitment  
(With grades collapsed)

Source	df	MS	F
Main Effects	4	134.059	4.132
Grade	2	68.823	2.121
Gender	1	236.406	7.287*
Reciprocity	1	162.567	5.011*
2-Way Interactions	5	109.802	3.384
Grade-Gender	2	188.069	5.797*
Grade-Reciprocity	2	2.795	.086
Gender-Reciprocity	1	155.249	4.785*
3-Way Interactions			
Grade-Gender-Reciprocity	2	75.492	2.327
Error	98	32.443	

Note. \*p < .05.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Commitment Scale by Friendship Type, Age and Gender

	<u>Commitment Scale Score</u>	
	Mean	S.D.
<u>Children in Reciprocal Friendship</u>		
Grades 2-3		
Males	45.50	6.67
Females	54.29	2.69
Grades 4-5		
Males	50.80	5.90
Females	51.20	4.55
Grades 6-7		
Males	47.50	7.78
Females	53.00	4.75
<u>Children in Non-Reciprocal Relationship</u>		
Grades 2-3		
Males	47.93	6.39
Females	46.50	5.19
Grades 4-5		
Males	51.78	3.96
Females	48.14	3.58
Grades 6-7		
Males	41.25	9.11
Females	49.69	5.36

Note. N = 110

### Age and Satisfaction as Predictors of Commitment

The final hypothesis states that both age and level of satisfaction will have an effect on the level of commitment in a friendship. An interaction between age and satisfaction level was hypothesized because the effect that satisfaction has on commitment is expected to increase with age. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to assess the power of age and friendship satisfaction as predictors of commitment in children's best friendships.

The analysis revealed that level of friendship satisfaction is a significant predictor of commitment scores on the Commitment Scale and that it accounts for a significant proportion of the variance,  $R^2 = .287$ ,  $F = 88.856$ ,  $p < .05$ . Age, however, is not a significant predictor of children's level of friendship commitment and does not account for a significant proportion of the variance,  $R^2 = .007$ ,  $F = 1.566$ ,  $p > .05$ . The hypothesized interaction between age and satisfaction in the prediction of commitment was not significant,  $R^2_{cha} = .0003$ ,  $F_{cha} = .119$ . Therefore, a main effect of satisfaction was found in the prediction of commitment, but a main effect of age and the 2-way interaction between age and satisfaction were not significant.

### Additional Commitment Measures

In addition to the Commitment Scale, two other measures were designed to investigate further commitment in children's friendships.

Commitment understanding. In order to determine the extent to which children understand what friendship commitment implies, the students were asked to list three behaviors that would show that a person is committed to his or her friend. This open-

ended question was different from the other commitment measures because it assessed the participant's ability to articulate an understanding of commitment, while the other measures determined whether or not the participant's behaviors indicated a commitment to his or her friendship.

The participant responses were coded into one of the following nine categories: (1) friendship duration, (2) loyal/supportive, (3) trustworthy, (4) communication, (5) mutual activities, (6) helps me, (7) cares for me, understands/respects me, is nice to me, (8) does not fight/argue with me, (9) miscellaneous. Table 4 shows the types of responses that made up each category. A participant was considered to understand commitment if he or she provided at least one response that fit either the first or second category listed above. Participants who provided either no response to the question or provided responses from only the third through the ninth categories were coded as not understanding the concept of commitment. A total of 132 participants provided at least one response to the question asking for behaviors that show that a friend is committed to his or her best friend. Of these respondents, only 46 displayed an understanding of commitment (i.e., provided a response of either friendship duration or loyal/supportive).

A 6 (grade) x 2 (gender) chi square analysis revealed significant age differences in children's understanding of commitment,  $X^2(5) = 70.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .56$ ,  $cc = .49$ . Children in grades two, three and four were unable to articulate behaviors that describe a committed friendship. Of the older children, 10% of fifth graders, 44% of sixth graders, and 51% of seventh graders provided responses suggesting an understanding of

Table 4

Examples of Commitment Response Type

Commitment Response Type	Example of Response
	My friend is committed to me if he/she....
1. Friendship Duration	... stays friends with me for a long time.
2. Loyal/Supportive	... does not betray or backstab me. ... supports me.
3. Trustworthy	... does not lie to me. ... keeps promises made to me. ... does not tell anyone my secrets.
4. Communication	... talks with me a lot / about anything.
5. Mutual Activities	... plays with me, spends time with me, has fun with me, shares (objects) with me.
6. Helps Me	... helps me with homework, sports, etc.
7. Cares For Me	... understands / respects me, is nice to me.
8. No Fighting	... does not fight or pick arguments with me.
9. Miscellaneous	Any response that did not fit into any other category or that did not make any sense.



commitment (See Table 5). A difference between two proportions test was used to determine where the age differences in commitment understanding occurred. The six grades were looked at individually for the difference test. The number of participants in the second, third, and fourth grades who displayed an understanding of commitment was significantly lower than the number of participants in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades ( $p < .05$ ). Table 6 shows the z scores for the differences analyses between the six grades. The number of sixth- and seventh-grade children with an understanding of commitment was significantly higher than the number of fifth-grade children,  $z = -4.59$  and  $6.83$ , respectively,  $p < .05$ . There was no significant difference in commitment understanding between the sixth- and seventh-grade students,  $z = -1$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Table 7 depicts the frequencies of each commitment response type for the children at each grade. Only two responses were given by second graders (i.e., two children gave one response each). Each of their responses mentioned a mutual activity (e.g., “play” and “swinging”). Of the 21 responses provided by third graders, 52% mentioned mutual activities. For the fourth-grade responses ( $N = 26$ ), 35% were mutual activities and 27% mentioned the trustworthiness of a committed friend. The 76 fifth-grade responses were more diverse than the previous grades, but the majority of the responses (22%) still made mention of mutual activities and 20% of the responses fell into the “Cares for me” category. The third most common category (16% of the responses) mentioned by fifth graders was “Helps me.”

