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GOSSIP AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN FEMALES: DO THEY HAVE
POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the
University of Ottawa as partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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Dedicated to:

My parents, who have always been the wind beneath my wings

My husband, who has helped make so many dreams come true

and

My children, who have taught me what is truly important.

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Abstract

In the past, studies of aggression focussed almost exclusively on physical aggression; findings revealed that males were more aggressive than females. Recently, interest in female aggression has been rekindled due to the suggestion by Crick and others that females aggress primarily by attacking personal relationships, (i.e.,gossiping about others, excluding them from play groups, manipulating friendships); this form of aggression has been termed "relational aggression". Numerous studies have examined the relationship of relational aggression to negative outcomes such as peer rejection, loneliness and depression. However, relational aggression may fulfil a normative function in female social development by serving to create and maintain the intimate dyads that are the hallmark of girls' social interactions. In the present research, the relationship of gossip and exclusion to friendship intimacy and social competence was examined. Eighty-seven girls, 39 drawn from grades 4-5 and 48 drawn from grade 8 participated in the study. Engaging in negative gossip and exclusion were predictive of lower peer acceptance, which partially supported the hypothesis that these are dysfunctional behaviours. However, support for the positive role of these behaviours was obtained within the realm of friendship. Exclusion of peers from play was predictive of friendship intimacy in younger subjects, and interview data further supported the idea that these behaviours may help create and maintain intimate dyadic friendships: girls reported that gossip is most likely to occur in the presence of a best friend, and that the motivation behind exclusion is often preservation of a best friendship. Positive gossip, included with negative gossip in previous research, emerged as an important predictor of peer acceptance and friendship intimacy.

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GOSSIP AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN FEMALES:

DO THEY HAVE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ?

Introduction

There is a vast body of research literature exploring the link between peer relations in childhood and later adjustment. A key focus within this research has been children's aggressive behaviour, which has been consistently revealed as a risk factor for both concurrent and later maladjustment. Aggression with peers during the childhood years has been found to predict school dropout, delinquency/criminality, psychopathology and other negative outcomes (Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987; Roff & Wirt, 1984). The negative impact of such outcomes on society is great; thus, it is important that we continue in our attempts to understand the development, correlates, and risks associated with aggressive behaviour in children.

Studies defining aggression as physical harm inflicted upon another person have generally revealed that aggressive behaviour is more frequent among males. Meta-analytic reviews have revealed that, with regards to physical and, to a lesser extent, verbal aggression, there are definite gender differences: boys are more aggressive than girls, especially in the preschool and elementary school years (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980; Hyde, 1986). This finding seems to be robust cross-culturally: higher levels of aggression have been consistently observed among males, compared to females, in American, English, Swiss, African, Indian, Italian, and Mexican subjects (Parke & Slaby, 1995; Tomada & Schneider, 1997). Physically aggressive episodes are also more frequently observed with boy-boy dyads than with pairs of girls or boy-girl pairs (Smith & Green, 1974). It has been argued that society

may be at least partly responsible for these differences: aggressive behaviour is at least more tolerated, but perhaps even encouraged in boys, while girls are socialized to avoid such acts, and thus feel more guilt and anxiety regarding the expression of aggression (Parke & Slaby, 1995).

Sex Differences in Types of Aggression: Physical vs. Relational Aggression

Despite the overwhelming evidence that females tend to be the less aggressive gender, interest in the phenomenon of female aggression has recently intensified, in part because many studies have ignored the issue of aggression in females (Olson, 1992; Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Dodge, 1983). It has been suggested by researchers such as Crick (1995, 1996, 1997) and Bjorqvist and colleagues (1992, 1994, 1998) that the aggression research does not capture the full range of harmful behaviours that children direct toward their peers, and that research findings which indicate that females are less aggressive than males are misleading because of the limitations in the definition of aggression employed. Furthermore, these researchers have argued that, although boys engage in overt (physical and verbal) forms of aggression more frequently, this does not necessarily mean that they are more aggressive overall than girls. These researchers have proposed that there is a distinct form of aggression, termed *relational* or *indirect aggression*, that is more prevalent in females than in males. This type of aggressive behaviour achieves the goal of inflicting harm on others by "attacking" personal relationships through exclusion from play, threatening withdrawal of friendship, gossiping, and hostile rumour spreading. Since girls' social interactions take place primarily in small, intimate groups (Hartup, 1992; Benenson, 1993), this type of aggression may be more salient and significant for them than are

the more physical forms of aggression. Lagertspetz et al. (1988) have described the phenomenon as follows:

"Close friendships increase opportunities for indirect [relational] aggression. For instance, a friend can be harmed simply by being abandoned or by the other being 'unfaithful' by association with someone else. When friendships are close and other peers are aware of them, such manipulations are more forceful sanctions against those the perpetrator wishes to punish than they are likely to be in a looser context" (p.412)

The first notion of relational aggression can be traced to a study performed by Feshbach (1969). He suggested that, if aggression were conceived of as behaviour motivated by the goal of inflicting pain, then indirect approaches to achieving this goal (e.g., social exclusion, rejection) could be as painful as more direct means (physical harm), and thus considered to be aggressive. His research revealed that first grade girls were more likely than boys to respond to an unfamiliar peer with social exclusion.

More than two decades later, researchers have begun to investigate further the nature of this phenomenon. Nicki Crick and her colleagues have carried out much of the research aimed at establishing relational aggression as a construct distinct from physical aggression. A recent meta-analysis based on published and unpublished data evaluated the association between relational and physical aggression. Correlations between relational and physical aggression ranged from .16 (observational data) to .62 (peer reports), which are not beyond the magnitude expected for two constructs that are hypothesized to be different forms of the same general behaviour (Crick et al., 1999). Factor analyses also consistently identified relational aggression as a factor distinct from physical and verbal aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Casas

& Mosher, 1997). Other support for the meaningfulness of the relational aggression construct came from the fact that elementary school-age children associated relationally aggressive behaviours with anger and intent to harm, both integral characteristics of aggression (Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996). In interviews with pre-adolescents carried out by Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist and Peltonen (1988), girls were found to prefer relational means of aggression, and reported longer durations of anger than boys. In addition, girls regarded their friendships as having greater emotional significance than boys did.

Evidence for the Validity, Reliability, and Significance of the Relational Aggression Construct

It has been repeatedly reported that relational aggression is more common in girls, while physical aggression is more common in boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, Huesmann, & Fraczek, 1994; Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, Landau, Fraczek & Caprara, 1998). In a study of 491 third to sixth graders, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that 17% of girls and two percent of boys were relationally aggressive (scores on the relational aggression scale of the Crick peer nomination of aggression instrument greater than one standard deviation above the mean) but not physically aggressive, while 16% of boys and 0.4% of girls were physically aggressive (scoring one standard deviation or more above the mean on the overt aggression subscale) but not relationally aggressive. Nine percent of boys and four percent of girls were identified as both physically and relationally aggressive. Children who engaged in

these types of behaviours at one point in time tended to persist in behaving in this manner, with relatively high stability estimates obtained over short (one month, $r=.80-.86$) and long (six month, $r=.56-.68$) follow-up periods (Crick, 1996).

