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The present study examined the associations among mothers' direct interventions in their children's peer interactions, called maternal friendship facilitation, and negative interactions in children's best friendships. Participants were 347 fifth-grade children and their mothers. Drawing on three theoretical perspectives, it was hypothesized that higher levels of friendship facilitation strategies would be related to lower levels of negative interactions and that the strength of these associations would be stronger for boys than for girls. It was also hypothesized that associations between friendship facilitation strategies and negative interactions would be mediated by the strength of children's attachment to peers. Two types of friendship facilitation were negatively associated with negative interactions: talk and encouragement, and meeting other parents. However, these associations were significant only for girls. Peer attachment did not mediate the associations between friendship facilitation strategies and negative interactions.

MATERNAL INFLUENCE ON NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS IN  
CHILDREN'S FRIENDSHIPS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This study was framed by Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, social cognitive theory, and attachment theory. First, the PPCT model broadly examines the ways in which individual development is shaped through everyday interactions, individual characteristics, the varying contexts of individuals' lives, and time. It is utilized in this case to demonstrate how processes in two different contexts are associated and how person characteristics can both mediate and moderate this association. Second, social cognitive theory describes various cognitive mechanisms by which individuals learn and enact their own behavior, with a particular emphasis on the role of environmental stimuli, such as parental behavior, in shaping this behavior. This theory describes the processes that lead from parenting practices to children's friendship interactions. Finally, attachment theory describes the means by which affective bonds to others shape personal behavior, and is used in the current study to explain the ways in which the association between parenting and children's friendship interactions could be mediated by children's attachment to their friends. These three theoretical frameworks provide cognitive, affective, and behavioral foundations for the hypotheses presented in the current study.

#### *PPCT Model*

Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; 2006) Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model was designed to describe the manner in which four influences on individuals' development – proximal processes, person characteristics, contexts, and time – could help researchers understand intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and moral development. The PPCT model suggests that these four influences are

interdependent, and thus should be examined together for their impact to be best understood. Specific directions of association among the four influences are not discussed in the PPCT model because it is proposed that influences across all model components are reciprocal. For development to occur, individuals must engage in interactional processes, which occur over time and within contexts, and these processes are then shaped by person effects. In this way, the four categories of influence; process, person, context, and time; work together to shape development.

*Process.* Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) suggested that interactions between individuals and their environments are at the core of all human development. Individual development is shaped by individuals' reciprocal interactions with environmental stimuli. These interactions are labeled *proximal processes*, and they consist of everyday activities in the lives of individuals. All experiences, whether interpersonal or intrapersonal, that contribute to individual learning and change are proximal processes. Proximal processes are essential for development because they serve as the mechanisms through which person-environment interactions influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

This study will look at the interpersonal process of maternal friendship facilitation as it relates to negative interactions within children's friendships. Friendship facilitation consists of the everyday involvement of mothers in their children's social lives for the purpose of creating opportunities for social development and positive peer experiences. Facilitation strategies include encouraging and creating social experiences intended to increase the quantity and quality of peer interactions. Strategies of guiding and counseling children through social experiences are also integral to friendship facilitation and such strategies potentially create opportunities for building children's confidence,



increasing their understanding of social rules, and conveying mothers' values and beliefs about friendship and their feelings about particular friends. The friendship facilitation process as a whole provides children with a framework of values and behaviors upon which they can model their friendships. For proximal processes to be effective, they must occur regularly and with increasing complexity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998); therefore, higher levels of friendship facilitation should have a greater influence on children and their friendships. Specifically, it is proposed that higher levels of maternal friendship facilitation will be related to lower levels of negative interactions within children's best friendships due to more maternal supervision over friendship interactions and greater maternal support in problem-solving and general social skill development.

The outcome variable of interest in this study, negative interactions within children's best friendships, is also a proximal process variable. Negative interactions encompass high levels of conflict and betrayal coupled with low levels of conflict resolution, and each of these interactions is evident within interpersonal interactions that occur in everyday circumstances. The experiences of conflict, betrayal, and conflict resolution are shaped by the characteristics of the individuals involved as well as the contexts in which such experiences occur. In turn, these processes also shape the people experiencing them and can influence characteristics of social contexts. It is hypothesized that higher levels of friendship facilitation, a process embedded within the family context, will be related to lower levels of negative interactions. Higher levels of peer attachment, a person construct, are also expected to be associated with lower levels of negative friendship interactions. The potential for negative interactions to influence individual characteristics and contexts, such as friendships and peer networks, make this an important area of study.

*Person.* According to the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), the *person* contributes to development due to individual characteristics that shape the course and impact of proximal processes. Resources, force characteristics, and demand characteristics have the ability to alter the ways in which individuals interact with their environments and the manner in which they respond to environmental stimuli, which in turn shapes individual development.

Resources possessed by the person include assets as well as liabilities that influence developmental processes. Personal assets include competencies, knowledge, and experience that aid in individuals' movement toward greater complexity in proximal processes; thus, they enhance the potential development of individuals. Liabilities include physical and cognitive conditions, defects, or injuries which inhibit the potential of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Demand characteristics are individuals' personal qualities that allow them to elicit or repress responses from their environment in ways that encourage or discourage effective proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These characteristics can take the form of physical attributes, social competencies, or personal dispositions. Child gender is a demand characteristic in this study because individuals' gender draws particular responses from others. For instance, mothers may have beliefs and expectations regarding child gender that would elicit different friendship facilitation strategies for boys and girls.

Force characteristics are dispositions that can either enhance or diminish the quality of proximal processes. These dispositions are categorized as developmentally generative or developmentally disruptive. Disruptive force characteristics diminish the quality of proximal processes. Examples of disruptive force characteristics include inattention, impulsivity, insecurity, shyness, and regulatory difficulties. Generative force

characteristics, such as motivation, curiosity, and initiative, encourage proximal processes and thus promote development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this study, peer attachment (conceptualized as children's sense of connection to their friends) is a generative force characteristic that represents individuals' value for friendships and their connection to friends. Based on the PPCT model, it is predicted that higher levels of maternal friendship facilitation will increase children's ability to manage their peer relationships and instill in children a greater value for friendship and attachment to peers. Greater attachment to peers should then put individuals at ease and give them greater confidence and control in their peer interactions thereby providing opportunities to decrease negative interactions. Levels of peer attachment are expected to mediate the relationship between maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions within children's best friendships.

*Context.* Bronfenbrenner (1994) envisioned individual development as occurring within a nested set of *contexts*, or environments. Each of these contexts has reciprocal influences on individual development. Contexts are differentiated by characteristics such as normative activities, social expectations, behavioral patterns, and beliefs and values that all contribute to contexts' influence on individual development. Individuals then influence contexts by introducing stimuli, providing feedback, and contributing to stabilizing or destabilizing forces. Context has the potential to provide unique experiences and so contexts may have widely differing influences on individual development.

The first level of context is the *microsystem*, settings in which individuals directly live their lives such as family, work, and school. This is the level at which proximal processes occur, with these processes being shaped by the nature of the specific

microsystem. The characteristics of a microsystem are critical influences on development; these characteristics include physical settings, social norms and boundaries, and symbolic attributes of contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In addition, other people are integral components of microsystems in that they provide stimuli and social interactions. The potential developmental influence of a given microsystem is dependent on these third parties (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, in infancy and childhood, the family is considered to be the primary developmental context, due in large part to the quantity and quality of the processes available through interactions with family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). As school and peers gain importance in middle childhood, we could expect that these microsystems would serve important roles as developmental contexts in middle childhood. Both the peer and family microsystems are represented in this study. Peer attachment and negative interactions in friendships are each embedded in the peer microsystem. Friendship facilitation represents a proximal process within the family microsystem that presumably influences children in ways that shape the nature of processes experienced within the peer system.

The second level of context is the *mesosystem*, comprised of two or more microsystems interacting in individuals' lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Development is thought to be enhanced by the effective linkage of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), such as when parents and teachers collaborate in children's educational experiences. The current study is a test of a mesosystem model in that the family microsystem is linked to the peer microsystem through mothers' attempts to support children's friendships (friendship facilitation). Processes in the family microsystem influence processes in the peer microsystem as mothers encourage, advise, and support children in their friendships with the intent of shaping friendships, which are part of the

peer microsystem. The effective linkage of two microsystems is expected to enhance individuals' functioning in both.

