*Chapter 1*

# What Is Friendship?

Consider a variety of friendships as reflected in these vignettes.

> Leah (age 2) and Olivia (almost 3) attend the same home-based day care with a few other children. The girls spend nearly every weekday together and have been doing so for the past 18 months. They love to play with one another in the pretend kitchen, and they both like to draw pictures. They sit next to each other at lunch, take naps on cots side by side, and are concerned if the other is crying or upset. One of Leah's very first words was "Livy," the name she uses for Olivia.

> Mark and Jeremy are in the same second-grade class. Mark is active and impulsive, and he is often aggressive toward his classmates—pushing to be first on the slide, grabbing toys away from others, hitting when he does not get his way. Most of the other children in his class avoid playing with him and even actively exclude him when they can. Jeremy is a bit of a loner who often plays by himself. He also acts aggressively toward his peers when he is frustrated or upset by them. Whenever the second graders need to pick partners for an activity, Mark and Jeremy choose each other. On the playground, they play together more often than either of them plays with any other child.

> Johnny and Dave are friends who live in the same neighborhood and are in the sixth grade. They both wait at the same bus stop for the school bus to pick them up each morning. Some of the

older boys at the bus stop like to pick on Dave and make fun of him. Johnny, who is a strong and athletic boy, sticks up for his friend and frequently tells the other boys to leave Dave alone. The older boys usually listen to Johnny, and Dave and Johnny work on their homework together or trade baseball cards or make up games to play as they wait for the bus.

Amy is in high school and her parents are going through a messy divorce. She spends a lot of time at her friend Mary's house, having dinner with Mary's family and staying for sleepovers on many weekend nights. Amy often talks with Mary about her concerns about her parents and what will happen to her and her younger brothers when her parents' divorce is finalized. There is no one else with whom she shares her worries. Mary is a good listener and tries to comfort her friend when she is feeling down about her family.

When they were in the fifth grade, James and Thomas nominated each other as best friends on a sociometric assessment. Twelve years later, they were asked to describe what their relationship had been like in fifth grade. Thomas said, "We've spent nearly all our waking hours together in the past 23 years." James said, "He lived near me. We would ride our bikes. We were together *constantly.*" On rating scales, they both described their relationship as highly enjoyable, supportive, intimate, and satisfying. On the same sociometric assessment, Katie nominated Jennifer as her best friend, but 12 years later, Katie couldn't remember who her best friend had been in the fifth grade. When asked specifically about Jennifer, Katie said, "Oh, yeah, Jennifer. She was just someone to talk to. I had nothing better to do so we would sometimes talk … she was someone to call to do things when I didn't want to go by myself."

At first blush, these stories describe very different relationships, yet we refer to them all as friends. What do they have in common? What is it that sets these relationships apart from other relationships the children may have? What do the children bring to the friendships based on previous life experiences and personal characteristics? What are the concurrent and long-term implications of these friendships for the children involved in them? On the one hand, each of these children has a friend. On the other hand, the most salient features of the relationship differ from child to child and from friendship to friendship, and the quality of the relationship likely differs as well. The children bring to the relationship their own characteristics and relationship histories. These characteristics and histories will determine the nature and dynamics of the

friendship and will contribute to the future pathways of the individuals in the friendships. Thus, recognizing the significance of friendship requires linking past, present, and future to understand what determines whether children have a friend and what that friend (and that relationship) are like, how the relationship affects the child's current adjustment and well-being, and whether there are long-term implications of the child's experience in that relationship.

The first tasks in specifying the developmental significance of friendship are to define the relationship clearly and to differentiate it from other important relationships with peers. This introductory chapter considers both of these issues. We define friendship from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, and anthropology and briefly describe key theories of friendship. Then we distinguish friendship from popularity and from social networks. Finally, we discuss four assumptions that guide the remainder of the book.

## DEFINITIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendships in childhood and adolescence have been studied most extensively by developmental psychologists, but sociologists, anthropologists, and other scholars have also investigated friendships. Unfortunately, research from these various disciplines has most often proceeded in parallel with only rare intersection. In order to integrate the research from these disciplines, it is first necessary to understand the ways in which the definition of friendship and the assumptions about this relationship differ from one discipline to another. Here, we will review how psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists define and study friendship and also present some strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

### Psychological Perspectives on Friendship

When developmental psychologists talk about friendship, they are most often referring to a specific kind of relationship with distinct properties. Their definition of friendship centers on friendship as a dyadic relationship. Friendships are often described as "horizontal" relationships because of the sense of equality that is at their core. Thus, they are unlike other close dyadic relationships, such as parent–child and sibling relationships, that are "vertical" in nature because the partners differ in age and developmental stage. Friendship is based on mutual affection or reciprocity of liking. When asked to describe a friend, most people, regardless of age, emphasize mutuality or reciprocity—including the expectations that friends support one another and that giving and taking are at the founda-

tion of the relationship (Bigelow, 1977; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975).