The most frequent commitment response (27% of the responses) given by sixth graders was that a committed friend is loyal to and supportive of their best friend. This

Table 5

Number of Participants who Displayed an Understanding of Commitment on Open-Ended Measure

Grade	Commitment Understanding	
	Understands	Does Not Understand
Grade Two	0 <sup>a</sup>	37 <sup>a</sup>
Grade Three	0 <sup>a</sup>	36 <sup>a</sup>
Grade Four	0 <sup>a</sup>	30 <sup>a</sup>
Grade Five	3 <sup>b</sup>	27 <sup>a</sup>
Grade Six	17 <sup>c</sup>	22 <sup>b</sup>
Grade Seven	26 <sup>c</sup>	25 <sup>b</sup>

Note. Values with different superscripts are significant at ( $p < .05$ )

Difference for each type of commitment understanding across grades,  $c > b > a$ .

N = 223

Table 6

Z Scores for Difference Tests on Commitment Understanding by Grade

Grade	Grade					
	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
Two	-----	0	0	-2.5*	-7.33*	-10.2*
Three	0	-----	0	-2.5*	-7.33*	-10.2*
Four	0	0	-----	-2.5*	-7.33*	-8.5*
Five	-2.5*	-2.5*	-2.5*	-----	-4.86*	-6.83*
Six	-7.33*	-7.33*	-7.33*	-4.86*	-----	-1*
Seven	-10.2*	10.2*	-8.5*	-6.83*	-1*	-----

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

Table 7

Frequency of Commitment Response Type for each Grade

Commitment Response Type	Grade					
	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
Duration**	0	0	0	1	2	1
Loyal/Supportive**	0	1	0	5	23	37
Trustworthy	0	0	7	9	9	23
Communication	0	1	2	8	5	24
Mutual Activities	2	11	9	17	12	21
Helps Me	0	3	3	12	15	12
Cares for Me	0	3	3	15	14	21
No Fighting/Arguing	0	2	0	3	1	0
Miscellaneous	0	0	2	6	3	6

Note. \*\* A participant mentioning one of these two categories is considered to have an understanding of friendship commitment.

N = 360

response was one of the two replies that a participant needed to provide in order to be coded as understanding commitment. The second and third most frequent responses given by sixth graders were “helps me” and “cares for me,” respectively.

Among seventh graders, 25% stated that an individual demonstrates commitment to a friendship by being loyal to and supportive of his or her friend. The next most frequent response (18% of the responses) was mutual activities, followed by the response that friends demonstrate their commitment by the amount or frequency of their communication (15% of the responses).

A 2 (gender) x 2 (commitment understanding) chi square analysis revealed a significant difference in commitment understanding between males and females,  $X^2(1) = 5.47$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ ,  $cc = .15$ . Commitment understanding was present in 14% of males and 26% of females. A difference test was conducted to determine at which grades the gender difference in commitment understanding occurred. Because of small cell sizes, the grades were divided into two groups (one group included grades four and five and the second group included grades six and seven). Grades two and three were not included in this difference analysis because none of the children in these grades displayed commitment understanding. The difference test revealed a significant gender difference in commitment understanding for the participants in grades four and five ( $z = 2.5$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but the gender difference for the participants in grades six and seven was not significant ( $z = -1.86$ ,  $p > .05$ ). More females than males in grades four and five displayed an understanding of commitment.

A chi square analysis revealed a significant difference in commitment understanding between children in reciprocal friendships and those in non-reciprocal friendships,  $X^2(1) = 6.44$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ ,  $cc = .17$ . Understanding was present in 22.9% of the children in reciprocated friendships compared to 9.7% of the children in non-reciprocated friendships.

Commitment/loyalty vignettes. Responses to the commitment/loyalty vignettes had a significant, but weak correlation with the Commitment Scale scores ( $r = .227$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, the two commitment measures overlapped somewhat in their assessment. Because the correlation between Commitment Scale scores and the Commitment Vignette scores was significant (See Table 8), an analysis was run to determine the extent to which the variables of grade and gender exerted the same effects on the vignette scores as was found on the scale scores. The 6 (grade) x 2 (gender) ANOVA using Commitment Vignette total score as the dependent variable indicated a significant main effect for grade,  $F(6,209) = 3.123$ ,  $MSE = 4.272$ ,  $p = .01$ , but not gender,  $F(1,209) < 1$ ,  $MSE = 4.272$ . The gender main effect was the only significant finding when the same analysis was conducted using Commitment Scale scores as the dependent variable. The 2-way interaction between grade and gender,  $F(5,209) = 2.770$ ,  $MSE = 4.272$ ,  $p < .05$ , was also significant. The mean vignette scores appear in Table 9. The simple effects analysis of the interaction showed that Gender was significant at Grade 5,  $F(1,28) = 7.305$ ,  $p < .05$ . The vignette scores of the fifth-grade males ( $M = 15.15$ ) were significantly higher than those of the fifth-grade females ( $M = 13.35$ ). Gender was also significant at Grade 7,  $F(1,49) = 6.882$ ,  $p < .05$ . The seventh-grade females scored