The broadest of contexts is the *macrosystem*, which represents the larger cultural groups with which individuals identify. The characteristics, resources, customs, opportunities, and rules of the macrosystem filter down to the systems within it, shaping the structures of and processes within each system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For example, cultures that value individualism are likely to contain micro-, meso-, and exosystems that encourage children to form peer relationships outside family contexts and to manage those relationships with little adult assistance. This study includes the construct of gender, which could be considered as either a macrosystem influence or a person influence. In the current study, gender is utilized as a person construct because it does not represent a cultural belief or norm, but rather an individual characteristic.

*Time.* All development occurs within the bounds of *time*, which can be measured as biological maturation, the continuity of interactions in a given process, or changing macro-systems' impact on individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In ecological theory, time constitutes a context, the *chronosystem*, which includes development of individuals as well as changes in environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The chronosystem is used in research to assess stability and change in development and is often viewed in terms of life events, either individual incidents or sequences of events. The chronosystem also influences development through environmental changes over time such as changes in financial situation, shifts in family structure, and contextual stress levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the case of this study, time would allow for the examination of the effectiveness of friendship facilitation throughout childhood. However, time is not considered in the current study.

### *Social Cognitive Theory*

Social cognitive theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1986), begins with a model that views behavior, the person, and external environment as connected through a system of reciprocal influences. Three core constructs from the theory are applicable to the current study: modeling, agency, and self-efficacy.

*Modeling.* Individuals learn new behaviors and refine preexisting behaviors through observation and imitation, or *modeling* (Bandura, 1986). The construct of modeling is extracted largely from early versions of Bandura's theory. In more recent years, the theory has moved away from its previous focus on modeling and observational learning. However, the construct of modeling has proven useful to researchers, continues to be utilized, and remains associated with Bandura's theoretical work.

Modeling is conceptualized as a form of socialization whereby individuals observe real or symbolic role models and utilize their observations to shape their own behaviors. There are three means by which modeling occurs: it elicits responses from the observer, it inhibits or disinhibits preexisting behaviors in the observer, and it elicits similar behaviors from the observer (Bandura, 1986). In the current study, maternal friendship facilitation is conceptualized as a behavior that may elicit several types of modeling by children. Children who observe their mothers' efforts to initiate and regulate their peer interactions will be likely to model such efforts by engaging in efforts of their own to foster positive peer relationships. In addition, this theory would predict that mothers' efforts to encourage acceptable social skills and assist children in inhibiting nondesirable social behaviors would result in a decreased likelihood that children would engage in negative interactions with peers. Finally, maternal friendship facilitation is

expected to provide children with a model of the value of friendships, which they can then integrate into their own cognitive schemas of relationships and imitate by engaging in fewer negative interactions.

*Agency.* Agency refers to intentional behaviors that are enacted with a goal of producing particular outcomes (Bandura, 2001). Personal agency is reflected through individuals' demonstration of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection. The intentional nature of agency means that it has a future orientation because intention requires a focus on the achievement of a goal in the future. Thus, acts of agency require forethought and an intended outcome based in the future. In addition, agency requires the ability to put these thoughts and intentions into action through the effective use of self-reactiveness. Self-reactiveness encompasses self-regulation and motivation, which allow individuals to monitor their own behaviors and choose behaviors that will assist them in reaching their goals. Finally, self-reflectiveness is required to assess the effectiveness of agentic acts. These assessments are combined over time to form individuals' sense of their own effectiveness as an agent. Self-reflection thus gives rise to beliefs about self-efficacy.

There are three types of agency represented within social cognitive theory: personal, proxy, and collective. These are conceptualized as interdependent agentic forces operating in individuals' lives. The construct of friendship facilitation can be conceptualized as any of these three types of agency. *Personal agency* is the ability of individuals to act intentionally; therefore, maternal friendship facilitation is an act of mothers' personal agency. Mothers choose to engage in strategies that they believe will shape their children's friendships in ways that they feel are desirable. Through modeling, it is expected that this maternal act of personal agency will also influence children's

personal agency. Theoretically, a heightened sense of personal agency within children should lead to reduced negative interactions in their friendships because it allows them to pursue their personal and relational goals more effectively, which should reduce undue negativity in their friendships as children strive for positive relationships.

*Proxy agency* is the ability of individuals to recruit others to act on their behalf. Friendship facilitation could also be conceptualized as a representation of children's proxy agency. It could be that children are eliciting their mothers to act on their behalf in the facilitation of their friendships. For instance, several strategies of friendship facilitation address mothers' efforts to enable their children's proximity to their peers by driving children to activities and allowing children to invite friends over. It may be that it is actually the children driving this behavior by encouraging their mothers to provide transportation and permission, resources they, as children, cannot access directly for themselves.

Many goals require the collective agency of a group or dyad. *Collective agency* is the act of individuals working together toward a shared goal. Friendship facilitation can also be conceptualized as collective agency in that mothers and children are working together to shape children's friendships. Although mothers are directly responsible for the specific behaviors in friendship facilitation, children contribute to the process through their receptiveness to their mothers' efforts. Maternal friendship facilitation is unlikely to be successful if children are resistant to mothers' attempts to facilitate. Therefore, effective friendship facilitation is the result of the cooperative efforts of mothers and children to maintain positive friendships in children's lives.

*Self-Efficacy.* *Self-efficacy* is the effectiveness with which individuals engage in personal, proxy, and collective agency. Theoretically, it is not self-efficacy itself that has



the greatest influence on individual behavior, but individuals' beliefs about their own self-efficacy. Beliefs about self-efficacy shape motivation, affective and cognitive processes, and individual behavior. They influence cognitions about the individual's ability to engage in particular activities and achieve certain goals. Individuals will choose contexts and activities based, in part, on their beliefs about their own abilities to effectively produce actions that will allow them to be successful. In addition, self-efficacy beliefs are expected to influence feelings of self-worth, motivation to try new things, and decision-making skills. In short, beliefs regarding self-efficacy shape the degree to which individuals are able to enact their own agency (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003).

An individual's belief in his or her own ability to navigate relationships is called *relational efficacy*. This construct has been utilized primarily in research on marital conflict, within which it is more specifically defined as an individual's belief that he or she is able to perform behaviors necessary to manage and resolve the conflict in their close relationships (Doherty, 1981). This definition of relational efficacy is directly applicable to the current study as it relates to children's efficacy in minimizing negative interactions with their friends. It is theorized that support from others contributes to efficacy (Bandura, et al., 2003), so it is predicted that mothers' support, in the form of friendship facilitation, will increase children's beliefs about their relational efficacy, which will allow for more effective management and prevention of negative interactions.

Beliefs about what the self is capable of will shape individuals' ability to regulate and manage their own behaviors and responses (Bandura et al., 2003). Self-efficacy beliefs influence individuals' expectations and standards regarding their abilities to self-regulate, called *regulatory efficacy*. Individuals high in self-regulation are more likely to

expand their resources of knowledge and skill, resources that will further opportunities for success in future endeavors and will support the development of still higher levels of efficacy (Bandura, 2001). Regulatory efficacy is likely to influence children's negative interactions with their peers as it should shape their abilities to regulate their responses to their friends' behavior, which would have the potential to reduce negativity in friendship interactions.

Self-efficacy not only includes beliefs about what individuals are able to do, but also what they are able to do with the assistance of others (proxy and collective agency). This type of self-efficacy, *collective efficacy*, reflects the functioning of the group, or dyad, and influences beliefs about the collective ability to work for the good of either the group or the individual (Bandura, 2001). Friendship facilitation may shape the interactions in children's friendships through this mechanism. It may be that when children are confident in the collective ability of the mother-child dyad, their cognitions about friendship interactions are more positive because they are confident in their ability to negotiate such interactions with the help of their mothers. This in turn, may then lead to fewer negative friendship interactions because confidence in collective agency minimizes individuals' vulnerabilities to discouragement and anxiety about potential interactions, thus allowing them to relax and to minimize negative interactions as they arise. In addition, high levels of friendship facilitation and a strong sense of collective efficacy may give children confidence that their friendships have been effectively selected and maintained with the assistance of their mothers and they can be assured that their friendships are of "high" quality and are with individuals with whom they are likely to get along.

### *Attachment Theory*

Attachment theory is grounded in the idea that individuals form affectional bonds with their caregivers early in life in order to provide safety and security for infants, with these bonds later shaping individual development and future relationships. When children experience sensitive and responsive caregivers, they develop trust in their caregivers, which allows them to explore their worlds with confidence that their caregivers will protect them. Children also learn to think of themselves as individuals worthy of protection and care. These building blocks of trust and self-worth are expected to prove invaluable in future close relationships (Bowlby, 1982).