Hartup and Stevens (1997) distinguish between the deep structure and the surface structure of friendship. The deep structure, or essence of friendship, is reciprocity. This deep structure exists relatively unchanged across the lifespan. In contrast, the surface structure, or the actual exchanges and interactions that occur between friends, changes with age according to the developmental tasks associated with that period. Thus, while play and sharing are the social exchanges that define friendship among young children, social exchanges among adolescent friends center on intimacy (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Hartup and Stevens are careful to identify reciprocity as the deep structure within friendships in Western cultures. As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, there are cultural differences in the meaning of friendship and the characteristics associated with friendship. For example, in Western cultures, a defining feature of friendship is that it is voluntary, unlike kinship relations, yet in other societies, strict social constraints may dictate who is able to be friends or whether and how relationships can be terminated (Krappmann, 1996). Nevertheless, psychological research on friendship is dominated by studies of children and adolescents in the United States, Canada, and Western European countries.

In the method section of most developmental psychology journal articles, considerable effort is given to a careful and thorough explanation of the specific definition of "friend" used in that study. Commonly, this involves asking children to name their best friends and then identifying friends as those pairs of children who reciprocally nominate one another. As we discuss in Chapter 2, reciprocal friendship nominations are the gold standard in developmental psychology research. This means, then, that psychological research usually focuses on specific identified friendship pairs. Comparisons of friends versus nonfriends may then be made by asking a child questions about a reciprocally nominated friend (vs. a classmate not named as a friend) or by observing pairs of friends together and comparing the features of their interactions to those of two classmates who do not nominate one another as friends. Friendship quality (discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6) is often assessed as well, by giving a child a questionnaire that asks specific questions about the named best friend and asking the friend questions about the target child.

In studying friendship, developmental psychologists typically focus on the outcomes of friendship. This research identifies differences between children with and without friends, examines the effects of high- versus low-quality relationships, and considers how participation in friendship contributes to adjustment and functioning currently (e.g., cross-sectional studies) or in the near future (e.g., short-term longitudinal studies). There

are, of course, notable exceptions to this focus on outcomes as more psychologists are now studying friendship processes, but the majority of the existing psychological work is outcome oriented.

As with any approach, there are strengths and weaknesses of the psychological approach to defining and studying friendship. The greatest strength is that when developmental psychologists identify friendships, they are likely capturing "real" friendships, due to the requirement of reciprocity and mutuality. These friendships can then be examined to determine, for example, what brings children together as friends, how they influence each other over the course of their friendship, the quality of the friendship, and the outcomes of the friendship (topics that are covered in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6). Methodologies that prioritize reciprocated friendships, however, may inadvertently miss important relationships (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of methodologies for identifying and studying friendships). Namely, children may change their choice of a best friend from month to month, week to week, or even day to day. Limited nominations may cause researchers to miss some mutual friendships, and typically only friendships with same-age schoolmates are identified. Another concern is that there is some inconsistency in how psychologists use the word *friend* and how others use the term. For example, teachers and parents may refer to all children's classmates as "friends." Despite potential shortcomings, the way psychologists define friendship allows for investigation of a particular relationship that is declared by two people as important and significant.

## Sociological Perspectives on Friendship

Sociological research often focuses on the construction of friendship culture. This research examines the active role that children play in their own socialization. Drawing on symbolic interactionism (e.g., Mead, 1934), sociological research considers how social interactions with peers involve interpretation of self and others and how children produce and reproduce with peers and friends routines that they adopt and adapt from adult culture. This interpretive approach (Corsaro, 1985, 1992, 1994, 2003) assumes that children develop social competence and knowledge about social institutions, social structure, and the contexts in which they live through interactions in the peer culture (Crosnoe, 2000).

Sociological studies of friendship also examine how friendships fit within the larger social structure and how factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status organize friendships. For example, Thorne (1993) and Eder (1995) provide in-depth ethnographic studies of gender and peer culture. Allan (1989) argues that a sociological analysis of friendship should include an examination of the significance of friend-

ship—not only on the support that friends provide individuals and the significance of these relationships for individual development as psychologists study—but more specifically on "the way in which friendships are incorporated into social organization, their social utility and their significance for social identity" (p. 10).

Sociological definitions of friendship are usually broad and inclusive. "Friends" are often assumed to be the peers with whom a child frequently interacts, and friends often include small groups of peers as opposed to dyads only (Adler & Adler, 1998; Corsaro, 1985; Rizzo, 1989). Sociological studies often do not define friendship explicitly and may leave it up to the children themselves to label other children as "friends" with no check on reciprocity. This emphasis fits with sociologists' focus on how children themselves define their relationships rather than on outsiders' views. Alternatively, in ethnographic studies, researchers themselves label some children as friends, and thus the term *friend* reflects the researchers' personal expectations of a friend that is likely based on frequency of interaction, participation in common activities, and observing the children who refer to one another as friends.

One key contribution of the sociological approach to studying friendship is in identifying friendships according to how the children themselves define friendship. Additionally, attention to how friendships fit into the larger social organization contributes to a greater understanding of the "social whole." Of course, leaving the definition of friendship up to the children studied or to the researcher's perspective means that different studies are not necessarily examining the same relationship. Another issue of concern may be the lack of attention to the dyad and various levels of friendships (friends vs. best friends, for example), but overall, there is great potential for understanding the place of friendship within children's social lives with the sociological perspective.