Table 8

Correlation Coefficients for Commitment Scale Scores and Vignette Scores

	Comm. Scale	Vignette Total	Comm. Vigs.	Trust Vigs.	Betray Vigs.
Commitment Scale	-----	.25**	.23**	.15*	.17**
Vignette Total		-----	.49**	.66**	.73**
Commitment Vignettes			-----	.08	.14*
Trust Vignettes				-----	.02
Betrayal Vignettes					-----

\* $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$

Table 9

Mean Vignette Scores (1-14) by Grade and Gender

Grade	Gender	
	Male	Female
Grade 2	14.05	14.19
Grade 3	13.83	13.06
Grade 4	14.06	14.07
Grade 5	15.15 <sup>b,2</sup>	13.35 <sup>1</sup>
Grade 6	12.11 <sup>a</sup>	13.00
Grade 7	12.88 <sup>1</sup>	14.29 <sup>2</sup>

Note. Values with different superscripts are significant at ( $p < .05$ )

Difference for each grade across gender,  $b > a$ .

Difference for each gender across grades,  $2 > 1$

N = 221



significantly higher on the commitment vignettes ( $\underline{M} = 14.29$ ) than did the seventh-grade males ( $\underline{M} = 12.88$ ). The simple effects analysis also revealed that Grade was significant for males,  $\underline{F}(5,95) = 3.157$ ,  $p < .05$ . A subsequent Tukey analysis showed that the vignette scores of the fifth- grade males ( $\underline{M} = 15.15$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of the sixth-grade males ( $\underline{M} = 12.11$ ). Grade was also significant for the commitment vignette scores of the females,  $\underline{F}(5,114) = 2.369$ ,  $p < .05$ . However, a Tukey analysis failed to identify any significant differences between the six grades of females.

Examination of the means indicates no clear trend in the female commitment vignette scores. The two highest means occurred with the seventh grade females ( $\underline{M} = 14.29$ ) and the second grade females ( $\underline{M} = 14.19$ ). The lowest mean ( $\underline{M} = 13$ ) occurred with the sixth grade females.

### Reciprocity

Commitment vignettes. A 3 (Grade) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Friendship Type) ANOVA was run using the combined scores from the three commitment/loyalty vignettes as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a Grade x Gender x Friendship Type interaction,  $\underline{F}(2,96) = 3.485$ ,  $\underline{MSE} = 4.088$ ,  $p < .05$ . The simple effects analysis of this interaction showed that gender was significant for second and third graders in reciprocal best friendships,  $\underline{F}(1,16) = 5.977$ ,  $\underline{MSE} = 4.732$ ,  $p < .05$ . The commitment vignette scores of the second and third grade males ( $\underline{M} = 15$ ) were significantly higher than the commitment vignette scores of the second and third grade females ( $\underline{M} = 12.43$ ). See Tables 10 and 11 for the mean commitment vignette scores of children in reciprocal and non-reciprocal relationships.

Table 10

Mean Commitment Vignette Score for Reciprocal Friends by Grade and Gender

Grade	Gender	
	Male	Female
Grades 2-3	15.00 <sup>b</sup>	12.43 <sup>a</sup>
Grades 4-5	15.10	14.6
Grades 6-7	11.5	13.5

Note. Values with different superscripts are significant at ( $p < .05$ )

Difference for each grade across gender,  $b > a$ .

N = 47

Table 11

Mean Commitment Vignette Score for Non-Reciprocal Children by Grade and Gender

Grade	Gender	
	Male	Female
Grades 2-3	13.33	13.89
Grades 4-5	14.89	13.29
Grades 6-7	13.25	13.38

Note. N = 55

### Social Self-Efficacy

Commitment scale. A regression analysis was conducted to explore the effects of self-efficacy, age, and gender on children's friendship commitment. The analysis was run with self-efficacy, age, and gender as predictors and Commitment Scale score as the dependent variable. Also examined was the effect of the interactions of the predictor variables. The forward selection regression approach revealed that the significant predictors of Commitment Scale scores were the interaction of self-efficacy by gender and self-efficacy by itself (see Table 12). The two predictors accounted for a significant proportion of the variance,  $R^2 = .145$ ,  $F = 18.51$ ,  $p < .01$ . Gender alone was not included in the equation because it did not account for a significant proportion of the variance,  $t(220) = 1.747$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Vignettes. Another regression analysis was run to explore the effect of self-efficacy on the responses to the hypothetical vignettes. Self-efficacy, age, gender, and their interaction terms were the predictors and total vignette score was the dependent variable. The forward selection regression approach revealed that the significant predictors of the vignette scores were self-efficacy and age (See Table 13). The two predictors accounted for a significant proportion of the variance,  $R^2 = .107$ ,  $F = 13.13$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Table 12

Predictors in Regression Equation for Commitment Scale Scores

	R <sup>2</sup> Change	<i>B</i>	Beta	t-value	p
Self-Efficacy by Gender	.109	.047	.271	4.069	< .01
Self-Efficacy	.137	.098	.192	2.879	< .001

Table 13

Predictors in Regression Equation for Total Vignette Scores

	<i>B</i>	Beta	t-value	p
Self-Efficacy	.579	1.103	3.246	p< .01
Age	3.273	.999	2.825	p< .01

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

The current study focused on the role that commitment plays in young children's best friend relationships. The hypothesis, that young children (in this study 7 year olds) display commitment in their best friendships, was supported because no age differences were found for the Commitment Scale score. That is, the scores of the 7 year olds were not significantly different from those of any other age, including 14 year olds. The Commitment Scale score indicates an individual's ability to feel and act in a committed manner towards a best friend. The absence of age differences on this scale indicates consistent levels of committed feelings and actions in children's friendships from middle to late childhood and on into the early teenage years. Gender differences were found in the commitment scores, in partial support of the second hypothesis. In every grade other than fifth, the commitment levels in female friendships were higher than those in male friendships. Friendship reciprocity was found to be a contributing factor in children's commitment levels. As predicted, children in reciprocated best friendships scored significantly higher on the commitment scale than did those children in non-reciprocated friendships. Friendship reciprocation between two children has an important effect on the degree to which these children are committed to the friendship. However, contrary to expectation, this effect of reciprocity on commitment scores did not increase with age.