Traditionally, attachment theory has been utilized to address the relationships between young children and their caregivers, as well as how these relationships impact future relational bonds. However, the attachment theory model has been applied to developmental periods beyond early childhood and relationships beyond that of the child-caregiver (Bretherton, 1985). One way that research has extended the attachment theory model into these broader areas is through the concept of the internal working model.

The *internal working model* is composed of expectations and rules held by individuals as references for navigating attachment relationships. The working model is a global, internalized representation of what individuals expect from their attachments, and it encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. Expectations regarding specific relationships are related to the internal working model but remain distinct because the working model is developed from an accumulation of experiences and relationships and is not based on a single relationship (Bretherton, 1985). Attachment theory has occasionally been portrayed as a model that applies only to parent-child

relationships; however, attachment relationships have also been studied with respect to romantic partners and friends (Furman, 2001).

*Attachment and parenting practices in middle childhood.* Working models change with age, so it is important to move beyond infant attachment to look at attachment behaviors later in development (Bretherton, 1991). As individuals develop, faculties related to attachment such as cognitive capacity, behavioral control, and motivational complexity will all increase, which provides reason to expect that internal working models will undergo considerable changes beyond infancy (Crittenden, 2000). Not only do working models evolve throughout the lifespan, but the expression of attachment within relationships shifts as well (Richardson, 2005). Therefore, we must consider how attachment in middle childhood may present itself differently from traditional definitions of attachment that are rooted in the parent-infant relationship. It has been suggested that middle childhood is a pivotal period for the development of attachment relationships because it is at this point that individuals are laying the groundwork to develop attachment relationships with peers in addition to attachments to caregivers (Mayseless, 2005). Cognitive changes associated with middle childhood and early adolescence, such as increases in perspective-taking, self-reliance, and social intuition, are also proposed to change the shape of attachment relationships (Crittenden, 2000).

Accessibility and responsiveness have been characterized as the primary features of attachment relationships (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), and the expression of these features may change dramatically as individuals move through childhood. Traditional attachment behaviors, such as mothers' reactions to their children's fear responses to strangers, decrease in middle childhood due to children's greater

experience, cognitive and biological changes, and the development of skills and strategies for coping (Thompson & Raikes, 2003). Yet according to attachment theory, the parent-child attachment relationship does not necessarily diminish with the absence of such behaviors. Instead, attachment is expressed through alternative behaviors such as parenting practices of monitoring, providing social support, and engaging in open communication (Richardson, 2005), which each reflect accessibility and responsiveness.

Another parenting practice that may serve as an expression of parent-child attachment is friendship facilitation. As children are beginning to transition from caregivers as their only attachment relationships to attachment relationships with same-age peers, it is expected that parents' behaviors will change to accommodate and encourage children's needs for greater autonomy (Mayseless, 2005). Friendship facilitation strategies such as encouraging participation in extracurricular activities and advising regarding peer-related problem-solving can be utilized by caregivers to encourage autonomy development, while at the same time these behaviors maintain parental accessibility and responsiveness as parents remain involved in children's explorations into new contexts and relationships. In this way, friendship facilitation can be conceptualized as a component of the attachment relationships that exist between children and their mothers in middle childhood.

*Attachment to friends.* Attachment to friends has been studied among adolescents and adults, but such efforts have received some criticism. It has been suggested that individuals rarely rely on friends for attachment needs such as safe havens and secure bases, and friendships are often short-lived and are bound to specific contexts. Because friendships generally do not meet traditional definitions of attachment relationships, it has been suggested that friendships only occasionally

constitute attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989). Yet it is possible that this definition of attachment is too narrow and does not adequately cover the full range of attachment behaviors and relationships that individuals experience in their daily lives. Furman and Simon (2006) have dealt with this conundrum by employing the construct of relational views to understand the manner in which relationships with friends are characterized by relational importance that differs from that of traditional attachment definitions.

*Relational views* encompass expectations of intimacy and closeness rather than expectations of safe haven and secure base. The concept of relational views was developed by Furman and associates (Furman & Simon, 2006; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002; Furman & Wehner, 1994) for application to the study of attachment in adolescent romantic relationships and friendships. Utilizing a relational views perspective circumvents arguments that attachment is not relevant to friendships by acknowledging the lack of certain attachment functions within these relationships while still maintaining the attachment-related constructs of intimacy and closeness. This study will define peer attachment in a manner that is consistent with the definition of relational views, rather than a more traditional definition of attachment relationships.

*Peer attachment as a mediator of the association between friendship facilitation and interactions with friends.* According to attachment theory, attachment to parents is predicted to influence individuals' attachment to others in their lives, including peers (Bowlby, 1982). As with attachment representations, relational views are expected to be related to specific behaviors within relationships (Furman, 2001; Furman & Simon, 2006). Given these two predicted associations, as well as an understanding of parenting practices as a dimension of the parent-child attachment relationship, peer attachment is

proposed to function as a mediator of the association between the parenting practice of friendship facilitation and the relational behavior of negative interactions in friendships. Higher levels of friendship facilitation will be associated with greater attachment to peers, and higher levels of attachment to peers will be associated with lower levels of negative interactions within friendships.

### *Conclusion*

All three of the theories described here inform the study of maternal friendship facilitation efforts as a potential influence on negative interactions within children's friendships. The PPCT model supports an examination of the manner in which two microsystems may interact to shape the nature of friendship interactions, as well as the role of person characteristics in relation to such associations. Social cognitive theory provides a detailed explanation for the cognitive processes that lead from maternal friendship facilitation to children's negative interactions in friendship. Attachment theory provides a rationale for the function of peer attachment as a potential mediator of the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions within children's friendships. Together, these three theoretical perspectives ground the hypotheses presented in the current study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Friendships play integral roles in shaping children's development. They serve as sources of information about oneself and about others, provide emotional and cognitive resources for coping and problem-solving, and serve as models for future relationships (Hartup, 1992). Due to the potential importance of friendships in children's lives, dimensions of friendship quality have emerged as a primary focus of child development research. Much of this research has focused on identifying the predictors and consequences of positive friendship features, yet friendships are also characterized by negative qualities that may be equally important in shaping children's development. Friendship qualities, including negative qualities, can be influenced by individual and contextual factors (Berndt, 2004), including parental efforts to manage children's peer relationships through strategies such as supervision and advising. The aim of this study is to look at the ways in which parents' attempts to influence children's friendships have direct and indirect effects on negative interactions within friendships.

#### *Friendships in Middle Childhood*

Friends become increasingly important in children's lives throughout middle childhood and adolescence, in part due to increased time spent with peers (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Childhood friendships contribute to psychological health, offer opportunities for socialization, and provide support (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Friendship research has been particularly focused on friendship quality. Researchers have argued that the quality of children's friendships is important because of its associations with individual behavior, socioemotional development, and self-perceptions (Berndt, 1996). Positive friendship quality has been associated with child adjustment



dimensions such as higher levels of self-reported social competence and global self-worth, and lower levels of internalization and loneliness (Parker & Asher, 1993; Rubin et al., 2004). Higher levels of friendship quality within specific relationships have also been linked to greater acceptance by peers (Parker & Asher).

Children interact with their peers within a diverse set of circumstances and contexts that include peripheral encounters with peers; groups of peers who share activities and interests, known as cliques and crowds (Brown, 1990); close friendships; and best friendships. Children's peers can be defined as individuals of the same age and status. Children may know their peers intimately or they may know them by name or reputation only. In contrast, friendships are defined as dyadic, reciprocal peer relationships that are identified and defined by the individuals within them (Rubin et al., 2006). In theory, there is no limit to the number of friendships children may have. However, children generally have one friend who they consider their best friend. Children's best friendships differ in important ways from children's other peer relationships and friendships. Best friendships are more stable than other close friendships (Degirmencioglu, Urberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1990), and children report that their best friendships are more positive and less negative than other friendships (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). In addition, best friends have been shown to have more influence on individual behaviors, such as smoking and school involvement, when compared to other friends (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Urberg, 1992). This study focuses on interactions within children's best friendships.

As with many areas of developmental research, friendship research has often neglected middle childhood in favor of early childhood and adolescence (Huston & Ripke, 2006). However, middle childhood is a time during which children's conceptions

of friendship and friendship quality change considerably. Bigelow (1977) found that in fifth and sixth grades children began to express increased expectations of their friendships, such as loyalty and genuineness. Such changes are accompanied by increases in friendship qualities of loyalty, trust, and intimacy (Berndt, 2002). Given that children's conceptualizations and expectations regarding friendships are in transition during middle childhood, they may be particularly open to external influences, such as parenting practices, in their interactions with friends during this developmental period.