## Anthropological Perspectives on Friendship

Anthropological study of friendship in childhood and adolescence is more scarce than either psychological or sociological investigation of these relationships. This stems from two factors: anthropologists have only rarely studied friendship (Bell & Coleman, 1999; cf. Allan, 1989), and studying children has generally remained at the margins of research in mainstream anthropology (Hirschfeld, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 1999). Nevertheless, recent interest in children's lives—called "childhood studies" or the "anthropology of childhoods" (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007; LeVine, 2007)—and recognition of children as active agents have encouraged anthropologists to attend to children's unique perspective on their social worlds (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007; James, 2007).

In studying friendship, anthropologists eschew a search for a universal definition of friendship and focus on how it emerges in particular social and cultural contexts (Bell & Coleman, 1999). Some anthropologists consider friendship an idiom of interaction (Smart, 1999) or an idiom of affinity and togetherness (Rezende, 1999). By referring to friendship in these terms, the authors allow for different understandings of friendship across cultures without imposing a set of specific criteria with which to define the relationship (cf. Carrier, 1999).

For example, the notion that friendships are voluntary relationships is taken as a given in psychological research, yet anthropologists have identified societies in which relationships with ties like friendship are understood through kinship terms. In still other societies, friendship is formalized and institutionalized through ceremonies and rituals that rigidly define appropriate behavior between friends (e.g., Allan, 1989; Banton, 1966). Consistent with the broader interests and emphases of the discipline, anthropological study of friendship has focused on how the social and economic structures and cultural practices of different societies allow for (or hinder) friendships and on how relationships such as friendships are organized and function to sustain the institutions and practices of different societies (Allan, 1989; Gaskins, 2006). These questions logically pull for a comparative perspective examining how friendships differ between societies and cultures.

Perhaps indisputably, the greatest strength of the work of anthropologists is the attention paid to culture. Too often we examine children in Western cultures and assume we understand the construct of friendship. There is much more to understand, however, and anthropologists provide us with fascinating and informative perspectives on cultures and societies around the globe. We should also note that the work of anthropologists is extraordinarily involved. Researchers must gain permission and enter societies that are not their own; they must become a part of the group they are studying in order to understand the nature of friendship in that group; and they must spend a great deal of time and energy studying these societies, without a "blueprint" methodology.

## Summary

The importance of friendship is acknowledged across a number of disciplines, and each emphasizes different aspects of the relationship consistent with the overarching concerns, questions, and levels of analysis of the particular field of study. Although the discussions in this book draw most heavily on research within psychology, an integration of the findings and methods of study across disciplinary boundaries provides a richer, more complex and complete understanding of the importance of friendship in children's lives.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FRIENDSHIP

There is no single unified theory of friendship from psychology, sociology, or anthropology that describes its development, its features, and its significance; that yields clear testable hypotheses; and that provides a framework for organizing research. Nevertheless, the study of peer relations, and of friendship in particular, has made use of relevant theories in other areas of developmental, social, and personality psychology to guide research and explain discoveries about friendship.

### Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory

The most often cited theoretical conceptualization of friendship is Harry Stack Sullivan's (1953) interpersonal theory. We describe it in detail here because of its importance in guiding empirical research, especially in the last several decades. Sullivan's theory is developmental in nature and is aimed at explaining how personality develops within interpersonal relationships. Central to his theory is the assumption that specific tensions or interpersonal needs arise at each period in development. Individuals are motivated to seek certain types of interpersonal situations to satisfy these social needs. Particular interpersonal relationships are best suited for the satisfaction of each need, and thus these relationships are essential at the various stages or "developmental epochs."

Sullivan (1953) asserts that peer relations are central to adaptive development beginning in the juvenile period with the need for compeers. Sullivan describes the juvenile era as the "actual time for becoming social" (p. 227), and its beginning roughly corresponds to when children enter school. Interactions with peers provide children the opportunity to develop the social skills and competencies of competition, cooperation, and compromise. The need for acceptance and the desire to avoid the peer rejection that Sullivan labels ostracism also emerge at this time. Sullivan describes the formation of ingroups and outgroups as children compare themselves to one another, determine what characteristics, behaviors, abilities, and attitudes make valued companions, and then exclude those peers who do not meet these expectations.

Sullivan (1953) places singular importance on friendship. The beginning of preadolescence is "spectacularly marked" by the need for interpersonal intimacy that is satisfied through close friendship. Mutuality is the key to this relationship as a friend "becomes of practically equal importance in all fields of value" (p. 245). Sullivan eloquently describes friendship this way:

> All of you who have children are sure that your children love you; when you say that, you are expressing a pleasant illusion. But if you

will look very closely at one of your children when he finally finds a chum—somewhere between eight-and-a-half and ten—you will discover something very different in the relationship—namely, that your child begins to develop a real sensitivity to what matters to another person. And this is not in the sense of "what should I do to get what I want," but instead "what should I do to contribute to the happiness or to support the prestige and feeling of worth-whileness of my chum." (p. 245)

The friendships Sullivan describes are based on closeness and self-disclosure, reciprocity, similarity, and collaboration that requires sensitivity to the other person. This relationship thus represents a notable shift from peer relationships in the juvenile era when preferred playmates do not achieve this level of collaboration and intimacy.