The frequency of relational aggression changes with the age of the child. Relational aggression has been identified as early as preschool (Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997); however, it seems to become more important after the age of eight, peaking at around the age of 11 (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). By adolescence, when dating relationships emerge, it has been reported to be less prevalent (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992).

Relational aggression has been found to be linked to concurrently-measured social and adjustment difficulties. Boys and girls (third to sixth grade) who are described as relationally aggressive in peer reports are more likely to be of controversial or rejected sociometric status, to perceive themselves as being more disliked by peers, and to score higher on measures of depression (Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In girls, but not boys, relational aggression is associated with more self and peer reports of loneliness and isolation from peers (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995(ages 9-12); Henington et al., 1998(ages 7-8); Verlaan, 1999 (ages 11-15)), and is predictive of peer rejection six months later even after controlling for overt aggression (Crick, 1996, ages 9-12). To date, however, little solid evidence exists of adjustment difficulties in the long run. Examination of data drawn from the Carolina Longitudinal Study (Xie, 1998) failed to indicate any links between social aggression in childhood (grades 4 and 7) and problematic outcomes such as early school dropout, criminal arrests, or teen parenthood in either Grade 12 or young adulthood (ages 20

and 24).

Werner and Crick (1999), arguing that past longitudinal studies had focussed on outcome variables more typical of males than females, investigated the correlates of relational aggression in an adult sample. They included measures of two adjustment problems found in previous research to be particularly important for females: Borderline Personality Disorder and disordered eating patterns. For both males and females, relational aggression was associated with higher levels of maladjustment (peer rejection, antisocial and borderline personality features). Relational aggression was also associated with bulimic symptoms in women. The results of this study must be interpreted with caution, however, as the amount of variance uniquely accounted for by relational aggression was small (3-12%), and other factors that might have contributed to prediction, such as physical aggression, were not measured. Another problem with this study involves the potential limitations to the generalizability of the findings, since the fraternity and sorority members who participated in the study were a self-selected group who may not be representative of the general young adult population. Because of the exclusiveness of the selection process of fraternities and sororities, it is possible that relationally aggressive young adults are overrepresented in fraternity/sorority groups. The majority of the outcome variables in this study were also based on peer ratings, and it is possible that peer evaluations obtained in the social context of fraternities and sororities are different from those obtained in other social groups.

Within the realm of relational aggression, the issue of whether gender differences exist and the importance of these differences appear to be of particular

interest. Girls seem to be more relationally aggressive than boys and also seem to find these behaviours more distressing than do boys: Crick (1995) presented nine to twelve-year-old children with 10 vignettes of ambiguous provocation situations (5 physical aggression, 5 relational aggression). Compared to the boys, the girls reported that they would experience significantly more distress in the relational aggression scenarios. Similarly, Galen & Underwood (1997) found that, although girls (grades four, seven and ten) viewed vignettes of relational and physical aggression as being equally hurtful, their ratings of the hurtfulness of the relational aggression scenarios were significantly higher than the boys' ratings (their ratings of the hurtfulness of physical aggression were not significantly higher than boys' ratings). Finally, a recent study by Crick (1997) revealed that relationally aggressive boys (aged nine to twelve) were significantly more maladjusted (teacher-rated internalizing and externalizing difficulty scores) than relationally aggressive girls and nonaggressive children, suggesting that relational aggression may be a more significant risk factor for boys, possibly because it is a less normative behaviour for boys.

The Friendships of Relationally Aggressive Children

It has been suggested that the problems of aggressive children within the peer group may be alleviated if these children have one or more positive dyadic friendship relationships (Parker & Asher, 1993). Grotzinger & Crick (1996) investigated whether this was the case with relationally aggressive children. They found that relationally aggressive girls (grades four and five) were just as likely as nonaggressive girls to have at least one reciprocal friendship (75% of aggressive, 79% of nonaggressive). In

contrast, relationally aggressive boys were more likely than nonaggressive boys to be friendless (36% of aggressive, 23% of nonaggressive). The quality of the friendships of relationally aggressive girls also seemed to be surprisingly positive overall: they reported higher levels of intimacy and help and guidance in their friendships than did nonaggressive girls. Furthermore, relationally aggressive children were just as likely to have a non-relationally aggressive friend (52%) as they were to have a relationally aggressive friend, and no consistent differences were found in the sociometric status of friends of relationally aggressive children and nonaggressive children (Crick et al., 1999). Thus, it seems that the friendships of relationally aggressive girls are at least not less frequent, more negative, or more dysfunctional. It is not yet known how this may affect their adjustment. Relationally aggressive girls did report higher levels of exclusivity (e.g., "gets jealous when friend plays with someone else", "would rather play alone with friend and not with other kids too") and more reported relational aggression both within the friendship and against others outside the friendship. However, research by Berndt (1999) has demonstrated that friendships with more negative interactions are not necessarily perceived as less intimate or less stable than those with fewer negative interactions.

Unresolved Issues in Research on Relational Aggression

Some researchers have begun to look at who the victims of relationally aggressive children are. It seems that rejected children are the most common victims of relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Putallaz et al, 1999: grade four subjects). Being a victim of relational aggression also was predictive of high scores on teacher and self report measures of loneliness, depression, social anxiety, and

social avoidance, above and beyond that predicted by being a victim of overt aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Hawker, 1998; Verlaan, 1999; Putallaz et al, 1999). To date, no one has investigated the dynamics of the victim-aggressor relationship. Thus, it is not possible to determine whether characteristics of the victim of relational aggression, such as appearance, social behaviour or abilities, play a role in his or her victim status. It is also not clear whether maladjustment precedes or results from victimization.

Findings from prior research suggest that relational aggression is a distinct form of aggression which is more prevalent in female populations and possibly associated with various negative outcomes. However, there is still a lot we do not know about this construct. The majority of the data are taken from self-report questionnaires and peer-report sociometric measures, where children simply nominate peers as engaging in the acts described, or indicate whether they themselves have behaved in these ways. These data have been useful in that they have provided us with information regarding the existence and frequency of occurrence of relationally aggressive behaviours in children's social interactions, and have allowed for preliminary investigations of the correlates of these behaviours. However, the data resulting from the use of these types of measures do not provide any insight into the antecedents or consequences of relationally aggressive episodes, the reasons why children may act in these ways, or whether the behaviours actually do occur as they are described in forced-choice questionnaires or hypothetical vignettes.