Middle childhood is also an important developmental period for the study of negative friendship interactions because a number of maladaptive social behaviors are especially prominent during these years (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). During middle childhood, there are significant increases in relational hostility among peers, including behaviors such as exclusion or gossip (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Middle childhood is also a time when high levels bullying behaviors are reported (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000). Although middle childhood has rarely been considered in research on age-related changes in friendship qualities, given these trends it is reasonable to expect that negative interactions occur frequently within middle childhood friendships.

#### *Negative Interactions in Children's Friendships*

Friendship researchers have typically conceptualized friendship as a primarily positive experience and generally have focused on positive features of friendship quality (Berndt, 2004). Negative features are often downplayed as a relatively minor component of relationship quality and are not expected to have additional value beyond positive features. Current friendship quality measures are strongly imbalanced toward positive features, often including up to two or three times more items and subscales focusing on

positive characteristics as compared to negative characteristics (e.g. Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). Berndt (2004) called for researchers to take greater notice of the negative interactions in children's peer relationships and to conduct more detailed analyses of the negative features of friendships to match the extensive work on positive friendship features. As it stands, the general neglect of negative friendship features may result in a diminished understanding of friendship quality, the negative interactions that occur in friendships, and the effects of negative interactions on individual children's well-being.

Friendship's voluntary nature may contribute to the general perception that it is largely characterized by positive interactions. If a friendship has a high level of negative interactions, it is assumed that children will end the friendship. However, this assumption rests on the belief that children will be unsatisfied with friendships characterized by negativity and will choose to act on their dissatisfaction. Contextual factors and relationship perceptions may influence whether this occurs. Some children may not perceive interactions of conflict, betrayal, or hostility as negative enough to dissolve a friendship, particularly if they have few other friendships to fall back on or if their other friendships are equally negative. For example, research related to bullying and aggression has shown that children often maintain friendships with those who victimize them (Crick & Nelson, 2002). In addition, negative friendship features do not correlate strongly with positive friendship features, such that friendships with high levels of negative features may have either high or low levels of positive features (Berndt, 2004). For example, Hawley, Little, and Card (2007) found that adolescents in relationships reported to be high in conflict and relational aggression also reported high levels of fun,

companionship, and closeness, indicating that there are benefits in friendships that could potentially balance or outweigh the costs associated with negative interactions.

Regardless of children's ability to leave friendships, the fact remains that negative interactions do occur in friendships. In one study, adolescents reported an average of one to two conflicts with close friends per day (Laursen, 1995). In light of this, it is reasonable to assume that most friendships are characterized by negative interactions of varying intensity and frequency. Friendship plays an important role in children's lives and friendships contain negative interactions, so we can expect that negative interactions within friendships are a salient element of children's everyday lives.

Among the few studies that have looked at negative interactions in children's and adolescents' friendships, all have shown that negative interactions are linked with primarily negative outcomes. La Greca and Harrison (2005) looked at a variety of predictors of social anxiety and depression in middle to late adolescence, including positive and negative friendship qualities. They found that negative interaction in adolescents' best friendships, which was measured as a composite score of conflict, criticism, exclusion, dominance, and pressure, was positively related to both social anxiety and depressive symptoms. In contrast, positive interactions only related to lower levels of social anxiety. Thus, negative friendship interactions had greater explanatory power than positive interactions in terms of individual depressive symptoms. Keefe and Berndt (1995) also reported that negative interaction was related to negative individual outcomes. These researchers defined negative interaction as the combination of conflict and rivalry and looked at its effect on self-esteem. In their sample of seventh and eighth graders, they found that higher levels of negative interactions within participants' three closest friendships were related to decreases in self-reported disruptive behavior in the

classroom and global self-esteem across two time points. High levels of negative interactions have also been linked to higher levels of internalization and externalization (Bierman & McCauley, 1987).

Socially, there is evidence that negative interactions within specific friendships are associated negatively with children's status in the larger peer group. Bierman and McCauley (1987) asked participants to choose three same-grade, same-sex peers they particularly liked and three they particularly disliked. Negative nominations were related to higher levels of self-reported negative interactions in children's friendships, and positive nominations were not significantly related to negative interactions. Children were also given a list of all the children in their class and asked to rate the degree to which they were friends with each child. Higher levels of negative interactions were related to lower frequencies of friendship ratings.

Therefore, empirical evidence demonstrates that negative interactions within friendships are linked with individual characteristics of children and with individual status within the larger peer group. However, links to the family context have not yet been explored. One family characteristic that may be particularly relevant to the negative interactions occurring within children's friendships is friendship facilitation, an intentional intervention by parents in peer interactions and relationships.

#### *Maternal Friendship Facilitation's Association with Negative Interactions in Children's Best Friendships*

The linkage between parents and peers has become a topic of interest in developmental research, in part due to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) influence. The ecological concept of mesosystems, interacting contexts with reciprocal influences on

one another, lends itself to research regarding the intersection of parenting and peer relationships. Most recently, this intersection has been explored as a direct link.

Friendship facilitation is the everyday involvement of parents in children's social lives for the purpose of creating and improving opportunities for social development and represents parental efforts to influence directly children's friendships. As such, it can be considered a parenting practice (Darling & Steinberg, 1993), a specific behavior in which parents engage with the purpose of achieving a socialization goal. In the case of friendship facilitation, this goal would be providing opportunities for children's positive interactions with friends. Parents may utilize a number of distinct strategies as they engage in friendship facilitation. The current study will focus on three specific strategies: talking about and encouraging friendship interactions, meeting other parents, and enabling proximity to peers. Although each of these is expected to be related to negative interactions in children's friendships, the reasons why such associations exist may differ. Talk and encouragement is a parenting behavior that is primarily made up of communicative interactions intended to guide children in the successful negotiation of friendship-related interactions, including the prevention of negative interactions. Meeting other parents is a strategy related to the supervision and monitoring of peer interactions. Mothers who know each other are likely to confer regarding the interactions between their children, which would result in mothers becoming more informed regarding potential peer problems. Enabling proximity allows children to spend greater time with their peers, which provides opportunities for developing social skills that could be utilized to prevent negative interactions.

The concept of friendship facilitation is consistent with the theoretical and empirical work of Ladd, Le Sieur, and Profilet (1993), who proposed that parental

influences on peer relationships were best conceptualized as either indirect or direct. Ladd et al. suggested that parents engage in purposeful strategies intended to directly influence their children's peer relationships (parenting practices), despite the literature's emphasis on indirect parental influences on children's friendships. Ladd et al. organized these intentional parenting strategies into four categories that represent the various roles parents may play in facilitating children's relationships. The first, parent as *designer*, involves efforts to organize and manage children's contexts so as to promote more frequent and more positive peer interactions. Second, parents take the role of *mediator* when they manage specific peer relationships, such as assisting in the initiation of a new friendship. Parents can also act as *supervisors* through monitoring and overseeing children's peer interactions. Finally, parent as *consultant* refers to parental activities of advising and generating conversation about peer interactions and relationships. This theoretical framework was designed with a focus on parents of preschoolers; however, the parental strategies represented in the framework are not exclusive to parents of young children, so this framework is expected to be applicable in middle childhood as well.

Very little research has been conducted on friendship facilitation in middle childhood, but there is a fair amount of research on this topic in early childhood and in adolescence. For instance, Ladd and colleagues (Ladd & Golter, 1988; Ladd, Le Sieur, & Profilet, 1993; Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992) examined the parent-peer link in their research with parents of preschoolers. Ladd and Golter (1988) found wide variability in parents' levels of initiation of peer contacts with preschoolers, ranging from no attempts to initiate peer contacts to parental arrangement of all peer interactions. Findings indicated that preschoolers whose parents actively initiated play opportunities had larger

peer networks, more peer interactions, and for boys, were more likely to be socially accepted in kindergarten. The quality and frequency of mothers' conversations with preschoolers about peers correlates positively with sociometric peer acceptance, and the frequency of these conversations is associated with higher levels of teacher-reported peer competence (Laird, Pettit, Mize, Brown, & Lindsey, 1994). Among preschoolers in a lab setting, more parental supervision of peer interactions is correlated with higher levels of positive peer interaction (Bhavnagri & Parke, 1991). To date, there has been no early childhood research regarding the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in friendships.