In Sullivan's (1953) view, a primary outcome of preadolescent friendship is validation of self-worth. Through self-disclosure, children learn that their friends have similar interests, concerns, and values, and are reassured that they are important and worthy. Consensual validation of self-worth also occurs simply because children recognize (for the first time, Sullivan argues) that they are valued by another person. If children do not form a chumship, loneliness is an expected result.

As a psychiatrist, Sullivan (1953) was especially interested in friendship, not only for what it provides children currently and for the future, but also for the therapeutic potential of chumships for resolving problems from earlier periods. Isolated juveniles may avoid further isolation and loneliness by experiencing the consensual validation and collaboration of a chumship. Immature, irresponsible juveniles may "grow up" (p. 254) when the need for intimacy is satisfied with a friendship. Ostracized or rejected children may form a friendship with one another, and may "do each other a great deal of good" (p. 252) and improve their status in the group. Malevolent children may experience the closeness, caring, and tenderness of friendship, "whereupon the malevolent transformation is sometimes reversed, literally cured" (p. 253). Sullivan acknowledges that friendship does not always have these "curative" effects. He also does not provide specific hypotheses about the processes through which the therapeutic effects occur, though he suggests that consensual validation is of central importance.

## Expansions of Sullivan's Theory and Other Viewpoints on Friendship

More recently, other theorists have built on Sullivan's ideas in related conceptualizations of friendship. In their neo-Sullivanian model, Duane Buhrmester and Wyndol Furman (1986) build on Sullivan's ideas by

suggesting that social competence develops as children interact with others in a variety of relationships. They further outline the specific competencies that result from the key relationship at each developmental epoch, noting similarities and differences in the contributions of friendships and peer acceptance. The highly collaborative nature of chumships is expected to foster perspective-taking skills, empathy, and altruism.

James Youniss (1980) integrated Sullivan's ideas with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which also places great significance on social interactions. Youniss's Sullivan–Piaget thesis is that "relations with adults and peers serve equally important but distinct functions in children's social development" (p. 1). A central tenet of the thesis is that both Sullivan and Piaget view social maturity as stemming from interpersonal understanding and not from individual behavior. There is a special place in development, then, for peer relationships and particularly friendships according to this thesis. Reciprocity and cooperation are the cornerstones of children's peer relationships that explain their unique contributions to development.

Of all current researchers and theorists, Willard Hartup's name is most closely connected with the study of friendship. Hartup was active in the general resurgence in the interest in peer relations in the 1970s and 1980s. However, while others focused on peer interactions and peer acceptance and rejection, Hartup quickly moved to emphasizing the significance of the dyadic tie of friendship. His ideas about friendship are influenced by behaviorism, social exchange theories, cognitive theories, attachment theory, and interpersonal theory. Hartup's theory of friendship emphasizes its significance as a developmental context across the lifespan (e.g., Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In addition, Hartup's conceptualization of friendship emphasizes its multidimensional nature, including the three "faces" of friendship—having friends, friendship quality, and the identity of friends (Hartup, 1995, 1996a). This focus on multiple dimensions of friendship has been incredibly influential in guiding empirical research in the last two decades.

## Other Theories Relevant to Friendship Research

The vast majority of empirical studies on friendship include an almost obligatory reference to Sullivan's theory, yet given that there is no unified theory of friendship, researchers must look to a variety of theories from diverse domains as the basis for many of their hypotheses and studies. Some of these come from the modifications and expansions of Sullivan's ideas, described above. Others come from theories that are not specific to friendship, yet they have in common attention to reciprocity, mutual-

ity, and equality that are hallmarks of friendship. Several of these are described here.

### Attachment Theory

Attachment theory as first proposed by John Bowlby in the 1930s (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988) suggests that infants develop attachments with their primary caregivers who respond to their signals and behaviors. From these early experiences, mental representations of the self, others, and relationships, called *internal working models,* develop and guide future interactions and relationships. Attachment theory and its importance as a model for understanding friendships are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Wyndol Furman and his colleagues (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 2009; Furman & Wehner, 1994) have proposed a behavioral systems conceptualization of close relationships that draws on attachment theory and neo-Sullivanian perspectives. This model proposes four behavioral systems—attachment, caregiving, affiliative, and sexual/reproductive. The first three systems emerge in the parent–child relationship but then develop further in other relationships, including friendships and romantic relationships. The affiliative system is of particular importance in friendships and involves play, cooperation, collaboration, and reciprocity. Individuals are expected to rely on different relationships to satisfy the goals of the different behavioral systems, and the particular relationship an individual turns to at any given time is expected to be determined by a variety of factors, including age and development and culture (Furman & Buhrmester, 2009).

### Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) and was developed further over the next several decades. It is not a specific theory of friendship but is a model of studying human development. In brief, Bronfenbrenner suggests that development proceeds as a system of interactions and accommodations over the life course between a person and the changing settings and context in which the person lives. The model is often depicted as a series of concentric circles representing the complex system of relationships within multiple levels of the child's environment. The microsystem includes the child and reciprocal interactions in the child's immediate environment (e.g., parent–child relationships, friendships). The mesosytem involves interactions and connections between microsystems (e.g., ways in which out-of-school friends might influence children's relationships with others

in school). The exosystem consists of settings that influence children's development but do not include them directly, and the macrosystem includes cultural values and customs. We consider the macrosystem in Chapter 7 regarding cultural influences on children's friendships. Finally, the chronosystem reflects the fact that the environment is ever changing. The focus on friendship as a context for development and the idea that children influence and are influenced by their environment are ways in which ecological systems theory guides friendship research.

### Learning Theories and Theories of Interpersonal Attraction

Learning theories and various social psychological theories of interpersonal attraction and relationship development (see Kelley et al., 1983; Perlman & Fehr, 1986, for reviews) have been applied (though rarely) to friendships in childhood and adolescence. Findings of the importance of similarity, propinquity, reinforcement, and positive affect in friendship selection and maintenance fit with assumptions of these theories. For example, reinforcement theorists focus on the rewards received from others (e.g., Clore & Byrne, 1974; Lott & Lott, 1960, 1974). Exchange and equity theorists focus not only on the rewards received but also on what we invest in a particular relationship and how the rewards and costs of a particular friendship compare to others (e.g., Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, 1980; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). These theories have been used extensively to describe adult relationships, including friendships, and they may hold promise as models to be applied to friendships in childhood and adolescence. For example, Hand and Furman (2009) considered exchange theory as a framework for evaluating adolescents' perceptions of costs and rewards in same-sex and opposite-sex friendships.

### Summary

Although Sullivan's theory is the most often-cited theory in research on children's and adolescents' friendships, there are numerous others that focus specifically on friendship and still others that are more general theories but are relevant for friendship. Our current understanding of friendship, however, suggests that friendships may vary by age, gender, cultural group, and many other variables. It is not surprising, then, that no single model of friendship will likely "work" in all cases. Thus, it seems futile to search for one guiding theory that might explain all of the variables of interest related to friendships. Developing relevant "mini theories" of friendship, incorporating models and theories from other

research areas, and more thoroughly and systematically investigating the theories we do have will serve to enrich the empirical research literature on friendship in the coming decades.

## FRIENDSHIPS COMPARED TO OTHER PEER RELATIONS

One task in identifying what is special about friendships is to show how they are different from other types of peer relations. Current conceptualizations of the peer world emphasize that peer relations occur at different levels of social complexity—at the level of interactions, dyads, and groups (Hinde, 1979, 1997; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). It is important for us to present these distinctions early in the book so that it is clear what is meant by the term *friend* versus the term *peer,* especially because these terms are often used interchangeably outside of the research realm. When we use the term *friend,* we are referring to a particular type of peer relationship that is dyadic in nature and can be distinguished from other aspects of peer interactions and peer groups, namely peer acceptance and rejection and peer networks. These forms of peer relations do not necessarily involve specific relationships between two children.

### Friendship and Peer Status

#### *Peer Status*

As the vignettes at the beginning of this chapter illustrate, children have different types of relationships with both their friends and their peers. There are some children in every classroom who are not liked and others who are popular and liked by many. A child's status in the peer group— called social status, peer status, or sociometric status—is a measure of how liked (accepted) or disliked (rejected) the child is. This status is a summary of how other children in a particular group, usually classmates or grade mates, feel about a child in terms of liking. Thus, it is a unilateral construct (unlike friendship) and only represents feelings of others toward the child. Although we often speak of "rejected children" or "popular children," peer rejection versus acceptance is not a characteristic that resides in the child and only makes sense in the context of the peer group (see Asher & Coie, 1990; Bierman, 2004; Newcomb et al., 1993; Rubin et al., 2006).

With respect to peer status, children who are well liked are more cooperative and socially competent than rejected children. They com-

municate well with others, regulate their emotions effectively, and show social sensitivity and a keen awareness of others. Children who are rejected by peers show low rates of these positive, prosocial behaviors and high rates of aggressive and disruptive behavior as well as impulsive and immature behavior (Bierman, 2004; Newcomb et al., 1993). Countless studies have shown that being rejected by the peer group is a risk factor for a host of adjustment problems both concurrently and in the future including loneliness, victimization, mental health problems, and antisocial behavior and delinquency (Bierman, 2004). Peer status is the dimension of peer relations that has received the most attention in the developmental literature.

In addition to continuous measures of acceptance versus rejection, social status is also indexed by placing children into five sociometric status groups based on their pattern of being liked and disliked (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Newcomb & Bukowski, 1983). The "rejected" group includes children who are highly disliked and not liked. Children in the "popular" group are highly liked and not disliked. The "neglected" group is comprised of children who are neither liked nor disliked by many peers, and the "controversial" group includes children who are both liked and disliked by many peers. Children who do not fall into one of these four extreme groups are considered to have "average" sociometric status. The rejected group has received the most attention because of the serious implications for poor adjustment associated with being disliked (Bierman, 2004; Rubin et al., 2006).