Current research projects are beginning to look more deeply into the

relational aggression phenomenon, in an attempt to gain a richer understanding of these behaviours. Observational designs are now being employed, in addition to laboratory-based studies. In these studies, researchers have used video and audio recording of both naturalistic (Craig & Pepler, in press; Putallaz, Kupersmidt, Grimes & DeNero, 1999) and confederate-induced (Galen & Underwood, 1997) relational aggression episodes to obtain a sense of how these behaviours occur in children's actual social interactions. Such information is useful to validate self and peer reports. Interviews have also begun to be utilized (Xie, 1998; Paquette & Underwood, 1999) in order to give children the opportunity to describe episodes of aggression and victimization that they have actually experienced. With an interview component, children can be asked directly about the antecedents of these episodes, the results of the behaviour, and what their feelings and thoughts are when these episodes occur, providing a rich first-hand, relevant perspective not possible when questionnaires with more constrained response alternatives are utilized. Some of these more recent projects have yielded results inconsistent with those reported in earlier studies. For example, many have been unable to find significant gender differences in rates of relational aggression (Rys & Bear, 1997 (grade 3 & 6); Henington, Hughes et al., 1997 (grade 2 & 3), Craig, 1998 (grades 5 - 8); Osterman et al., 1994 (grade 8); Bartlett & Bergevin, 1999) and others have failed to find that the children who engage in relationally aggressive behaviours are less accepted in the peer group (Xie, 1998 (grade 4 & 7); Henington et al., 1997 (grade 2 & 3)). The discrepancies may be at least partially due to differences in methodology: more recent studies, which have sampled representatively from the whole population, have failed to obtain the results

that the early studies, which tended to use extreme group designs, achieved.

However, other methodological differences in subject age and type of measures employed hamper our ability to compare results directly. Nevertheless, the nature of the relational aggression construct is not as simple as it once seemed.

Is Relational Aggression Always a Bad Thing?

The picture of relational aggression painted by Crick and others is a negative one: these researchers portray relational aggression as damaging and dysfunctional, and predictive of maladjustment. However, some of their findings do not fit well within such a model. For instance, the fact that relationally aggressive girls are just as likely to have positive friendships as are non-aggressive children, when combined with evidence that children with friends are more socially competent than those without friends (McGuire & Weisz, 1982, grade 5-6) and that relational aggression and social intelligence are positively correlated (Kaukianen et al., 1993), suggests that relational aggression is *not necessarily* dysfunctional. The approach used by the majority of researchers so far, including Crick's and Bjorkqvist's groups, has combined a large number of behaviours, including gossip, exclusion, and manipulation, into one global construct of relational aggression. If one looks at the research regarding the different behaviours individually, however, there is some evidence that some of these relationally aggressive behaviours may play a positive role in normal social development, at least for girls. Some of this research is outlined below.

Gossip

Gossiping, a key element in the construct of relational aggression, has been

studied extensively. A large body of research supports the role of gossiping behaviour, defined as "evaluative talk about a person not present" (Eder & Enke, 1991, p.494), as an important element in social and identity development. It has been suggested that gossip, involving the sharing of personal information in an intimate manner, aids in the formation of exclusive friendship groupings and "functions crucially in establishing intimacy" (Ben-Zeev, 1994, p.15; Taylor, 1994). It is also thought to strengthen interpersonal bonds and to help people to learn about others while understanding their differences, thus aiding in the development of empathy (Ben-Zeev, 1994; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Collins, 1994). Some research has supported the idea that gossip is a form of social comparison, providing information which allows people to evaluate their own actions and achievements and leads to better self-understanding (Suls, 1977; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Collins, 1994). Finally, it has been suggested that gossip highlights ambiguous areas of behaviour about which group members have little consensus, allowing them to learn which behaviours are acceptable within the group (Suls, 1977; Eder & Enke, 1991; Fine, 1977).

Gossiping is a high rate behaviour in middle childhood and adolescence, especially in females (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Ben-Zeev, 1994; Eder & Enke, 1991; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). Research by Fine (1977) has shown that gossiping is not only a common behaviour among young adolescents but is seen as normative in that they admit to it and are not ashamed of it. It may also be a key behaviour in the initiation of friendships: studies have shown that, in children who become friends, gossip in initial interactions is reciprocated and leads to greater amity; in children

who do not become friends, attempts to engage in gossip end abruptly or go unreciprocated (Parker, 1986). There is additional evidence for the positive role that gossip plays in social development. A study by Jaeger et al.(1994) revealed that young adults who engaged in moderate levels of gossip had more close friends than those who engaged in low levels; low gossipers reported significantly fewer friends and were less often identified as a close friend by others.

Gottman and Mettetal (1986) have developed a theory that includes gossip as one of the significant social processes of childhood and adolescence. They suggest that in middle childhood, from eight to twelve years of age, all social processes are organized around the goal of being included in the larger same-sex peer group. Gossip, especially negative-evaluation gossip involving the exchange of negative information about a third party, is thought to function in aiding the child to discover the norms of the group and thus learn how to act to avoid being rejected. Most gossip at this stage involves negative evaluation and serves to build solidarity between friends by putting "us against them". According to Gottman and Mettetal, "the centrality of gossip is characteristic of the conversations of friends during middle childhood" (p.206). However, by adolescence, they argue, the goal of social interaction shifts to self-exploration. Gossip, still a key social process, becomes more psychological, and incorporates a great deal of discussion of the self in the service of this new goal. Positive gossip, involving the exchange of positive information about a third party, and informational gossip, involving the exchange of neutral information about a third party, become much more prevalent at this stage, although negative gossip is still present. Overall, talking about others is characterized as a form of

social comparison that allows adolescents to develop a sense of themselves in relation to those around them (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). In summary then, gossiping, a behaviour defined in the relational aggression research as negative and dysfunctional, is supported as a functional behaviour with positive consequences by a great deal of theoretical and empirical research. It appears to be a highly prevalent behaviour among children and adolescents and may be involved in the development of empathy and self-understanding, the establishment of intimacy in social interactions, and the clarification of group norms.

Intensiveness in Girls' Social Interaction

The research literature on children's social interaction has consistently revealed that, while boys interact in large groups, girls interact in small groups of two or three (Hartup, 1992; Benenson, 1993). Within these groups, boys' interactions revolve around shared activities, while girls' interactions involve more intimate activities such as self-disclosure and gossip (Jones & Dembo, 1989; Buhrmester, 1990). There seem to be developmental changes in that, in younger age groups, girls' relationships are not as intimate, involving less self-disclosure and gossip (Berndt & Hanna, 1995; Jones & Dembo, 1989). Around the age of ten to twelve females' dyadic relationships become more intimate and stable (Hallinan, 1980).

Past research has shown that the intimate social groupings of females are important in the development of socio-emotional and interpersonal skills (Savin-Williams, 1980). Self-disclosure to friends is thought to help children gain a better understanding of themselves, others, and social relations in general (Townsend, McCracken & Wilton, 1988). Sharabany (1994) found that friendship intimacy was

positively associated with both popularity ($r=.26$) and role-taking ability ($r=.21$).

Similarly, Burhmester (1990) found that intimacy in friendship was related to adjustment and interpersonal competence in both adolescents and, to a lesser extent, pre-adolescents. In adolescents, both self- and friend-rated friendship intimacy were moderately to strongly correlated with self- and friend-rated interpersonal competence, defined in terms of skill at self-disclosure, support, conflict management, negative assertion (ability to tell friends they have been neglectful or inconsiderate), and initiation of friendships ($r=.45-.68$).