Research on adolescent peer relationships has recently adopted the construct of friendship facilitation as well. Much of this research has been focused on the relationship between friendship facilitation and adolescent problem behavior. For instance, friendship facilitation strategies of monitoring (defined in this case as enabling or restricting access to peers) and supporting (providing environments conducive to peer interaction) have been shown to correlate with lower levels of adolescent drug use and delinquency (Mounts, 2001, 2002, 2007); however, the strategy of prohibiting, or restricting, association with a particular peer, is related to higher levels of drug use and delinquent behavior (Mounts 2001, 2002). These findings indicate that parents may utilize different strategies to manage their children's peer relationships depending on their goals and that these strategies may have unique relationships with individual outcomes. This was also demonstrated by Tilton-Weaver and Galambos (2003), who found that the strategy of supporting friendships was associated with higher levels of school engagement and lower levels of deviant friendship, but the strategies of communicating disapproval and information-seeking were related to higher levels of adolescent problem behaviors. The



outcome of interest may have a bearing on the utilization of particular friendship facilitation strategies. The direction of effects in these studies is unknown and it is possible that parents are engaging in these strategies in response to troublesome child behaviors. Still, these strategies represent intentional parental attempts to influence children's friendships, whether it is through prevention or intervention. In general, studies of friendship facilitation rest on the assumption that parents influence peer relationships, and peer relationships influence problem behavior, but the relationship between parental influence and peer interactions has been largely neglected in the literature among all age groups.

Friendship facilitation has rarely been examined in relation to the quality of children's friendships, although there are a few notable exceptions. Vernberg, Beery, Elwell, and Abwender (1993) examined the strategies parents used to facilitate adolescents' friendship development after relocating to a new neighborhood and school. Adolescents and their parents were asked to discuss ways that parents could help adolescents meet their friendship goals. The responses were coded and used to develop a measure of friendship facilitation. Twenty strategies were identified in the final analysis and a factor analysis yielded four factors: meeting other parents, enabling proximity to peers, talking to adolescent, and encouraging activity. Overall, greater use of friendship facilitation strategies was linked with increased intimacy and companionship in adolescents' new friendships.

Of particular relevance to this study, Mounts (2004) found that adolescents who reported their parents engaged in higher levels of consulting, defined as giving peer-related advice and helping with problem-solving, had friendships with lower levels of reported conflict. It is expected that this finding will extend to negative interactions in

friendships in middle childhood. The overall pattern in the friendship facilitation literature is that higher levels of friendship facilitation, including strategies of monitoring, supporting, and consulting, are associated with more positive outcomes and fewer negative outcomes for children and adolescents. This is true of both individual and relational outcomes. Therefore, it is hypothesized that higher levels of maternal friendship facilitation will be linked with lower levels of negative interactions in children's friendships.

*Gender as a Moderator of the Association between Friendship Facilitation and Children's Friendship Interactions*

Generally, research considering gender differences in parental influences has indicated that girls are more responsive to parental efforts than boys. For example, adolescent girls demonstrate greater conformity to parents' wishes and preferences than boys (Berndt, 1979). However, evidence for gender variations related specifically to friendship facilitation has been mixed. Most research on this topic has found no child gender differences regarding the types of friendship facilitation strategies utilized by parents (Mounts, 2002; Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, 2003; Vernberg, Beery, Ewell, & Abwender, 1993). However, other researchers have reported that parents engage in higher frequencies of friendship facilitation with girls than with boys (Vernberg, Beery, Ewell, & Abwender, 1993). Among preschoolers, mothers' involvement in peer interactions was more beneficial for girls than boys in terms of prosocial behavior and social acceptance (Ladd & Hart, 1992). One exception to this trend was Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, and Kupanoff (2001) finding that friendship facilitation strategies utilized by both mothers and fathers were more influential in shaping adolescent boys' peer interactions than girls'. However, the overall trend in the literature suggests a

hypothesis that the relationship between friendship facilitation and negative interactions will be stronger for girls than boys.

*Peer Attachment as a Mediator of Associations between Friendship Facilitation Efforts and Children's Friendship Interactions*

Assuming there is a relation between maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions within best friendships, the next step is to explore the generative mechanism through which this association occurs. One possibility is that maternal friendship facilitation promotes in children a different way of thinking about friends and friendship interactions. It is of interest to consider why it may be that some mothers engage in more friendship facilitation than others. Perhaps mothers who are purposefully involved in attempts to shape their children's peer interactions do so because they value friendships and social connections within their own lives. Such parents may engage in friendship facilitation in an effort to support their children's efforts to establish and maintain social connectedness within their own lives. Children who are exposed to such efforts would be receiving clear messages from mothers that friendships are valuable and important resources, and this may increase their own value for social connectedness. In turn, children who value and feel attached to peers will be less likely to engage in the types of negative friendship interactions that might place such relationships at risk. Thus, children's perceptions of attachment to their friends may represent an explanatory mechanism linking friendship facilitation and interactions within children's best friendships. For instance, attachment representations of peers have been shown to mediate the association between parent-child attachment and interactions with peers among young children (Cassidy, Kirsh, Scolton, & Park, 1996). Of course, this study involved an early childhood sample and did not focus on friendship facilitation but rather

parent-child attachment; however, it is expected that this association will hold true in middle childhood and with friendship facilitation.

There has been little empirical work that has specifically addressed the proposed role of peer attachment as a mediator of the association between friendship facilitation and peer interactions. Other parent constructs, such as parent-child attachment and parental support, have been shown to be associated with peer attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Wilkinson, 2004). In terms of the relation between peer attachment and interactions within friendships, one study indicated that higher levels of peer attachment were linked to higher levels of intimacy within adolescents' best friendships (Marsh, Allen, Ho, Porter, & McFarland, 2006). Also, Zimmerman (2004) found that adolescents' general attachment representations were related to the quality of their specific friendships. Based on this limited empirical evidence, as well as the rationale outlined above, it is expected that children's sense of connection to their peers will be linked with lower levels of negative interactions occurring within their best friendships.

#### *Research Questions and Hypotheses*

The current study considers whether there is a negative association between levels of maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions in children's best friendships, as well as whether such a relationship might be mediated by levels of peer attachment. Specific research questions and hypotheses for the study are as follows.

Research Question 1:

What is the relation between maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions within children's best friendships?

Hypothesis 1:

Maternal friendship facilitation will be associated negatively with negative interactions in children's friendships.

Hypothesis 2:

The negative association between maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions will be stronger for daughters than for sons.

Research Question 2:

Does peer attachment mediate the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in friendships?

Hypothesis 3:

Maternal friendship facilitation will be associated positively with peer attachment.

Hypothesis 4:

Peer attachment will be associated negatively with negative interactions in children's friendships.

Hypothesis 5:

Peer attachment will mediate the association between maternal friendship facilitation and negative interactions in children's friendships.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 347 students who were enrolled in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2003-2004 school year. Students were recruited from nine elementary schools located in a southeastern county in the United States. Sixty-two percent of the children and their mothers identified themselves as White ( $n = 215$ ) and 38% were Black ( $n = 132$ ); 53% were girls ( $n = 185$ ) and 47% were boys ( $n = 162$ ). Sixty-seven percent of mothers were married to the biological fathers of target children, 23% were single mothers, and 11% were living with a nonrelated adult partner. The Hollingshead (1975) four factor index of social status was used to calculate family socioeconomic status. The mean score for the sample was 44 (medium business personnel and minor professionals) and ranged from 15 (unskilled laborers) to 66 (major business persons and professionals).

#### *Measures*

*Identification of friends.* Children and mothers jointly completed the Social Contexts of Friendships Interview (Fletcher et al., 2006) to identify children's friends. Together, mothers and children compiled a list of up to 10 of the child's closest non-sibling and non-adult friends. Participants were then asked to identify the child's best friend from this list. If participants had difficulty identifying a best friend, they were asked to identify the friend they spent the most time with. Of the children who listed at least one friend, only one did not identify a best friend. This study will focus on participants' best friendships.

*Maternal friendship facilitation.* Children completed the child version of the Friendship Facilitation Questionnaire (Vernberg, Beery, Elwell, & Abwender, 1993). Children reported on how frequently their mothers engaged in behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). This measure is comprised of four subscales. The first, Met Other Parents, has four items, such as “Met families of other kids at school,” and yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .64. Enabled Proximity to Peers includes seven items such as “Driven you to a friend’s house.” Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale was .79. The third subscale, Talk to Child, included items such as “Pointed out the qualities you should look for in a friend.” Cronbach’s alpha for this five item subscale was .79. Encouraged Activity Involvement was the fourth subscale with four items such as “Encouraged you to make a team at school,” and a Cronbach’s alpha of .68.