### Distinctions between Peer Status and Friendship

Friendship differs from peer status because it defines a particular relationship between two individuals (see Bukowski & Hoza, 1989, for a review of differences between peer status and friendship). Although it also involves liking, the key difference is that the liking involved in friendships is *reciprocal*. Peer status and friendship are correlated, but their differences are clearly seen in the fact that not all popular children have friends, and many rejected children do. The numbers vary from study to study depending in part on how researchers measure the overlap between friendship and social status. In one sample, slightly less than half of low-accepted children had at least one mutual friend, but over 90% of high-accepted children had at least one friend (Parker & Asher, 1993). Using specific sociometric status categories, the distinctions between social status and friendship may be even more striking with nearly 40% of rejected children having at least one mutual friendship and at least 30% of popular children being friendless in one sample (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 2001).

### *Similarities across Peer Status and Friendship*

Links between peer status and friendship are evident in several ways. Some of the social skills and competencies that help children make friends are also those that enhance their social acceptance. Thus, it is not surprising that peer acceptance predicts the number of reciprocal friends a child has (Erdley, Nangle, Newman, & Carpenter, 2001; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; Parker & Asher, 1993). Better accepted, more popular children have more opportunities to form mutual friendships. In addition, popularity may temporally precede friendship. In several analyses, Bukowski and colleagues showed that popularity mediated the link between children's characteristics (e.g., aggression, competence) and participation in a mutual friendship (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Bagwell, 1999). Specifically, children's characteristics determined their popularity, and popularity determined the likelihood that the children had a mutual friend. In addition, children who were popular at one time were more likely to have a friend 6 months later, but having a friend did not predict later popularity (Bukowski, Pizzamiglio, Newcomb, & Hoza, 1996).

### *Friendship, Peer Status, and Adjustment*

In terms of their association with adjustment, additional findings suggest that popularity, but not friendship, is directly related to children's feelings of belongingness. In contrast, friendship, but not popularity, is directly related to children's feelings of loneliness in early adolescence (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993). Popularity is associated with loneliness through its association with friendship—children who are more popular are more likely to have a friend and thus feel less lonely. Thus, popularity and friendship are conceptually and empirically linked to one another, yet they are also associated with different aspects of adjustment. This difference is evident even over the long term: Rejection in preadolescence (but not friendship) predicted school adjustment and aspiration level in early adulthood, yet having a friend in preadolescence (but not peer rejection) was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher self-worth in early adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998).

Moreover, the quality of children's friendships differs for popular and unpopular children. Children's own reports of the quality of their friendships do not yield straightforward conclusions about links between friendship and peer status. Parker and Asher (1993) found that low-accepted children had friendships with less validation and caring, more conflict and betrayal, less help and guidance, less intimate exchange, and less conflict resolution—in short, lower-quality friendships—than average-accepted and/or high-accepted children. In contrast, other evidence

indicates that self-reports of friendship quality by rejected girls and their friends do not differ from those of average and popular girls with their friends (Lansford et al., 2006). There are very few observational studies of friendship quality. Nevertheless, two studies show compromised friendship quality for children who are not well accepted in the larger peer group. Rejected girls' interactions with their friends showed poorer conflict resolution and more immaturity as compared to higher-status girls with their friends (Lansford et al., 2006). In a study of both boys and girls, dyads of two low-accepted friends also showed less positive, coordinated, and sensitive interactions than two high-accepted friends (Phillipsen, 1999).

### Summary

A complete picture of a child's experience in the world of peers requires understanding both the child's place in the larger peer group (i.e., peer status) and the child's relationships with specific peers (i.e., friendship). As we argue in this book, a child's participation in and experience of friendships throughout childhood and adolescence is significant. But so is the child's level of acceptance and rejection by others. Therefore, it is valuable to look within particular friendships to appreciate the significance, meaning, and implications of that relationship, but we should do so without ignoring an understanding of the child's place in the peer group as a whole.

## Friendships and Larger Peer Groups

### Peer Networks

Children typically have multiple friends, and they often spend time with multiple peers in cohesive peer networks, also called peer cliques. The peers in a network are tied by bonds of affection and association. They "hang around" together. Research on peer networks draws both from sociometric research, because it assumes that children are embedded in a peer context with a particular structure, and from friendship research, because it assumes that there are particular peers who are most important to a child and influence the child (Kindermann, 1993). Children may belong to more than one network, and networks may be overlapping. Often these groups are formed around activities the children enjoy or participate in together. Peer networks are usually identified by asking children with whom they hang around (Bagwell, Coie, Terry, & Lochman, 2000) or by asking children to identify naturally occurring peer groups in their class or grade with "Who hangs out together?" (Cairns,

Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Gariepy, 1988; Cairns, Xie, & Leung, 1998; Gest, Farmer, Cairns, & Xie, 2003; Kindermann, 1996). With this latter approach, children are expected to be able to report on the social networks in their class because these are children who are observed to spend time together frequently. Reports from multiple children are combined to identify peer networks according to how often children are named as hanging around other peers. With both approaches—self-report and peer informant—network membership is based on a consensus of peers about who belongs together in a clique.