Friendship satisfaction contributed significantly to the prediction of friendship commitment, and accounted for a significant proportion of commitment variance. The predicted effect of age on commitment scores was not significant. As a result, the expected interaction between age and satisfaction in the prediction of commitment was also not significant.

### Commitment in Young Children's Friendships

The major premise of this study was that the methodology used in past research has led to an underestimation of the onset of commitment in children's friendships. Bigelow (1977) and Bigelow and LaGaipa (1975) asked children to write an essay about the expectancies they have of their best friend. Based on the responses to this open-ended measure, the conclusion of both studies was that the qualities of commitment and loyalty are not present in children's friendships until the age of 11 or 12. The contention of the present study was that, given appropriate measures, loyalty and commitment can be found in the best friendships of children much younger than age 10. The argument behind this contention is that just because young children are not able to articulate an understanding of or an expectation of commitment is not direct proof that they do not feel a sense of commitment to their friendships. The scores on the Commitment Scale used in this study and the answers to the open-ended commitment question support the argument. The Commitment Scale scores of the 7-year-old children were not significantly different from the scores of the 13 and 14 year olds. However, there was a wide discrepancy in the number of participants from the younger and older age groups



who displayed an understanding of commitment when presented with the open-ended question.

The results suggest that, although young children are not able to articulate an understanding of commitment, their Commitment Scale scores reveal that they feel committed and act in ways suggestive of commitment toward their best friends. Therefore, two different types of commitment measures yielded quite different results about young children's ability to commit to their friends. Previous investigators (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977) have used open-ended measures to conclude that commitment is not present in the friendships of very young children. However, when the participants in the present study were asked to rate how well a variety of commitment feelings and behaviors describe their current best friendship, the commitment levels of 7 year olds were no different than those of children as old as 14. By using a measure more appropriate to the developmental abilities of very young children (i.e., a commitment scale), this study effectively revealed that previous research probably has underestimated the age at which children begin to show commitment in their best friendships. The results just presented are consistent with the commitment and loyalty findings of Clark and Bittle (1992) and Weiss, Smith, and Theeboom (1996). In these studies, loyalty and commitment in children's friendships were assessed along with various other friendship qualities. Similar to the present study, the measures used in both of these studies were questionnaires asking the participants to answer specific questions based on their current best friendships. Clark and Bittle (1992) found that their participants, ranging in age from

third to seventh grade, did not differ in their ratings of the importance of loyalty and commitment in their friendships. However, when compared with other friendship qualities (e.g., mutual activities, conventional morality, and empathic understanding) commitment did become more important to the children as they got older. Weiss, Smith, and Theeboom (1996) also found the friendship quality of commitment and loyalty to be present even in their youngest participants, the 8 year olds. The younger children in their study actually mentioned loyalty and commitment behaviors in their friendships more often than did the older participants (i.e., the 13 through 16 year olds).

The results of the present study were not only consistent with the two previous studies, but also expanded on their findings. The data in the current study revealed that the quality of commitment and loyalty is important and present in the friendships of children as young as 7. Similar to the findings of Clark and Bittle (1992), there were no significant age differences in the commitment levels of the children in the present study. Taken together, the results of the present study along with those of the Clark and Bittle (1992) and Weiss, Smith and Theeboom (1996) studies suggest that, when commitment and loyalty are assessed with measures utilizing specific questions about children's current friendships, very young children possess these qualities. When children are presented with an open-ended question about friendship expectations (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977), on the other hand, the data do not accurately reveal the onset of commitment and loyalty in children's friendships.

### The Development of Commitment Understanding

When second graders in the present study were asked to list behaviors that suggest that a friend is committed to his or her best friend, they almost always left the answer space blank because they did not know what commitment means. The third graders were more willing to take a guess at the meaning of commitment and the most common response was that committed friends engage in mutual activities. This mention of common interests and activities is consistent with previous research (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977) which suggests that young children's expectations of a friendship focus on companionship and shared activities. Similarly, the most frequent response of the fourth and fifth grade participants was mutual activities. However, the responses of these older children were more diverse and mention of mutual activities was not as likely as occurred for the third grade children. The fourth and fifth grade children consistently wrote that committed friends are trustworthy and caring toward each other as well. This trend toward responses of moral values and character admiration are typical of the second stage of Bigelow's (1977) friendship expectations. Fourth and fifth grade children also fit the age range that Bigelow suggests make up this second stage.

The most common response of the sixth and seventh graders was that committed friends are loyal and supportive of each other. For this study, the participants who made this response were considered to have an understanding of the concept of commitment. The next two most frequent responses given by sixth graders were that committed friends help and care for each other. These responses fit well with Bigelow's (1977) third or final stage of friendship expectations where children's friendship expectations focus on

empathy, understanding, and self-disclosure. For seventh graders, the second and third most frequent responses were that committed friends engage in mutual activities and communicate well with one another. The communication response matches the self-disclosure expectation found in Bigelow's third stage, but the mutual activities response does not corroborate Bigelow's findings for children in this third stage.