A factor analyses was conducted with all friendship items for the purpose of determining whether existing subscales could be utilized in current analyses. A scree plot yielded by this analysis indicated that the best solution included three factors, not four. Examination of factor loadings and close scrutiny of all items resulted in the removal of three items. Remaining items loaded on the following three factors with loadings of .40 and higher. The first factor, Talk and Encouragement, included six items and was derived from a combination of the original subscales Talking to Adolescent and Encouraging Activity Involvement. It included items such as, “Pointed out the qualities you should look for in friends.” Cronbach’s alpha for this factor was .76. The second factor, Enable Proximity, included five items from the Enabling Proximity to Peers subscale and yielded an alpha of .75. An examples of items on this subscale were “Let you go to the movies with a friend.” The third factor, Meet Other Parents, consisted of five items from the original Meet Other Parents and Encouraged Activity Involvement

subscales. It included items such as “Found ways to meet the parents of other kids” and Cronbach’s alpha was .69. Items loading on these three factors were utilized as the subscales for primary analyses.

*Peer attachment.* The peer subscale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to assess children’s feelings of connection to their friends. This 25-item measure includes subscales of trust, communication, and alienation. The Trust subscale includes 10 items such as “My friends are fairly easy to talk to,” and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .86. The eight-item communication subscale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .84, with items including “I tell my friends about my problems and troubles.” The alienation subscale consisted of seven items such as “I get upset a lot more than my friends know about.” Cronbach’s alpha for the alienation subscale was .63. Children respond to each item by indicating the extent to which they agree with it on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost never or never true*) to 5 (*almost always or always true*). Cronbach’s alpha for the total combined scale was .89.

A factor analysis was conducted with the peer attachment measure. A scree plot indicated that three factors would be best; however, one of the three factors was comprised almost entirely of items that loaded above .40 on all three factors with a difference of less than .20 between the primary and secondary factors. Items that did not clearly load on a single factor were deleted and the factor analysis was conducted again. This second factor analysis yielded two distinct factors. These factors closely conformed to the original subscales of trust and communication, minus a few items. The communication factor included seven of the eight of the original communication items and had an alpha of .81. The trust factor included five items from the original 10-item



trust subscale, with an alpha of .80. However, these factors were multicollinear ( $r = .64$ ,  $p = .00$ ). In addition, numerous items loading on the trust factor seemed to tap attitudes regarding both trust and communication. For instance, “My friends are fairly easy to talk to” and “My friends listen to what I have to say.” For these two reasons, it was decided to use the full peer attachment measure rather than the factors in further analyses.

*Negative interactions.* Each child completed the Conflict/Betrayal and the Conflict Resolution subscales of the Friendship Quality Measure (Parker & Asher, 1993) for each of the friends they listed in the Social Contexts of Friendships Interview. This study utilized only the responses related to each child’s identified best friend. For each item, the participants rated their friendships on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*really true*). The seven-item conflict/betrayal subscale included items such as “My friend and I argue a lot” and “I can count on my friend to keep promises” (reverse coded) with a Cronbach’s alpha of .68. The conflict resolution subscale was reverse-coded to reflect poor conflict resolution skills. The three-item subscale included the item “My friend and I make up easily when we fight.” Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale was .36. The combined conflict/betrayal and conflict resolution subscales had a Cronbach’s alpha of .64. Additional analyses revealed that dropping one item from the conflict resolution subscale, “My friend and I talk about how to get over being mad at each other,” increased the reliability to .71. Preliminary analysis showed that this measure was highly skewed. Recommended transformations were performed, but all failed to bring the measure to a normal distribution. Accordingly, we dichotomized the variable such that scores below 1.25 represent little to no negative interactions and scores above 1.25 represent moderate to high levels of negative interactions.

### *Procedures*

Interviews were conducted in the family's home or a location of their choosing and were completed by two research assistants. For each interview, at least one research assistant was female and at least one was from the same ethnic group as the participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. Mothers gave consent for their own and their child's participation; children gave verbal assent for participation. Questionnaires were read aloud to mothers when needed, and were read aloud to all children. Mothers were compensated \$35 for their participation and children were given a small gift.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### *Bivariate Correlations among Model Variables*

Bivariate correlations among all variables are presented in Table 2. Correlations are presented separately for boys and girls. The three friendship facilitation subscales had significant positive intercorrelations for both boys and girls. Mothers with higher levels of one type of facilitation also had higher levels of the other types of facilitation. Peer attachment was also significantly correlated with each of the friendship facilitation subscales, such that reports of higher levels of maternal facilitation were related to reports of higher levels of peer attachment. This was also the case for both girls and boys. Correlations between the dependent variable, negative interactions in friendships, and the other model variables differed for boys and girls. For girls, negative interactions were negatively correlated with each of the facilitation subscales; however, for boys, negative interactions were unassociated with facilitation subscales. Finally, negative interactions and peer attachment were uncorrelated for girls, but negatively correlated for boys.

#### *The Association between Friendship Facilitation and Negative Interactions, Moderated by Gender*

The first focal analysis considered the relation between friendship facilitation and negative interactions. The dependent variable, negative interactions, was binary, so logistic regressions were conducted. Due to the high intercorrelations of the three friendship facilitation subscales, separate regressions were conducted for each

subscale, resulting in a series of three regressions. In the first step of the regressions, the demographic variables of child/mother race, child gender, and SES were entered as controls. None of the demographic variables were significant. Gender was retained in the analyses due to its hypothesized role as a moderator; race and SES were dropped from further analyses.

In the second step of each logistic regression, one of the three subscales of maternal friendship facilitation was entered as a predictor of negative interactions in children's friendships. Only meeting other parents had a negative association with negative interactions ( $B = -.30$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Enabling proximity to peers was not associated with negative interactions ( $B = -.19$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .11$ ) and neither was talk/encouragement ( $B = -.23$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .07$ ).

In the final step of the regressions, interaction terms of gender x relevant friendship facilitation subscale were entered. The interaction term of gender x talk and encouragement was significant ( $B = .70$ ,  $SE = .27$ ,  $p = .01$ ), as was the term of gender x meeting other parents ( $B = .68$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Therefore, the relations between these two friendship facilitation subscales and negative interactions were moderated by gender. The gender x enabling proximity to peers interaction term was not significant ( $B = .31$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .21$ ), indicating that gender did not moderate the association between enabling proximity to peers and negative interactions.

Given that gender was a moderator of the associations between negative interactions and the facilitation subscales of talk and encouragement and meeting other parents, the data were split by gender and logistic regressions were conducted separately for boys versus girls, each with negative interactions as the dependent variable. In the first regression, talk and encouragement was entered as the independent

Table 1

*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 347)*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Talk and Encouragement					
2. Proximity to Peers	.40**				
3. Meeting Other Parents	.42**	.53**			
4. Peer Attachment	.28**	.24**	.36**		
5. Negative Interactions	-.10	-.09	-.12*	-.15**	
<i>M</i>	3.61	3.27	3.86	4.04	.54
<i>SD</i>	.85	.90	.79	.55	.50
Range	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	2.16 – 4.96	0 - 1

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

Table 2

*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics by Gender*

		1	2	3	4	5
1. Talk and Encouragement			.40**	.49**	.25**	-.22**
2. Proximity to Peers		.40**		.53**	.19**	-.15*
3. Meeting Other Parents		.33**	.52**		.32**	-.23**
4. Peer Attachment		.31**	.27**	.38**		-.12
5. Negative Interactions		.06	-.02	.02	-.16*	
<i>Girls</i>	<i>M</i>	3.67	3.36	3.95	4.13	.51
	<i>SD</i>	.89	.89	.79	.53	.50
	Range	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	2.16 – 4.96	0 - 1
<i>Boys</i>	<i>M</i>	3.56	3.17	3.77	3.94	.58
	<i>SD</i>	.80	.92	.79	.54	.50
	Range	1 - 5	1 - 5	1 - 5	2.36 - 4.92	0 - 1

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

Note: Girls above the diagonal ( $N = 185$ ), boys below the diagonal ( $N = 162$ )

variable and was significant for girls ( $B = -.54$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p = .00$ ) but not for boys ( $B = .16$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p = .43$ ). For girls, a one unit increase in talking and encouraging decreased the odds of having a best friendship with moderate to high negative interactions by a factor of .58. The second logistic regression, with meeting other parents as the independent variable, was also significant for girls ( $B = -.64$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $p = .00$ ) and not for boys ( $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p = .82$ ). Girls' odds of having moderate to high levels of negative interactions in their friendships were .53 greater for every one unit decrease in meeting other parents.