How do these exclusive, intimate groupings come about? Leaper (1994) has proposed that exclusive friendships are related to higher status in female peer relations. He observed that girls' social interactions often involve shifts in friendship coalitions, as peers attempt to gain acceptance from some, while excluding others. Social rejection is thought to be a necessary aspect of the negotiation of these realignments. Xie (1998) has also proposed that the very nature of relationally aggressive behaviour suggests that the aggressor must hold a position of status within the peer group: acts such as gossiping, rumour spreading and exclusion cannot be carried out successfully without the active participation of others, which implies that the instigating child must have some power within the group. Recent research has supported this notion: the likelihood of engaging in relationally aggressive behaviours was found to increase with social network centrality, that is, more central children were more socially (relationally) aggressive, while children at the periphery of the social network engaged in fewer socially aggressive acts (Xie, 1998). Xie (1998) went further in proposing that this network centrality may be responsible for the lack

of findings demonstrating long-term maladjustment in relationally aggressive children:

"the effective use of social aggression requires the individual to be connected with the mainstream social networks, which, in most cases, support conventional beliefs and sanctions. Such constraints afforded by the peer social system may keep the individual from following deviant trajectories leading to subsequent maladjustment." (p. 102)

It seems intuitively reasonable that, in order to maintain an exclusive, intimate dyad, one would have to exclude others. However, exclusion of others from play groups has been defined as a relationally aggressive behaviour. Could it be that exclusion behaviour has a more functional component than that postulated by Crick's view of relational aggression, in that it is necessary for the maintenance of the intimate dyads that have been shown to be important in female social development? The current study attempts to answer this question.

The Present Study

Rationale

There were several goals for the present study. The initial purpose was to provide a more fine-grained analysis of the relational aggression construct. Previous research had relied mainly on global peer and self-report data which indicated only whether relational aggression had occurred. Researchers had not talked more extensively to the children who reported these occurrences in order to determine the exact nature of the relationally aggressive incidents. In this study, children who reported witnessing, instigating, or being victimized by relational aggression were interviewed to determine exactly what behaviours occurred and why they believed

these acts had been carried out, in order to obtain a more detailed picture of relational aggression from the child's perspective.

The second objective of this research was to contrast functional and dysfunctional models of relational aggression. Both Crick and Bjorkqvist have described all behaviours defined as relationally aggressive as dysfunctional in nature. However, the evidence that relational aggression is positively correlated with social intelligence and the fact that relationally aggressive girls are just as likely as nonaggressive girls to have positive friendships suggest that there may be a functional component to these acts. It was hypothesized in the present study that the relationally aggressive behaviours of exclusion and gossip are important for the development and maintenance of the small, intimate social groupings characteristic of the female social structure, and thus constitute a normal, as opposed to deviant, part of female social development. More specifically, it was hypothesized that the act of gossip was a normative act of social comparison: when girls talk about others, they are comparing the actions and characteristics of others with those of their own and those of their friends. Social comparison is a key element in the development of social understanding, which reinforces knowledge of others and social norms. Thus, girls who engage in gossip more frequently should be more socially competent. In addition, based on the literature which suggests that gossip is an intimate act, it was proposed that gossip should function to create and maintain friendship intimacy. Thus, we predicted that children who engaged in gossip more frequently would score higher on measures of friendship intimacy.

Research on girls' social interactions has indicated that they take place mainly

in dyads, and that experience in these dyadic relations is important for the development of intimate relationship skills. Exclusion of other children from play groups seems to be important for creating and maintaining these dyads. Thus, we hypothesized that children who engage in exclusion more frequently should score higher on measures of friendship intimacy and social competence. They should also spend more time in dyadic (as opposed to group or solitary) interactions. Finally, having a reciprocal best friendship should be related to higher levels of exclusion.

The alternative to the functional model is the dysfunctional model of relational aggression. This model suggests that gossip and exclusion are maladaptive forms of aggression, and consequently that these dysfunctional behaviours should be predictive of negative outcomes such as peer rejection. Thus, if the dysfunctional model is true, the results should indicate that children who engage in higher levels of gossip and/or exclusion would be less socially competent and have less intimate friendships than children who do not engage in these behaviours.

METHOD

Participants

Consent forms were distributed to 102 female students in eight classrooms, four in junior elementary grades and four in senior elementary grades. Included in the junior elementary group were three grade four classes and one grade five class. The consent rate was 85%. Eighty-seven girls participated in the initial questionnaire phase of the study, 39 from grade four or five (mean age 9.3 years) and 48 from grade eight (mean age 12.8 years). Three months after the questionnaire phase, sixty-nine girls participated in individual interviews. Power analysis had suggested that a

sample of 70 girls, 35 in grade four and 35 in grade eight, would be sufficient to detect group differences existing within the population in a study with two independent variables (gossip and exclusion), assuming a medium effect size, and power level of .80 (Cohen, 1992).

The decision to use female subjects only was based on the hypothesis that gossip and exclusion are normative behaviours for girls' social development but not for boys' social development. Although it might have been interesting to look at boys as well, it was decided that, for the purposes of this exploratory investigation, it would be most practical to focus only on girls. The choice of age groups was based on the research of Bjorkqvist and colleagues, which had indicated developmental changes in the frequency of relationally aggressive behaviours. These authors reported that relationally aggressive behaviours begin to appear around the age of eight, peak around the age of eleven, and then decline steadily during the adolescent years (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992; Bjorkqvist & Niemala, 1992). Subjects in this study were drawn from the age groups on either side of the "peak" in order to examine whether there were age differences in the correlates of gossip and exclusion.

Procedure

In Phase I of the study, both groups of girls (junior and senior elementary) completed the measures of relational aggression, peer acceptance, best friendship, friendship quality, friendship intimacy, and affective perspective-taking. The measures were administered in a group format.

Girls who reported on the self-report measures that they had witnessed, instigated, or been victimized by relational aggression progressed to Phase II of the study. It was expected that the majority of children from Phase I would progress to this second stage, as it was assumed that, although relational aggressors and victims of relational aggression may comprise only a minority of children (21% are aggressors and 17% are victims according to Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, 1996), most children would report having at least witnessed these acts. This was indeed found to be the case: only three children did not report exposure to these behaviours. The other 14 children who did not participate in the interviews were either absent or had moved by the time the interviews were carried out.

The girls participated in a structured interview lasting approximately 15 minutes about three months after the questionnaires were administered. The interview (see Appendix D) asked them to describe examples of relational aggression and the circumstances under which it occurred (e.g. when, why, with whom, etc.). The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet room within the schools. Children were informed that their answers would be kept confidential.

The interviews were coded according to a system developed by the author (see Appendix E).