The above discussion attempts to make a comparison between the participants' responses to the commitment question and Bigelow's (1977) three stages of friendship expectations. The participants' commitment responses do appear to fit reasonably well with Bigelow's stages and they are consistent with the age ranges he provides even though his stages dealt with friendship expectations. Bigelow's participants were asked to list expectations that they have of their best friends, whereas the present participants were asked to list things that a person does if he or she is committed to a friend. Perhaps the reason that the two different questions led to similar responses is that the children in the present study, while not necessarily familiar with the term "commitment," realized that the concept of commitment was a desirable friendship characteristic. In other words, the children may have viewed a committed friend as synonymous with a "good" friend or a "true" friend. If this type of reasoning occurred, then it follows that the children responded with expectations that they have for a good friend.

### Gender Differences

Commitment. Consistent with previous research (Clark & Bittle, 1992; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hoffman, 1981), females seemed to be more committed to their best friendships than males. The scores on the Commitment Scale showed that,

regardless of age, females displayed higher levels of friendship commitment than males. The results of the commitment/loyalty vignettes, however, were not as definitive. The commitment vignette scores of the fifth grade males were higher than those of fifth grade females. The only other grade showing a gender difference in commitment vignette scores was grade seven, with females scoring higher than males. The commitment/loyalty vignettes were intended to assess the participants' feelings of friendship commitment when faced with a realistic situation. The commitment scale, on the other hand, asked the participants very direct questions about how committed they feel toward their best friendships. The gender results of the commitment scale (e.g., females scoring higher than males) more closely reflect the findings of previous research (e.g., Clark & Bittle, 1992; Sharabany, Gershoni & Hoffman, 1981) conducted on friendship commitment. The fact that, on the commitment/loyalty vignettes, there were no gender differences for four of the grades, and that males in one grade scored higher, suggests that the vignette measure may be assessing a different aspect of commitment than the commitment scale. The low but significant correlation between the two measures supports this view.

The vignette measure provided the participants with concrete friendship scenarios to which they needed to respond, whereas the commitment scale assessed how committed the participants feel that they are to their best friendship. The vignettes seemed to have more face validity because they confronted the child with a realistic situation. Therefore, the results of the commitment scale suggest that females feel a higher degree of best friendship commitment and loyalty than males, but responses to the commitment/loyalty vignettes show that there are few gender differences in how males

and females respond to situations that actually call their friendship commitment and loyalty into question.

Self-Efficacy. The self-efficacy scores of males were significantly higher than the female scores regardless of the participant's age. A look at the CSPI means across grade and gender indicates that for every grade other than fifth there was a steady mean increase for both males and females. The fifth grade males scored higher than the males in any other grade, while the fifth grade females scored lower than the females in all other grades except for second. Therefore, the CSPI means reveal that the males in this study displayed higher levels of social self-efficacy consistently throughout the six grades researched. The reason for the differences in the gender results for the present study and earlier research may have to do with the time span between the studies. In the 17 years since the Wheeler and Ladd (1982) study was conducted, changes may have occurred in the levels of self-efficacy displayed by either male or female children or both of the genders. Various societal factors may have resulted in young girls feeling less self-confidence in social situations than they did two decades ago.

### Reciprocity

McGuire and Weisz (1982) define friendship as the “ongoing reciprocal liking and behavioral involvement between two individuals” (p. 1479). Thus there is a widespread assumption that a friendship involves individuals who mutually like one another and consider the other to be a friend. As expected, the present study found the commitment levels of children in reciprocal friendships to be higher than those of children in non-reciprocal relationships. Because non-reciprocal relationships are ones in

which an individual names a best friend who in turn names another individual as his or her best friend, it is evident that there is not a mutual commitment to the same friendship. It therefore follows that individuals involved in this type of one-sided relationship will likely have lower levels of friendship commitment than would individuals involved in a mutual reciprocated friendship.

Previous research (e.g., Clark & Drewry, 1985; Clark & Ayers, 1988) suggests that children in non-reciprocal relationships tend to have lower peer status and are viewed less favorably by peers than are children in reciprocal friendships. These investigators go on to suggest that the children in non-reciprocal relationships may be selecting as best friends children from higher status groups in an effort to elevate their own status and acceptance in their peer group. In other words, the children in non-reciprocal friendships may actually be naming an idealistic rather than a realistic best friend. If this is indeed how children in non-reciprocal friendships are naming their best friends, their lower levels of commitment may reflect the fact that they are not truly in a best friend relationship with the child they selected.

### Self-Efficacy

The present study demonstrates that a child's social self-efficacy is a significant predictor of the child's level of friendship commitment. Therefore, the extent to which a child feels he or she is socially competent can be used to predict how committed that child is to his or her best friend. The connection between self-efficacy and commitment likely has to do with Goetz and Dweck's (1980) contention that a child's self-perceptions of social competence can affect his or her behavior. The degree to which the child feels

confident in social interactions can then affect that child's peer relations. A logical explanation for the connection is that those children who feel more socially competent will feel more comfortable, and therefore be more successful at, initiating interactions with peers. These successful initial attempts will likely lead to the development of close friendships. On the other hand, low levels of social self-efficacy may translate into problems with initiating, and possibly maintaining, friendships. This possible explanation for the link between self-efficacy and commitment is supported by Wheeler and Ladd's (1980) suggestion that a child's self-efficacy plays a role in his or her ability to initiate social skills with peers. If a child has trouble initiating contact with peers, it is likely that this child will have more trouble finding and keeping friends than will a child who is confident in his or her ability to interact with peers.