#### *Peer Attachment as a Mediator between Friendship Facilitation and Negative Interactions for Girls*

To test for mediation, Baron and Kenny (1986) have stated that there are four criteria that must be met. The first is to show that the independent variable is significantly related to the dependent variable. Second, the independent variable must be significantly related to the mediator variable. Third, the mediator variable must be significantly related to the dependent variable. Finally, the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable must be significantly reduced when the mediator and the independent variable are simultaneously used to predict the dependent variable.

Analyses were conducted to examine peer attachment as a potential mediator of the association between the friendship facilitation subscale of talk/encouragement and negative interactions for girls. It was established in prior analyses that talk and encouragement was significantly associated with negative interactions. A linear regression analysis indicated that talk and encouragement was positively associated with peer attachment ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p = .00$ ). A logistic regression with peer attachment as a

predictor and negative interactions as the dependent variable was not significant ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = .30$ ,  $p = .76$ ), which meant that the third of Baron and Kenny's mediation requirements (a significant association between the mediator and dependent variable) was not met for testing peer attachment as a potential mediator of the association between talk/encouragement and negative interactions.

Analyses were conducted to examine peer attachment as a potential mediator of the association between meeting other parents and negative interactions for girls. In previous analyses, it was concluded that meeting other parents was significantly associated with negative interactions. A positive relationship between meeting other parents and peer attachment ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p = .00$ ) was found by conducting a linear regression. However, as with the previous analysis, the relation between peer attachment and negative interactions did not satisfy the requirements for mediation ( $B = -.20$ ,  $SE = .31$ ,  $p = .82$ ).



Table 3

*Hierarchical Logistic Regressions Predicting Negative Interactions*

	B	SE	<i>p</i>	e <sup>b</sup>
Step 1				
Gender	.29	.22	.19	1.33
Step 2				
Talk/Encouragement	-.23	.13	.07	.79
Meet Other Parents	-.30	.14	.03	.74
Enable Proximity to Peers	-.19	.12	.11	.82
Step 3				
Talk/Encouragement * Gender	.70	.27	.01	2.01
Meet Other Parents * Gender	.68	.29	.02	1.98
Enable Proximity to Peers * Gender	.31	.25	.21	1.36

*Note: Variables in steps 2 and 3 were estimated in three separate logistic regressions according to friendship facilitation type.*

Table 4

*Logistic Regressions Predicting Negative Interactions by Gender*

		B	SE	p	e <sup>b</sup>
<hr/>					
Girls					
	Talk/Encouragement	-.54	.18	.00	.58
	Meet Other Parents	-.64	.21	.00	.53
<hr/>					
Boys					
	Talk/Encouragement	.16	.20	.43	1.17
	Meet Other Parents	.05	.20	.82	1.05
<hr/>					

*Note: Individual friendship facilitation variables were estimated in separate logistic regressions.*

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Results for this study indicated that the associations between two dimensions of friendship facilitation (talk and encouragement and efforts to meet other parents) were moderated by child gender. Higher levels of mothers' talk and encouragement of friend interactions and mothers' efforts to meet other parents both were related to lower levels of negative interactions within daughters' friendships. Peer attachment was not a mediator of the relationship between these dimensions of friendship facilitation and negative interactions in friendships. Enabling proximity to peers was not associated with negative interactions for girls or boys.

#### *Gender Differences in the Association between Friendship Facilitation and Negative Friendship Interactions*

Gender was an important variable to consider within focal analyses for this study in that maternal efforts to influence children's friendships were related to lower levels of negative interactions in best friendships only with daughters, not sons. Theoretically, this finding is consistent with the PPCT model, which predicts that associations may differ by person characteristics, such as gender. However, the PPCT model does not suggest a specific direction for such moderation effects. The empirical literature regarding gender as a potential moderator of the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in children's friendships is mixed. However, research examining gender differences with other types of parental influence generally finds that girls are more responsive to parental socialization efforts than are boys (Berndt, 1979), which led to the hypothesis that the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions would be stronger for girls than boys. This may be especially true in the area of

friendship facilitation because girls are more relationally-oriented than are boys (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Wigfield, Eccles, Maclver, Reuman, & Midgely, 1991) and thus may be particularly sensitive to parental efforts to influence their relationships.

Also, it may be that girls' friendship interactions were more strongly associated with friendship facilitation than were boys' friendship interactions because the facilitation came exclusively from mothers. The decision to focus on maternal friendship facilitation was based on previous research indicating that mothers are more involved in managing children's peer interactions than are fathers (Bhavnagri & Parke, 1991; Updegraff et al., 2001). It has also been shown that mothers spend more time with their adolescent daughters and their daughters' friends than they do with their sons and sons' friends, which is a type of friendship facilitation (Updegraff et al., 2001). However, such findings are indicative of mean differences in levels of friendship management and involvement for mothers versus fathers and for boys versus girls and do not necessarily suggest that the *effectiveness* of such efforts (indicative of associations between variables) will differ for boys versus girls. Instead, it may be that friendship facilitation efforts are better received or more effectively expressed within same-sex parent-child dyads. Such an explanation for the findings reported here is supported by research indicating that parents may have a greater influence on their same-sex children (Perry & Bussey, 1979). For instance, Eisenberg et al. (1991) found that children's emotional responses were more closely correlated with their same-sex parents' sympathy and emotional restrictiveness toward them than their opposite-sex parents'. Also, Bussey and Bandura (1984) demonstrated that when children were presented with contradictions in the behaviors of same-sex role models and opposite-sex role models, children were more likely to model the behavior of the same-sex role models.

### *The Three Dimensions of Friendship Facilitation*

Two of the three dimensions of friendship facilitation examined were significantly linked with negative interactions. The first dimension, the maternal strategy of talking about and encouraging friendships, was negatively associated with negative interactions within best friendships among girls. This dimension of friendship facilitation encompasses conversations and advising regarding peer interactions and behavior with peers. That it was related to lower levels of negative interactions with peers was consistent with predictions because it is more likely than the other dimensions of friendship facilitation to directly address the quality and appropriateness of interactions in children's friendships. In addition, the practice of talking and encouraging is a relational interaction itself and thus may represent an opportunity to enhance children's ability to communicate effectively and positively, a skill that can be utilized to limit negative interactions. Mothers may also be more likely to engage in talking and encouraging with children who have already attained a higher level of communication skills. If this is the case, the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in friendships may be related to children's preexisting communication and social skills, which may also be related to negative interactions.

Meeting other parents was also associated negatively with negative interactions. There are potentially several explanations for this finding. It may be that when mothers are connected to the parents of their children's friends, children are motivated to make greater efforts to keep their interactions positive because they know that their mothers are more likely to learn about their behavior. Alternatively, mothers may make more efforts to meet the parents of their children's friends as an intervention tactic when their children have previously demonstrated high levels of negative interactions with their

friends. In this case, the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions would represent the effectiveness of negative interactions in shaping friendship facilitation in children's best friendships. It is also possible that mothers are more inclined to interact with each other when their children's friendships involve few negative interactions. Perhaps friendships that contain high levels of negative interactions discourage mothers from meeting other parents because of a fear of conflict with those parents or because mothers don't feel that these are friendships that should be encouraged by increasing interaction with the families of these friends.

The friendship facilitation strategy of enabling proximity to peers was not related to negative interactions within friendships, which is consistent with previous research regarding conflict in friendships. The primary goal of enabling proximity to peers is to increase the frequency of peer interactions, and greater time spent with friends does not necessarily reduce levels of conflict within friendships. In fact, conflict is most likely to occur in children's close friendships, which are defined in part by spending substantial amounts of time together (Hartup, French, Laursen, Johnston, & Ogawa, 1993). Among young children, spending more time together is related to higher levels of negative interactions (Green, 1933; Hinde, Titmus, Easton, & Tamplin, 1985). Greater time together may foster more positive interactions, but it also allows for more opportunities to engage in negative interactions. Therefore, assisting children in spending more time with their friends may not be related to the level of negative interactions within their friendships.

*Peer Attachment as a Mediator of the Association between Friendship Facilitation and Negative Friendship Interactions*

Based on theory and previous research, it was hypothesized that the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions would be mediated by peer attachment; however, this hypothesis was not confirmed in the current study. Attachment theory suggests that attachment representations, or relational views, will shape individuals' relationships and relational interactions (Furman & Simon, 2006). However, it may be that this is not necessarily the case with negative interactions. Or it may be that attachment to friends in general does not relate to the negative interactions within specific friendships.