Measures

Physical aggression, relational aggression, gossip, and exclusion. Peer reports, rather than self-reports, of aggressive behaviour were chosen due to evidence suggesting that peer nominations provide more accurate information that is less subject to social desirability and other biases related to self-reports (Osterman et al.,

1994; Werner & Crick, 1999). Crick and colleagues developed a peer nomination instrument to measure physical, verbal, and relational aggression (Crick, 1995)(see Appendix A). This measure includes three subscales, two of which assess aggressive behaviour. The Overt Aggression and Relational Aggression subscales each consist of five items. The Overt Aggression items are: "kids who hit, kick, or punch other kids at school", "kids who push and shove other kids around", "kids who tell others that they will beat them up unless the kids do what they say", "kids who say mean things to other kids to insult them or put them down" and "kids who call others mean names". The Relational Aggression items are: "kids who, when mad, get even by keeping a person from being in their group of friends", " kids who tell friends they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say", "kids who, when mad at a person, ignore them or stop talking to them", "kids who try to keep certain people from being in their group during activity time or play time" and "kids who try to make other people not like a certain person by spreading rumours about them or talking behind their backs". The third subscale, Prosocial Behaviour, consists of four items which serve as positively toned filler ("kids who you think would make good leaders if you were playing game", "kids who do nice things for other kids", kids who help out others when they need it", "kids who try to cheer up other kids when they are upset or sad about something").

Both of the aggression subscales have been shown to be highly reliable in past research, with Cronbach alpha values ranging from .82 to .89 for the Relational Aggression subscale and from .94 to .97 for the Overt Aggression subscale for three samples: test-retest reliability over a four-week interval was .82 and .90 for the

Relational Aggression and Overt Aggression subscales, respectively (Crick, 1996). Factor analysis of the peer nomination measure has also confirmed the existence of two separate factors for relational and overt aggression, both with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and high factor loadings (ranging from .73 to .91), and insubstantial cross loadings (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). The correlation between Overt and Relational Aggression scales has been shown to be moderate ($r=.54$ to $.57$) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Research by Crick has demonstrated that higher relational aggression scores on the peer nomination measure are associated with higher levels of peer rejection, loneliness (girls only), and depression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Higher rates of relational and overt aggression have been found to be significantly positively related to peer rejection ($r=.20$ -.39), and negatively related to peer acceptance (girls only) ($r=-.23$ -.29) at six-month follow up (Crick, 1996). These results suggest that the scale has adequate predictive validity.

During administration of the instrument, children were provided with a class roster and asked to nominate up to three classmates who best fit the behavioural descriptions provided for each of the items on the measure. The number of nominations a child received for each subscale comprised her total subscale score, which was then divided by the number of raters to make the scores equivalent for different classes.

The Overt Aggression subscale for the present study consisted of four of the five items from the original Crick measure ("kids who hit, kick, or punch other kids at school", "kids who say mean things to other kids to insult them or put them down", "kids who push and shove other kids around", and "kids who tell others that they will

beat them up unless the kids do what they say"); the item "kids who call others mean names" from the original measure was omitted in this study, as it was seen to be too similar to the item added for negative gossip "kids who say mean things about other people when they are not there". The Relational Aggression subscale in this study consisted of five items. Four of the five original relational aggression items from the Crick measure were retained ("kids who, when they are mad at a person, get even by keeping that person from being in their group of friends", "kids who ignore people or stop talking to them", "kids who tell their friends that they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they say" and "kids who try to keep certain people from being in their group when it is time to play or do an activity"), but the fifth item, "kids who try to make other kids not like a certain person by spreading rumours about them or talking behind their backs" was omitted, and replaced by the negative gossip item ("kids who say mean things about other people when they are not there").

For the purposes of this study, children received positive and negative gossip scores based on Gottman and Mettetal's definition of gossip: "any discussion of a third party". The negative gossip score consisted of the number of nominations the child received for the item "kids who say mean things about other people when they are not there", divided by the number of raters. The positive gossip score was comprised of the number of nominations the child received on the item "kids who say nice things about other people when they are not there", divided by the number of raters. The above items replaced the item "kids who try to make other kids not like a certain person by spreading rumours about them or talking behind their backs" in the present study. This revision allowed us to focus strictly on gossip, as opposed to

rumour spreading (which requires an evaluation of the truth of the negative gossip), and to obtain more information on the exact nature of the gossip, that is, whether it involved a positive or negative evaluation.

The exclusion score for the present study consisted of the number of nominations the child received for the three items "kids who when they are mad at a person, get even by trying to keep people from being in their group of friends", "kids who ignore people or stop talking to them", and "kids who try to keep certain people from being in their group when it's time to play or do an activity". In the original Crick measure, the item dealing with ignoring others included a reference to a negative emotional state (e.g. "kids who, when mad at a person, ignore the person or stop talking to them"). This reference was omitted from the item in the present study as it was believed that ignoring may not always occur as the result of anger. The number of nominations was divided by the number of raters in the child's classroom in order to standardize the score.

Peer acceptance. In the present study, some hypotheses involved predictions about the social competence of the children being studied; however, no acceptable, comprehensive definition of social competence has yet been established consensually (Eisenberg & Harris, 1984). Thus, for the purposes of the present investigation, two major elements of social competence were examined: peer acceptance and affective perspective-taking ability. Peer acceptance was measured using Parker & Asher's rating scale. Affective perspective-taking ability was measured using the most widely accepted measure of this construct for use with children and adolescents (Rubin, 1978; McGuire & Weisz, 1982).

The rating scale of peer acceptance, designed to assess children's overall acceptance by peers, was suggested by Parker & Asher (1993) as a superior approach to the traditional "name the three people you like to play with most/ like to play with least" nominations approach because it provides complete information about how much each child likes every other child in the group and does not confound acceptance with friendship. This latter issue is especially important in a study investigating friendship as well as peer acceptance. Children were provided with rosters of all classmates who had permission to participate in the study and were asked to indicate on a 1 to 5 rating scale how much they liked to play with each classmate. The score for a child's level of acceptance was the average rating received from all classmates (Parker & Asher, 1993).

Test-retest reliability for the rating measure is high: the correlation was .94 for grade sevens and .95 for grade nine students after four weeks, and .90 for grade sevens and .88 for grade nine students after five months (Kalfus & Berler, 1985). The rating scale has been found to be moderately ($r=.32-.59$) correlated with peer nomination instruments which ask children which three classmates they would like to play and work with (Kalfus & Berler, 1985). The predictive validity of the scale has been supported by findings indicating that ratings of acceptance obtained using this measure are negatively correlated with loneliness ($r=-.39$), and that high-accepted and average-accepted children are twice as likely as low-accepted children to have a very best friend (Parker & Asher, 1993).

Best Friendship Assessment. Children were asked to nominate their "best friend" from a list of the names of all other children participating in the study.

Normally, children's choices are then examined to identify children who have reciprocally nominated each other, and children are scored as having a best friend if a classmate whom they designate as a best friend in turn designates them. Reciprocal friendships in the classroom were identified in this study. However, if children nominated a person as a best friend who was not among those in the class whose parents had given consent for participation in the study, information about this friendship was treated as missing data. This strategy avoided reaching the erroneous conclusion that a girl was friendless when in fact she had very satisfying friendships outside the classroom or with peers whose parents did not consent for them to participate in the study (Schneider, Wiener and Murphy, 1994). This may be particularly important for females, since girls report more non-school best friends than do boys (Ray, Cohen & Secrist, 1995).