#### Limitations

A possible shortcoming of the present study is that the scores on the most important measure, the Commitment Scale, are dependent on the children's self-ratings of their best friendships. A potential problem with especially the younger children's self-reports is that the children may have been overly optimistic when answering questions pertaining to their friendships. It seems likely that the older participants would be more realistic when asked about their best friendships. If this inflated level of optimism did occur with the younger participants, their levels of friendship commitment may not be as high as their scores suggest. However, the argument can be made that the scores reflect the way in which the participants actually view their friendships. Young children may be overly optimistic about the quality and the potential longevity of their friendships, and



therefore have high feelings of commitment. A gap may however exist in young children's feelings of commitment and their willingness to engage in behaviors that will promote a long-term friendship. The measures used in this study did not allow for an exploration of this possible gap.

Another shortcoming is that the participants in this study were mostly Caucasian, middle-class children living in a suburban area. Therefore, the commitment findings of this research may not generalize well to a more diverse population of children. In addition, along with the wide range in the participants' ages, there was also likely a large range in their writing abilities. The children in second grade have just recently learned to express themselves with writing, whereas the seventh grade participants have been writing for a number of years. This difference in writing ability could have had an effect on the results of the commitment understanding measure which asked the children to state in their own words what commitment is. Some of the younger children may have had a better understanding of commitment than what they were able to articulate in writing. For this reason, a measure that did not rely so heavily on the participants' ability to communicate an understanding in writing may have been a more accurate assessment of what the children actually know.

A final shortcoming of this study involves some unusual and unexpected results based on the responses of the fifth grade participants. On more than one occasion, the responses from these fifth grade students do not follow the age and gender patterns seen in the other five grades. One example of such a discrepancy occurred with the commitment vignette scores. Only in the fifth grade did the males score higher on the

vignette scores than the females. Similarly, the commitment vignette scores increased with age in every instance for both genders except for when the fifth grade males scored higher than the sixth grade males. Another unusual result involving the fifth grade students occurred with self-efficacy scores. The fifth grade males scored higher on self-efficacy than any other male group while the fifth grade females scored lower on self-efficacy than any other female group except for the second grade females.

Because previous research has failed to find similar unusual results with this fifth grade age group, the problem appears to lie with the individuals in this study.

Interestingly, the discrepancies with the fifth grade results appeared on two measures that asked the students to assess how they would react in real-life situations. If not taking the questionnaires seriously, the students could have easily answered in the exact manner to each question. If this occurred, the results would indicate that the fifth grade males have higher degrees of self-efficacy and commitment in the vignette situations than is actually the case.

### Implications

Exploration into the concept of commitment in children's friendships has largely been overlooked in the friendship literature. Investigators who have looked into whether or not children are committed to their best friends (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977) seriously underestimated the age at which this phenomenon first occurs. The present study effectively showed that children as young as 7 are committed to their friendships, and that they hope these friendships continue indefinitely. It is important that this new information about the onset of commitment in children's

friendships now be expanded upon. Further questions about the factors that affect children's commitment levels and the effect that commitment has on children's friendships need to be answered. The role that self-efficacy plays as an individual differences variable in children's friendship commitment also deserves attention in future research. The hypotheses made concerning a connection between self-efficacy and commitment need to be empirically tested.

The present study effectively illustrates the importance of utilizing various types of measures, and the unique contribution that each measure can provide in helping to answer a research question. This study's use of open-ended questions as well as scale items revealed that just because young children cannot articulate an understanding of the term commitment does not mean that they do not have feelings and display behaviors that are indicative of commitment in their friendships. The results of this study should serve as a reminder, especially to investigators using young children as participants, to employ a variety of measures in the assessment of abstract concepts.

### Conclusions

Contrary to the results of some previous research (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Bigelow, 1977), the present study found that age is not a factor in the level of children's friendship commitment. Commitment levels do not change as children progress from childhood to the early teenage years. However, children's ability to verbalize an understanding of the concept of commitment does improve with age. Gender, self efficacy, friendship reciprocity, and friendship satisfaction each play a role in determining children's friendship commitment levels. Females, regardless of age, scored

higher on the Commitment Scale than males. Children who are highly self-confident in their ability to deal with social situations also tended to be more committed to their best friends than those children displaying less social self-confidence. Finally, children who are in reciprocal as well as highly satisfying relationships are also more likely to be committed to their best friends.

The concept of commitment in children's friendships deserves more consideration in the friendship literature because of the impact that it has on the stability of these relationships. The idea that very young children can be committed to their friends is a new one; therefore future research should explore further the quality of commitment in these young children's relationships. Of particular interest is whether young children who respond to commitment questions in a manner that indicates they are committed to their friend actually behave in ways that are conducive to maintaining a long-term relationship or have they simply responded to the questions in an overly-optimistic and idealistic manner? To answer this important question, future studies cannot simply rely on children's self-reports of their friendships, but must instead include a variety of measures. Ideally some actual observation and follow-up of the friendships could be conducted in order to assess the level of commitment these young children can attain.