### Friendship and Peer Networks

Dyadic friendships are often embedded within peer networks, but a child does not necessarily have a reciprocal friendship with every other child in his or her peer network. Although there is some overlap between groups based on friendship versus affiliation (hanging around together), the groups are not identical (Rodkin & Ahn, 2009). Rodkin and Ahn (2009) found that networks based on dyads of friends are smaller and less stable than groups based on affiliative ties, and agreement in the placement of individual children using the two methods was modest. In one cohort of sixth-grade students, just over 40% of children nominated as one of three best friends were members of the child's peer network. Likewise, just over 40% of children in a child's peer network were nominated as a friend (Kindermann, 1996). In another sample of sixth- through twelfth-grade adolescents, over 90% of the best friends named by students were members of the same peer network, and from 50 to 70% of the friends named by adolescents in a list of 10 friends were in their peer network (Urberg, Değirmencioğlu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995). In some cases, youth may not like all members of their network even though they frequently associate with them. In addition, not all members of a network hang around with others in their group with equal frequency, and this reflects a child's centrality in the peer network (Cairns et al., 1988). Some children are more peripheral members of their clique, and there are dominance hierarchies that suggest differences in the degree to which certain peers influence the activities and attitudes of other network members (Adler & Adler, 1995; Strayer, 1989).

Peer networks are an important dimension of peer relations because of the powerful socialization that occurs within the clique, yet they are distinct from friendships in both their form and function. Not only do networks provide a structure or social arrangement within the larger social world of childhood, but they are critical for the transmission of cultural knowledge (Adler & Adler, 1995, 1998; Harris, 1995). As such, participation within a particular network provides access to a set of behaviors

and attitudes that are valued by at least a portion of fellow clique members. Indeed, network members are similar in both positive and negative qualities such as aggression and bullying; academic motivation, engagement, and achievement; leadership; popularity; and sports participation (Adler & Adler, 1998; Bagwell et al., 2000; Cairns et al., 1988; Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Duffy & Nesdale, 2009; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Kindermann, 1993, 2007; Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997; Sijtsema et al., 2010).

### Crowds

In adolescence, crowds become more salient dimensions of the social world. Crowds are large reputation-based groups that are not based on affiliation and may include many peer networks (Brown, 1990; Brown & Lohr, 1987). Crowd members may interact with one another, but it is not necessarily the case that all adolescents in the same crowd know one another. Rather, they are linked only by being given the same label identifying stereotypic behaviors and attributes. Although particular crowds and the names for those groups differ from school to school, typical crowds include "brains" or "nerds," "jocks" or "athletes," "preps," "druggies" or "toughs," and "populars." Adolescents' crowd affiliation may be an important component of their sense of identity, yet among older adolescents, crowd affiliation is perceived as a hindrance to self-expression and the development of personal identities (Brown, 1990).

### Friendship and Crowds

Youth view crowds as important for providing support and facilitating friendships (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Urberg, Değirmencioğlu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 2000). In one sample of middle and high school students, 55–85% of their friendships were from their own or similar crowds (Urberg et al., 2000). The importance of affiliation with a crowd decreases across adolescence as older adolescents place more emphasis on their peer networks and are frustrated with the demands for conformity associated with crowd affiliation (Brown et al., 1986).

### Summary

Friendships often exist within a larger peer network, and it is important not to lose sight of the context for the friendship that the larger network provides. To be sure, friendships are only one dimension of children's social world that also involves participation in peer interactions and social groups. Nevertheless, we contend that friendship is a unique

relationship that holds importance for children's lives and makes independent contributions to their development and well-being.

## FRAMEWORK FOR THE BOOK

The primary goal of the book is to use research from the past three decades to understand the developmental significance of friendship. In pursuing this goal, our perspective is guided by four primary assumptions that we describe more thoroughly below.

1. Friends are important.
2. Children's development influences friendships, and friendships influence children's development.
3. Friendships are a developmental context.
4. Friendships are best considered from both a normative and an idiographic perspective.

### Friends Are Important

First and foremost is the assumption that friends matter, and they matter a lot. At least in most Western cultures, this statement is a truism. By describing friendships as important, we mean specifically that they have implications for children's development and adjustment. In other words, they are *developmentally significant*. Friends also matter simply because they are significant to children and adolescents. When children are asked to name others who are important to them, friends (along with parents) are named without hesitation (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982; Kiesner, Kerr, & Stattin, 2004). That alone may be reason to devote considerable effort to understanding friendships.

This assumption also recognizes that friends are important socialization agents who provide influences on development beyond those conveyed by parents, siblings, teachers, and other peers. To be sure, these influences are often similar or overlapping. An academically inclined child may receive support and encouragement to do well in school from parents. He or she may also have a best friend who is actively engaged in school, and with whom he or she enjoys working on homework. Prosocial, cooperative, easy-going children are likely to be well liked among their classmates and to have a close friend. They are also not likely to be lonely or depressed. Given the correlations among various socializing agents and socialization experiences and contexts, we place special emphasis on identifying ways in which friendships are unique in their contributions to development.