The best friends measure has been found to have good test-retest reliability: Oden & Asher (1977) found that best friend nominations taken six weeks apart were highly correlated ($r=.69$, $p < .01$). The validity of the measure is supported by high correlations ($r=.62-.63$, $p < .01$) obtained between the best friend measure and the ratings measure of peer acceptance (Oden & Asher, 1977).

Friendship Quality. A friendship satisfaction measure, proposed by Parker & Asher (1993), requires the child to answer two questions for each of the friendships she nominates: 1) How is this friendship going? and 2) How happy are you with this friendship? Children indicate their responses along a continuum. At the low end is a drawing of a frowning, unhappy face, and at the high end, a smiling, happy face. There are fifteen points along the continuum, and the child is asked to circle one. The

score for each item consists of the number which was circled, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction. For the present study scores on the two items were summed to produce a total friendship satisfaction score.

The Intimate Friendship Scale (Sharabany, 1974), an overall assessment of the degree of intimacy in a friendship, consists of 32 items, with four items for each of eight subscales: 1) frankness and spontaneity; 2) sensitivity and knowing; 3) attachment to friend; 4) exclusiveness; 5) giving and sharing; 6) imposition; 7) common activities; and 8) trust and loyalty. The exclusiveness element was considered to be too close to exclusion (which was measured separately here), and thus the four items related to exclusivity were omitted. In addition, the measure used in the present study included only 20 items of the remaining 28 (with the exclusiveness subscale omitted, there were two items in the trust and loyalty subscale and three items in the six remaining subscales). This shortened version has been used in previous research (Sharabany, 1994) and was utilized here for two reasons: 1) because only total friendship intimacy scores, and not subscale scores were going to be used in analyses; and 2) because of time constraints.

Children rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement provided about the person they nominated as their "best friend" using a six-point scale where higher scores indicated higher agreement. For each of the seven subscales, the mean score for all items was tallied. These seven mean scores were then averaged to compute a total intimacy score.

An initial study by Sharabany (1974) estimated internal consistency for each of the eight dimensions using alpha coefficients. The coefficients ranged from .72 to

.77. Jones & Dembo (1989) reported similar alpha coefficients (.77-.89). Evidence for the construct validity of the scale comes from findings that ratings of intimacy with the child's best friend were significantly higher among children whose friendship choice was reciprocated than among those whose choice was not reciprocated (Sharabany, 1994; Sharabany, Gershoni & Hofman, 1981), and that there was a significant difference between intimacy ratings for the nominated "best friend" and for another person nominated as "known well" (Sharabany, 1994).

Affective Perspective-Taking. The measure of affective perspective-taking ability used in the present study was based on one developed by Rothenberg (1970). Children were presented with four brief, tape-recorded dialogues (see Appendix C) which depicted adult (husband and wife) exchanges in which one character changed from an initially positive or neutral affect to a negative affect (happiness, sadness, anger, or distress/anxiety). Adult interactions were chosen to decrease the likelihood of a child appearing to be socially sensitive when in fact she was merely attributing characteristics to others that were just descriptions of herself. The conversations were designed to be within the range of possible, but not necessarily frequently heard interactions (Rothenberg, 1970).

After listening to the dialogues, children were asked two questions: 1) "How did the main character feel?" (feelings response) and 2) "Why did he/she feel that way?" (motives response). In the original study by Rothenberg, the children's responses were obtained in individual interviews, and any number of responses were allowed. In the present study, the children responded in writing, and only one response was elicited. Due to the limited number of responses obtained in this study,

Rothenberg's scoring system was simplified somewhat. For the feelings response, children were given a score of two if they correctly identified a change in feelings as well as the specific feelings involved, a score of one was given if the child accurately labelled one of the actor's feelings, a score of zero was given if feelings were not mentioned, and a score of minus one was given if the child incorrectly identified the feelings (Rothenberg's original scoring system for each feelings response ranged from two to minus two). The distinction between a score of minus one or minus two for an incorrect response was unclear in Rothenberg's scoring system, thus, all incorrect responses were given a score of minus one. For the motives responses, reasons that were not stated in the story but could be logically inferred from the context were given a two, an answer that involved a simple but accurate repetition from the story was given a score of one, and a score of minus one was given for any misinterpretations, additions and substitutions that changed the essential meaning of the story (Rothenberg's original scoring system for each motives response ranged from three to minus three). Scores of minus two and minus three were not used in the present study due to a lack of clarity in Rothenberg's scoring description with regard to what types of responses qualified for these scores. Feelings response and motives response scores were summed across scenarios to create a total affective perspective-taking score.

Rothenberg (1970) reported that inter-rater reliability for the affective perspective-taking measure was .91. Intercorrelations among social sensitivity scores (created by summing feelings and motives scores) for the four tape-recorded vignettes ranged from .28 to .47 (all significant at $p < .01$ or $.001$): Rothenberg

concluded that the correlations were high enough to suggest that all four vignettes were measuring similar (if not identical) abilities. Total scores obtained on this measure were correlated with peer, self, and teacher nominations for various aspects of interpersonal competence, including leadership, sensitivity and friendliness, and the correlations were stronger for eight-year-olds than for ten-year-olds (Rothenberg, 1970).

A study by Rubin (1978) provided moderate convergent and discriminant validity for the Rothenberg measure. Total scores on the Rothenberg scale were significantly correlated with scores on two other perspective-taking measures: the Miller, Kessel, & Flavell (1970) measure of recursive thought ($r=.20$, $p<.01$), and the Glucksberg & Krauss (1967) referential communication task ($r=.25$, $p<.01$). Some support for the discriminant validity of the scale comes from the fact that scores on the Rothenberg task were not significantly correlated with IQ scores generated using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test ($r=.15$).

Gossip and Exclusion Interview This structured interview was designed for this study for the purpose of obtaining more detailed, subjective information from the girls' perspective about how gossip and exclusion occur in their social worlds. It consisted of fourteen questions and took about 15 minutes per child to administer (see Appendix D). The interview was divided into two sections: one dealing with gossip, and one dealing with exclusion. In each section, the child was first asked to describe a time when they or their peers had engaged in the behaviour described. For exclusion, they were also asked to describe a time when they themselves had been excluded. The purpose of these questions was to obtain detailed descriptions of how

these behaviours occurred in the natural social environment. The remainder of the interview consisted of a variety of structured questions about gossip and exclusion, including the children's views as to why these events occurred, the group composition during these episodes (dyads vs. groups, best friends vs. acquaintances), and names and descriptions of the children who were the targets of these behaviours. These questions were designed to provide first-hand insight into the dynamics of relational aggression episodes.