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## Appendix A

**Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Circle one: Are you a **boy** or **girl** ?

4. What is the name of your best friend?

Is your best friend in your school?    yes    no

Is your best friend in your grade?    yes    no

5. How long have you been friends with your best friend? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How much time do you spend with your best friend in a normal day? **Circle one:**

- |                                |                                       |                             |  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| a. a lot of time<br>(5+ hours) | b. quite a bit of time<br>(3-5 hours) | c. some time<br>(1-3 hours) | d. not much time<br>(less than 1 hour) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|

**What are 3 things that a friend does if they are committed to their best friend?**

1.

2.

3.

## Appendix B

**Commitment and Satisfaction Scale**


---

**CIRCLE THE NUMBER** that best matches your feelings. Here is what each letter means:

**1 = no    2 = probably not    3 = I'm not sure    4 = probably yes    5 = yes**

---

1. My best friend and I will probably be friends for a long time.    **1   2   3   4   5**
2. I feel good about my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
3. I hope that my friendship with my best friend lasts for a long time.    **1   2   3   4   5**
4. I am happy with the amount of time that I spend with my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
5. I would do almost anything to stay friends with my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
6. My friendship with my best friend is the best one that I could imagine.    **1   2   3   4   5**
7. I would stop being friends with other people before I would stop being friends with my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
8. I am happy being friends with my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
9. I wouldn't be too upset if my friendship with my best friend ended soon.    **1   2   3   4   5**
10. I am happy with the things that my best friend and I talk about.    **1   2   3   4   5**
11. Before I stopped being friends with my best friend I would have to find someone that I liked a lot better.    **1   2   3   4   5**

---

**CIRCLE THE NUMBER** that best matches your feelings. Here is what each letter means:

**1 = no    2 = probably not    3 = I'm not sure    4 = probably yes    5 = yes**

---

12. I am happy with the way my best friend and I solve our problems and disagreements.    **1   2   3   4   5**
13. I am very committed to my friendship with my best friend.    **1   2   3   4   5**
14. My best friend is the best friend that I could ever want.    **1   2   3   4   5**
15. My best friend and I will probably not be friends for much longer.    **1   2   3   4   5**
16. I am happy with the things that my best friend and I do together.    **1   2   3   4   5**
17. Even if my parents and other friends disliked my best friend, I would still be best friend with him or her.    **1   2   3   4   5**
18. My best friend is the best friend that I could ever imagine.    **1   2   3   4   5**
19. Even if my best friend makes me very angry, I will still try to stay friends with him or her.    **1   2   3   4   5**
20. I am happy with the way my best friend acts toward me.    **1   2   3   4   5**
21. If my best friend and I had to move away from one another, I would try to remain friends with him or her.    **1   2   3   4   5**
22. If my best friend makes me very angry, I would have a hard time staying friends with him or her.    **1   2   3   4   5**

## Appendix C

**LOYALTY /COMMITMENT SCENARIOS**

Your best friend tells you that s/he does not like another one of your friends that you get along with very well and with whom you enjoy spending time.

1. What would happen if your best friend told you that in order for the two of you to be friends you had to stop spending time with the other kid?

- A. You would continue spending time with the other kid and risk losing your best friend.
- B. You would stop spending time with the other kid in order to keep your best friend.

2. How hard would it be for you to choose between being friends with the other kid or remaining with your best friend?

- A. Very hard
- B. Hard
- C. Easy
- D. Very easy

\*\*\*\*\*

You are the leader of a team in gym class and get to pick the kids that you want on your soccer team. Your best friend is in this class, but is not very good at soccer. There are several other kids in this class who are very good soccer players.

1. You begin to pick players to be on your team, who do you pick first?

- A. You first choose your best friend instead of some classmates who are much better soccer players.
- B. You first choose a classmate who is very good at soccer instead of your best friend.

2. How hard would it be for you to decide who to pick first?

- A. Very hard
- B. Hard
- C. Easy
- D. Very easy

\*\*\*\*\*

You and your friend have been best friends for several years. One day your best friend is gone and you are sitting with a group of kids that you would really like to be friends with. The other kids begin to make fun of your best friend.

1. What do you do when they all start to make fun of your best friend?

- A. Tell the group of kids that you do not like them talking about your best friend and walk away.
- B. Pretend to laugh along with the group as they make fun of your best friend.

2. How hard would it be for you to make a decision about what to do?

- A. Very hard
- B. Hard
- C. Easy
- D. Very easy

## TRUST

You told your best friend a secret and asked him or her not to tell anyone. You realize several weeks later that your friend has not told anyone your secret.

1. How do you feel when your friend does not tell your secret to anyone else?
  - A. very happy
  - B. it doesn't really matter
  - C. very mad
2. How important is it to you that your friend did not tell your secret to anyone else?
  - A. Important
  - B. Not important
  - C. I don't really care

\*\*\*\*\*

Your best friend asked to borrow one of your favorite shirts to wear for school pictures. You let your friend borrow the shirt, but say that it is your favorite shirt so you want it back the very next day. The next day at school, your friend brings your shirt back all cleaned and ironed.

1. How does it make you feel that your friend took good care of your shirt and got it right back to you?
  - A. very happy
  - B. it doesn't really matter
  - C. very mad
2. How important was it to you that your friend took good care of your shirt?
  - A. Important
  - B. Not very important
  - C. I really don't care

\*\*\*\*\*

You ask your best friend to come over to your house over the weekend and feed your dog while you are out of town with your family. Your best friend agrees to do this for you and when you get home you realize that your friend came over both days to feed the dog and play with the dog.

1. How does it make you feel that your best friend came over and took care of your dog?
  - A. very happy
  - B. it doesn't really matter
  - C. very mad
2. How important is it to you that your friend took good care of your dog?
  - A. Important
  - B. Not very important
  - C. I really don't care



### Minor Betrayals

You have heard from a classmate that your best friend was telling a group of other kids that he or she has a new best friend that is not you.