Furthermore, it is clear that there are multiple ways in which friendships affect development. Friendship may have a direct association with a particular outcome. Such would be the case if children without friends are more lonely or depressed than children with friends, controlling for as many potential confounding variables as possible (e.g., peer status, individual personality or adjustment variables, friendship network involvement, family experiences). Friendship may also affect development by serving as a moderator variable. One hypothesis is that having a good friendship buffers children against the negative effects of other peer experiences. For example, children with a friend may be less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety associated with rejection or victimization experiences (e.g., Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). In other words, having a good friend may serve a protective role.

## Friendship and Development

Second, we assume that friendships are important *across* childhood and adolescence. Interactions with peers and potential friends begin as early as infancy and toddlerhood for many children (Dunn, 2004; Howes, 1983). By the preschool period, many children identify a particular "best" friend. Certainly, friendships change as children age. They become more complex, more strongly embedded in a broader social context, and more intimate. Yet, there are aspects of friendship, such as companionship and enjoying spending time together, that are at the core of friendships from very early childhood through adulthood.

A developmental perspective on friendship suggests that the effects of friendship are not the same at every age. Although their developmental significance may vary with age, friendships are nonetheless valued relationships across childhood and adolescence. Likewise, a developmental perspective requires considering ways in which children's social, emotional, and cognitive development affects friendships. For example, as children gain the ability to take another's perspective, their ability to resolve conflicts with friends may improve. In statistical terms, we can consider how friendships are both independent and dependent variables. As independent variables, friendships affect development. Indeed, this is the emphasis of most of the book. However, friendships are simultaneously dependent variables because developmental processes and other social experiences affect friendship.

## Friendship as a Developmental Context

Third, we assume that friendships provide a context for social, emotional, and cognitive development. At the most basic level, friendship

provides a setting or environment in which development occurs by virtue of the time children spend with friends and the activities they do together. Friendships provide different developmental contexts than other social relationships because they are voluntary and because they are horizontal in nature (i.e., friends are relatively equal in their degree of social power). Understanding friendships as developmental contexts requires specifying how friendships affect socialization—both what aspects of development are affected and what processes account for those effects (Hartup & Laursen, 1991, 1999).

To date, we know much more about the "what" of friendships. We know about their important features and how they differ from other relationships with peers. We know what children think about and expect from their friends. And we have some good ideas about what aspects of children's development and adjustment are most likely influenced by their relationships with friends. We know much less about the "how" and "why" of friendships. Why is it that children without friends are "worse off" than children with friends? How is it that friends contribute to one another's development of emotion regulation skills? These questions speak to the processes that occur within friends' ongoing interactions and how those processes determine the significance of friendship. Our assumption is that we need to move toward analyses of processes to better understand friendships as a developmental context.

## Nomothetic and Idiographic Perspectives

Fourth, the framework we present for understanding friendship incorporates a nomothetic (or normative) approach and an idiographic (or individual differences) perspective. Specifically, it is possible to identify many aspects of friendship that seem to hold true for most children and adolescents. These include age-related changes in the features, functions, and meaning of friendship; ways in which friendships are embedded within larger social systems, such as peer groups, schools, and cultural context; and pathways through which friendships affect current and later functioning. At the same time, however, the experience of friendship and the context that a particular friendship provides may differ substantially across children. These individual differences are a function of the characteristics each child brings to the relationship, the interactions between the children, and features of the relationship itself, such as friendship quality. Most individual empirical studies of friendship proceed primarily from one of these approaches. As we study the normative development of friendships and the individual differences in friendships, we must take care to consider those who have negative interactions with friends and those who are friendless. Friendless children and those who choose the

"wrong" friends, for example, may potentially benefit from efforts that seek to help children make friends or make the "right" friends. In sum, our fourth assumption presumes that the nomothetic and idiographic perspectives are complementary. They can and should be integrated for a richer understanding of friendship and its significance.

The remaining chapters of this book aim to shed light on the friendship experiences of children and adolescents. We consider research, for example, that will help us better understand the children and adolescents represented in the vignettes at the beginning of this chapter: why Leah and Olivia may have befriended one another during toddlerhood (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the developmental significance of friendship in childhood); how Mark and Jeremy's friendship compares to their relationship with the larger peer group (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the dark side of friendship and aggression, and Chapter 8 for a discussion of friendship interventions); how Johnny and Dave's friendship may serve a protective function for Dave in the face of his harassing peers (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the protective role of friendship in the face of victimization); how positive friendship quality contributes to the well-being of two adolescent friends like Amy and Mary (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the importance of high-quality friendships); and whether childhood and adolescent friendships like those of James and Thomas or Jennifer and Katie shape psychosocial functioning in later life (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of friendships in adolescence).

Friendship is complex and multifaceted—there is no "one size fits all" for how friendships are formed, maintained, or terminated—but several decades of research have helped us understand the significant contributions of friendship to child and adolescent development. Of course, there are several related and important topics that are beyond the scope of this book. Because of our focus on dyadic friendships, the book only peripherally covers the growing literature on social networks. Likewise, although we focus on the contributions of friendships to child and adolescent development, a complete analysis of processes of peer influence is not included. Much of this work focuses on larger peer groups and the peer network as a whole.