Attachment theorists differ in their perspectives regarding the feasibility of attachment relationships between friends with some taking the position that it is not possible to be attached to a group (Ainsworth, 1989). The measure of peer attachment utilized for this study, the IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), could be viewed as a measurement of attachment to the peer group in that it is measuring attachment to friends in general, but it could also be conceptualized as an aggregate of attachments to multiple, specific friends. Furman (2001) found that working models across multiple friendships were highly correlated and that it was logical to aggregate these specific attachment representations into a general working model of friendship. Although this precedent suggests that an aggregate attachment measure is reasonable, it may be that it was not a good fit in this study. Perhaps a different measure of attachment would successfully mediate the relationship between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in best friendships - such as a measure of attachment to the best friend specifically or a more global measure of the internal working model.

There are other child characteristics that should be considered as potential mediators of the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions. The most likely of these is social competence. A primary goal of friendship facilitation is improving the peer interactions of children and one of the most direct ways to do this is through improving children's social competence. Ladd and Hart (1992) found that parents' initiation of play opportunities for their preschoolers led to greater competence in children's ability to initiate their own play dates. This suggests that not only did parents' friendship facilitation increase the number of peer interactions for their children, but also increased social competence related to managing their own peer relationships. Increased social competence is important in peer relationships because children's social behaviors are a primary predictor of their success with friends and peers (Ladd, 2005).

#### *Support for Theoretical Foundations*

Three theoretical perspectives were utilized to derive the hypotheses for this study, but not all were supported by the results. Peer attachment failed to mediate the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions in friendships, demonstrating that attachment theory was not a good fit in this case. The mesosystem construct of the PPCT model was confirmed in the association between the friendship facilitation process in the family microsystem and the process of negative interactions in the peer microsystem. The proposed role of person characteristics as an influence in shaping proximal processes was partially substantiated in the results of this study. The person characteristic of gender did moderate the association between friendship facilitation and negative interactions, but the person characteristic of peer attachment did not mediate the association. Finally, social cognitive theory suggests that maternal friendship facilitation models social skills and value for friendship for children, which



shapes children's interactions with friends by influencing child agency and self-efficacy. The results of this study support this social cognitive process of parental influence.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Although the current study has demonstrated that dimensions of friendship facilitation are linked with lower levels of negative interactions within girls' friendships, it is not without its limitations. One of these involves the lack of generalizability characterizing the sample. The sample included only individuals identifying themselves as Black or White, and thus findings cannot be generalized to mother-child dyads of other ethnicities. The sample was obtained entirely from a single county in the southeastern portion of the United States, which means that findings cannot be generalized to other geographic regions. Children in the sample were all in the fifth grade, and so results cannot be generalized to younger children or to adolescents. Data were collected from mothers and not fathers, so findings cannot be generalized to fathers and this study can only be thought of in terms of mothers' friendship facilitation efforts. This limitation may be especially problematic because some previous research suggests that fathers are more influential than mothers in some aspects of children's peer interactions. For example, fathers' support is more predictive of children's social initiative than is mothers' support (Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005).

The current study involves cross-sectional analysis of data only, which represents a problem in terms of ability to determine the direction of effects. As has been noted in previous studies (Mounts, 2004), friendship facilitation efforts may be utilized as a strategy of prevention and an opportunity to assist in children's individual social development or they may be utilized as an intervention approach in response to problem behaviors demonstrated by children. However, regardless of mothers' reasons for

initiating friendship facilitation, it is still utilized with the intention of shaping children's friendships. At this time, friendship facilitation has been examined exclusively as an independent variable. However, longitudinal research on friendship facilitation should consider the precursors of friendship facilitation in addition to its outcomes.

To date, research has been sufficiently negligent of negative aspects of children's friendships as to draw attention to this deficit (Berndt, 2004). The current study fills this problematic gap in the children's friendship literature by advancing the understanding of negative aspects of friendship through examination of parental influence on the negative interactions within best friendships. The current study also considers friendship facilitation as comprised of three related but conceptually distinct strategies and analyzed the individual relationships these dimensions had with negative interactions, thereby adding depth to our understanding of friendship facilitation as a set of strategies rather than a single behavior. The finding that mothers have a direct influence on their daughters' friendship interactions through strategies of talking about and encouraging peer relationships and meeting other parents suggests that mothers can successfully engage in these specific parenting strategies with the intention of decreasing negative interactions within their daughter's friendships.

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## APPENDIX A

### FRIENDSHIP FACILITATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Parents sometimes do things that can make it easier or harder for children to get together with their friends. Tell me how often you mother has done each of these things.

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Once in awhile
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Fairly often
- 5 = Always

#### Talk and Encouragement

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 13. | Pointed out the qualities I should look for in friends.              |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 15. | Spoke to me about how to behave with boys/girls.                     |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 12. | Talked to me about life and friends.                                 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 19. | Encourage me to make more of an effort to get together with friends. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 18. | Encouraged me when school sent notices of activities.                |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 17. | Encouraged me to make a team at school.                              |

#### Met Other Parents

- |           |    |   |
|-----------|----|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1. | Found ways to meet the parents of other kids so we kids could get to know each other. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3. | Got to know the parents of a friend I want to have sleepover.                         |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 4. | Met families of other kids at school.   |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 8. | Drove me to a friend's house.   |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 9. | Drove me to parties.  |

#### Enabled Proximity to Peers

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 6.  | Let me go to the movies.   |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 7.  | Told me the family was going to do something so I could invite a friend. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. | Paid for my way to the mall and the movies.                              |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 10. | Let me invite a couple of friends to go swimming.                        |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 5.  | Let me invite friends to sleep over                                      |

## APPENDIX B

### INVENTORY OF PARENT AND PEER ATTACHMENT – PEER VERSION

Each of the following statements asks about your feelings about your relationship with your friends. Tell me how true each statement is for you now.

- 1 = Almost never or never true
- 2 = Often true
- 3 = Sometimes true
- 4 = Seldom true
- 5 = Almost always or always true

#### Trust

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 6.  | My friends understand me.  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 8.  | My friends accept me as I am.  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 12. | My friends listen to what I have to say.                             |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 13. | I feel my friends are good friends.                                  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 14. | My friends are fairly easy to talk to.                               |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 15. | When I am angry about something my friends try to be understanding.  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 19. | I can count on my friends when I need to get something off my chest. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 20. | I trust my friends.  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 21. | My friends respect my feelings.                                      |

#### Communication

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1.  | I like to get my friend's point of view on things I'm concerned about. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 2.  | My friends can tell when I'm upset about something.                    |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3.  | When we discuss things, my friends care about my point of view.        |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 5.  | I wish I had different friends. (reverse-coded)                        |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 7.  | My friends encourage me to talk about my difficulties.                 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 16. | My friends help me to understand myself better.                        |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 17. | My friends care about how I am feeling.                                |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 24. | I can tell my friends about my problems and troubles.                  |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 25. | If my friends know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.    |

#### Alienation (reverse-coded)

- |           |     |   |
|-----------|-----|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 4.  | Talking over my problems with friends makes me feel ashamed or foolish. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 9.  | I feel the need to be in touch with my friends more often.              |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 10. | My friends don't understand what I'm going through these days.          |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. | I feel alone or apart when I am with my friends.                        |

- 1 2 3 4 5    18.    I feel angry with my friends.  
1 2 3 4 5    22.    I get upset a lot more than my friends know about.  
1 2 3 4 5    23.    It seems as if my friends are irritated with me for no reason.

## APPENDIX C

### FRIENDSHIP QUALITY QUESTIONNAIRE

For each friend that you named, please rate your friendship according to the way it is now and not how you want it to be.

- 1 = Not at all true
- 2 = A little true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Pretty true
- 5 = Really true

My friend ...

#### Conflict and Betrayal

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3.  | Get mad a lot.                                     |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 9.  | Sometimes says mean things about me to other kids. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 20. | Argue a lot.                                       |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 21. | Can count on to keep promises.                     |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 27. | Fight a lot.                                       |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 37. | Doesn't listen to me.                              |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 31. | Bug each other a lot.                              |

#### Conflict Resolution (reverse-coded)

- |           |     |   |
|-----------|-----|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1.  | Make up easily when we have a fight.                |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. | Talk about how to get over being mad at each other. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 35. | Get over our arguments really quickly.              |