1. What do you do the next time you see your best friend?
  - A. tell your best friend that you no longer want to be friends
  - B. ask your best friend if s/he really said that to the other kids
  - C. pretend that nothing happened because you don't want to fight with your best friend
  
2. How hard is it for you to decide what to do?
 

A. Very hard	C. Easy
B. Hard	D. Very easy

\*\*\*\*\*

Your best friend has started to spend more time with another group of kids than he or she spends with you.

1. What do you do?
  - A. tell your best friend that you are through being friends with him or her.
  - B. talk to your best friend about the amount of time you spend together.
  - C. do nothing, because you don't want to cause problems with your best friend.
  
2. How hard is it for you to decide what to do?
 

A. Very hard	C. Easy
B. Hard	D. Very easy

\*\*\*\*\*

You have studied very hard for a test, but your best friend has not. Your best friend understands that you do not believe in cheating and get angry when other classmates talk about cheating on a test. As you are working on the test, your best friend asks you to give him or her an answer.

1. What do you do after the test is over?
  - A. tell your best friend that you no longer want to be friends.
  - B. tell your best friend that you were very upset about what happened and that you expect it never to happen again.
  - C. don't say anything about what happened because you don't want your best friend to get angry with you.
  
2. How hard is it for you to decide what to do?
 

A. Very hard	C. Easy
B. Hard	D. Very easy

## Appendix D

**Children's Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale**


---

Please **CIRCLE THE NUMBER** that best finishes each sentence:

**1 = HARD! 2 = hard 3 = easy 4 = EASY!**

---

- |  |          |          |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Some kids want to play a game. Asking them if you can play is _____ for you.                                      | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 2. Some kids are arguing about how to play a game. Telling them the rules is _____ for you.                          | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 3. Some kids are teasing your friend. Telling them to stop is _____ for you.   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 4. You want to start a game. Asking other kids to play the game is _____ for you.                                    | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 5. A kid tries to take your turn during a game. Telling the kid it's your turn is _____ for you.                     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 6. Some kids are going to lunch. Asking them if you can sit with them is _____ for you.                              | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 7. A kid cuts in front of you in line. Telling the kid not to cut in is _____ for you.                               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 8. A kid wants to do something that will get you into trouble. Asking the kid to do something else is _____ for you. | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 9. Some kids are making fun of someone in your classroom. Telling them to stop is _____ for you.                     | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 10. Some kids need more people to be on their teams. Asking them to be on a team is _____ for you.                   | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 11. You have to carry some things home after school. Asking another kid to help you is _____ for you.                | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> |

---

Please **CIRCLE THE NUMBER** that best finishes each sentence:

**1 = HARD! 2 = hard 3 = easy 4 = EASY!**

---

12. A kid always wants to be first when you play a game. **1 2 3 4**  
Telling the kid you are going first is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
13. Your class is going on a trip and everyone needs a partner. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking someone to be your partner is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
14. A kid does not like your friend. **1 2 3 4**  
Telling the kid to be nice to your friend is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
15. Some kids are deciding what game to play. **1 2 3 4**  
Telling them about a game you like is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
16. You are having fun playing a game but the other kids want to stop. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking them to finish playing the game is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
17. You are working on a project. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking another kid to help is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
18. Some kids are using your play area. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking them to move is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
19. Some kids are deciding what to do after school. **1 2 3 4**  
Telling them what you want to do is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
20. A group of kids wants to play a game that you don't like. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking them to play a game you like is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
21. Some kids are planning a party. **1 2 3 4**  
Asking them to invite your friend is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.
22. A kid is yelling at you. **1 2 3 4**  
Telling the kid to stop is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.

## Appendix E

**Network of Relationships Inventory**

**Please Circle the number that best answers each of the questions.**

1. How much free time do you spend with your best friend?
  - 1 = Little or none
  - 2 = Somewhat
  - 3 = Not very much
  
2. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your best friend?
  - 1 = Little or not satisfied
  - 2 = Somewhat satisfied
  - 3 = Very satisfied
  - 4 = Extremely satisfied
  - 5 = The Most
  
3. How much do you and your best friend get on each other's nerves?
  - 1 = Little or none
  - 2 = Somewhat
  - 3 = Very much
  - 4 = Extremely much
  - 5 = The Most
  
4. How sure are you that this best friendship will last no matter what?
  - 1 = Little or not sure
  - 2 = Somewhat sure
  - 3 = Very sure
  - 4 = Extremely sure
  - 5 = The Most
  
5. How much does your best friend help you figure out or fix things?
  - 1 = Little or none
  - 2 = Somewhat
  - 3 = Very much
  - 4 = Extremely much
  - 5 = The Most

**Please Circle the number that best answers each of the questions.**

6. How happy are you with the way things are between you and your best friend?  
1 = Little or not happy  
2 = Somewhat happy  
3 = Very happy  
4 = Extremely happy  
5 = The Happiest
7. Between you and your best friend, who tends to be the boss in your friendship?  
1 = He/she almost always does  
2 = He/she often does  
3 = About the same  
4 = I often do  
5 = I almost always do
8. How much do you and your best friend argue with each other?  
1 = Little or none  
2 = Somewhat  
3 = Very much  
4 = Extremely much  
5 = The Most
9. How often does your best friend help you when you need to get something done?  
1 = Not often or never  
2 = Sometimes  
3 = Very often  
4 = Extremely often  
5 = The Most