The interviews were coded according to a system developed by the author (see Appendix E). Categories of responses were developed, including things said about others, reasons for gossiping, reasons for excluding, and approaches to exclusion, and the frequencies of these responses were recorded. On questions six, seven and fourteen (see Appendix D), if children reported that a specific girl was more often the target of gossip or exclusion, or gossiped more often than others, they were asked to name that girl. Number of nominations received were recorded and converted to z scores. Girls were considered to be victims or gossipers if their standardized score fell more than one standard deviation above the mean.

RESULTS

Psychometric Properties of the Measures

Since many of the scales used in the present study were adapted for specific purposes, their internal consistency and inter-rater reliability were examined.

Internal Consistency of Instruments.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated for the total score derived from the shortened version of the Sharabany Intimate Friendship Scale.

The estimate of internal consistency for the total intimacy score was high (.86 for younger subjects, .81 for older subjects).

Internal consistency was also examined for the aggression subscales of the modified Crick peer nomination measures of overt and relational aggression. Cronbach alphas were .87 for the Overt Aggression scale and .92 for the Relational Aggression scale. Overall, the internal consistency of these scales was similar to that reported by Crick for the original measure. Internal consistency of the exclusion score, which incorporated a subset of three items from the Relational Aggression subscale, was also examined, as it was a scale that had not been used in previous research. Cronbach alpha for this new scale was .87.

Inter-rater Reliability. The scoring of the Rothenberg affective perspective-taking measure involved an assessment of the quality of children's responses with regard to the motives they assign for particular emotions. As this assessment is somewhat subjective, inter-rater reliability was calculated for this measure. Two raters were trained in the scoring of the measure, and independently scored all subjects' responses. The scores obtained were then compared, and Spearman rank order correlations were calculated. The correlation was high (.95) and similar to that reported by Rothenberg (.91).

The gossip and exclusion interview and its respective coding system were developed by the author for the purposes of this study. As it was a new measure, it was decided that the inter-rater reliability for the coding would be assessed. A subset of the interviews (approximately 20%) were coded by two raters trained in the coding system. As the coding system was categorical in nature, inter-rater reliability was

assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960). Inter-rater reliability was moderate to high, with Kappas ranging from .55 to .85, with a mean of .71.

Means and Standard Deviations of Measures as a Function of Age¹

Means and standard deviations were calculated for all measures separately for the junior and senior elementary age groups. Table 1 presents these values.

The two age groups were compared to evaluate developmental differences on variables employed in this study. ANOVAs revealed that the groups were not significantly different on nomination scores for negative gossip, positive gossip, exclusion, relational aggression or physical aggression; however, they did differ on other variables. Peer acceptance ($F(1,85)=4.80, p<.05$) and perspective-taking ability ($F(1,85)=35.96, p<.001$) were higher overall in older girls, but friendship satisfaction ($F(1,85)=6.396, p<.01$) and friendship intimacy ($F(1,85)=8.06, p<.01$) were lower among older children.

Potential and actual ranges of scores obtained for the variables employed in this study are presented in Figures 1 through 9. The distributions are presented separately by age group due to significant differences in mean scores on some measures. Examination of these distributions reveals that, with the exception of friendship satisfaction, a true range of scores was obtained for all measures for both age groups, thus making less likely the possibility that ceiling or floor effects could have affected results. The range of scores for friendship satisfaction was badly truncated, as most children rated their friendship at the highest level of satisfaction (a score of 30); thus, the utility of the Friendship Satisfaction measure in this sample is questionable, and this measure was not used in regression analyses. The distributions

of other variables (overt aggression, friendship intimacy) were skewed in a prosocial direction; however, transformation of scores did not affect results¹. It is unlikely that the current sample is particularly prosocial; rather, it is predicted that distributions of overt aggression and friendship intimacy scores would be skewed in any sample of girls.

Intercorrelations Among Variables

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated among the primary measures separately for each age group (See Table 2). The magnitude of the correlations did not differ significantly for the two age groups (to control for the number of comparisons being made, a Bonferroni-corrected level of significance of .001 was used). In prior research, relational aggression was examined as a general construct. This study was the first to examine gossip and exclusion as separate constructs, rather than merely as elements included in the general relational aggression score, and was the first to compare positive gossip to negative gossip. Moderate negative intercorrelations were found between positive gossip and negative gossip. In addition, negative gossip and exclusion were found to be very highly and positively correlated in both age groups.

Relational aggression and overt aggression subscales were significantly correlated with peer acceptance in the junior elementary group, but only overt aggression was related to peer acceptance for the senior elementary school group. Negative gossip, positive gossip, and exclusion were all significantly correlated with peer acceptance in the junior elementary school group; however, only negative gossip and positive gossip were significantly correlated with peer acceptance in the

senior group. Differences in the magnitude of intercorrelations for the two age groups did not reach significance when a Bonferroni-corrected level of significance (.001) was used; however, using standard levels of significance, negative gossip and exclusion were more highly correlated with peer acceptance in younger than in older subjects.

Friendship intimacy was significantly correlated with both peer acceptance and friendship satisfaction in the older age group but not in the younger age group. These results suggest that the shortened version of the Intimate Friendship Scale was a valid indicator of friendship intimacy. Friendship intimacy was not significantly correlated with perspective-taking ability in either age group. Somewhat surprisingly, overt aggression was positively correlated with perspective-taking ability for older subjects.

In individual interviews, children nominated classmates who were most often the targets of gossip and most often the targets of exclusion. The same twenty children (23% of the sample) were named as victims of both types of behaviour. The children were also asked to name classmates who gossiped more than others. Twenty-three individuals (26% of the sample) were nominated as "gossipers", i.e. they were perceived to gossip more than other peers in the classroom. Intercorrelations between standardized victim and gossiper nomination scores and scores derived from questionnaire data were calculated separately for younger and older age groups (see Table 3). None of these intercorrelations were found to be significantly different in magnitude for the two age groups once a Bonferroni-corrected level of significance of .003 was applied. In both age groups children

nominated more often in interviews as gossipers were significantly more likely to be reported on questionnaires as engaging in negative gossip; moreover, they were also more likely to be nominated as excluding their peers. Nominations as a "gossiper" were not significantly correlated with positive gossip scores, but were significantly correlated with higher scores on physical aggression. A significant positive correlation was found in older subjects between interview nominations for gossiping and for victimization ($r=.47, p<.01$), suggesting that, in this age group, those who gossip are in many cases also gossiped about. This relationship was not significant for younger children.

Interview Data:

As indicated above, comparisons of intercorrelations between the variables as a function of age group revealed no significant differences; consequently, junior and senior elementary school groups were combined for analyses of interview data.

The Social Context of and Motives for Gossip and Exclusion Episodes

The children reported overwhelmingly that both gossip and exclusion took place significantly more often in groups rather than dyads. For gossip, 77% of children reported that it took place in groups of three or more while only 23% reported that it was more common in dyads ($\chi^2=20.43, p<.001$). For exclusion, 90% of participants reported that episodes took place in groups, while 10% said that it occurred more often in dyads ($\chi^2=49.99, p<.001$). However, they also reported that both types of behaviour were more likely to occur when people were with their best friends than when their best friend was not present, but especially gossip (Gossip with best friends:94%, $\chi^2=52.94, p<.001$). When significance levels were corrected for

multiple comparisons, the chi square for exclusion approached , but did not meet, the required $p < .005$ level of significance (Exclusion with best friends: 59%, $\chi^2 = 7.48$, $p < .01$). Significantly more children (61%) reported that they had excluded someone for fear that the person would "take away" their best friend than reported that they had not excluded a person for this reason ($\chi^2 = 35.18$, $p < .001$).

Descriptions of Gossip and Exclusion Episodes

The gossip themes that the girls reported they discuss, including multiple responses given by a single individual, are presented in Figure 10. The majority of responses indicated that the behaviour of others (how they acted, things they did) was the main topic of gossip. Clothing and appearance were also popular topics. With regard to exclusion, the main "techniques" cited for leaving a person out of the group (see Figure 11) included simply telling them they could not join, walking or running away, ignoring the person when they did attempt to join or insulting them. Whispering about the person or exchanging "looks" in their presence were less frequently mentioned methods.

In order to determine whether all reasons for gossiping or methods of exclusion were equally probable, chi square analyses were carried out. At the time of the interviews, the girls were instructed to give as many responses to the questions as they saw fit; however, only first responses were analysed in order to meet the criterion of independent observations. Categories of responses were collapsed based on similarity of content and/or prior research findings in order to generate expected cell frequencies greater than five.

Gossip content categories were reduced to two general categories: 1) personal characteristics, including clothing, appearance, and IQ; and 2) interpersonal characteristics, including attitudes and behaviour. Chi square analyses revealed that interpersonal characteristics were the topic of gossip significantly more often than personal characteristics ($\chi^2=26.44$, $p<.001$).

Exclusion "techniques" were also reduced to two categories: nonconfrontative strategies, including deliberate ignoring, running away, and whispering, and confrontative approaches, including telling people you don't want them around, giving evil looks, and insulting people. Confrontative strategies were reported to be used significantly more often than nonconfrontative strategies ($\chi^2=20.10$, $p<.001$)².

Reasons for Gossiping and Excluding Others

When multiple responses from each informant were included, children reported three primary reasons why children engaged in gossip (question 2): dislike of the person, anger at the person, and jealousy (see Figure 12). When all the reasons for exclusion were examined, the most popular reason was disliking the person (see Figure 13).

In order to determine whether different reasons for gossip and exclusion were reported equally often, chi square analyses were once again conducted using first responses only and collapsed categories. The reasons for engaging in gossip were collapsed into two categories: reasons involving negative affect toward the victim (jealousy, dislike and anger) and reasons involving personal gain for the gossiper (for fun, to be cool, and to make others dislike the victim). Reasons involving negative

affect toward the victim were given significantly more often than reasons involving personal gain for the gossiper ($\chi^2=30.27$, $p<.001$).

The reasons girls reported for excluding others were collapsed into two categories: 1) negative affect towards the person excluded (dislike, anger, jealousy, and "to be mean"; and 2) reasons aimed at maintaining the group (to conform, because the person was not "cool", and because there were too many in the group). Chi square analyses revealed that reasons involving negative affect toward the victim, especially dislike, were reported significantly more often for excluding someone from the group than reasons related to group maintenance strategies ($\chi^2=51.61$, $p<.001$).

Characteristics of Victims

Almost all subjects (86%) said that there were specific children who were more often targets of exclusion behaviour (question 14). A chi square analysis revealed that significantly more girls reported that a *specific* girl was targeted for exclusion (86%), as opposed to a random choice of victims (14%) ($\chi^2 =33.985$, $p<.001$). Gossip was less specific with respect to its target, with only 48% of those interviewed saying that one specific girl was most gossiped about (question six) and 52% reporting that "anyone" could be targeted (the chi square was not significant). Girls said more often that they excluded someone because people disliked the person (question 7a), than because the person was different ($\chi^2=12.11$, $p<.01$, met corrected level of significance). Anecdotal comments indicated that shyness was one quality that made excluded children seem different.

The same 20 children (23% of the sample) were nominated both as victims of gossip and as victims of exclusion and received the same number of nominations for

each category of victimization; thus, the participants victimization nomination scores were identical for both sets of nominations. Victimization nomination scores were converted to Z scores and children were designated as victims if their victimization score fell one standard deviation or more above the sample mean. Using this criteria, a child had to have a raw score of at least two victim nominations in order to qualify as a victim. Eight children met the criteria. As this sample was small, results should be treated as preliminary and interpreted with caution until further study with larger sample sizes is carried out.

Chi square analyses were carried out to determine whether victims were different from children who were not victimized. The McNemar chi square statistic for dependent samples was used, because both measures described the same individual. Victims were significantly different from non-victims on all variables. Victims were more likely than non-victims to have scores above the median on negative gossip ($\chi^2_{A/D}=20.00, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=22.88, p<.001$), social exclusion ($\chi^2_{A/D}=21.78, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=21.19, p<.001$), relational aggression ($\chi^2_{A/D}=17.52, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=26.26, p<.001$), and overt aggression ($\chi^2_{A/D}=19.15, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=24.02, p<.001$). Victims were also more likely than non-victims to have below-median scores on peer acceptance ($\chi^2_{A/D}=20.25, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=22.67, p<.001$), and friendship intimacy ($\chi^2_{A/D}=20.89, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=21.95, p<.001$). Their affective perspective taking scores ($\chi^2_{A/D}=15.63, p<.001, \chi^2_{B/C}=27.57, p<.001$) were significantly more likely than non-victims to be above the median.

Victims also appeared to be less likely to have reciprocal friendships: 73% of victims did not have a reciprocated best friendship, compared to 53% of non-victims.

However, a chi square value could not be obtained for this finding, due to low expected cell frequencies.

Characteristics of Gossipers

Sixty-one percent of those interviewed reported on question seven that a specific girl gossiped more than the rest of the girls in their class. Twenty-three subjects, or 26% of the sample, received one or more nominations as gossipers (26% of gossipers were also nominated as victims). A chi square analyses indicated that the number of girls reporting that one girl gossiped more than the rest was not significantly different from the number reporting that there was no specific gossipers. When asked what the girls who gossiped the most were like, more negative characteristics, such as snobbishness, conceit, and saying whatever they thought, than positive characteristics were reported. The chi square value comparing the frequency of positive and negative characteristics approached significance, $\chi^2=5.69$, $p<.06$.

Gossip nomination scores were converted to Z scores and children were designated as gossipers if their gossip score fell one standard deviation or more above the sample mean. Using this criteria, a child had to have a raw score of at least two gossip nominations in order to qualify as a gossip (ten children met the criteria). As was the case with the victims, this was a small sample, and results should be considered preliminary. Chi square analyses were carried out to determine whether gossipers were different from children who were not identified as gossipers. Once again, the McNemar chi square statistic for dependent samples was used. The analyses revealed that gossipers were significantly different from non-gossipers on all variables. Gossipers were more likely than non-gossipers to have scores above the

median on negative gossip ($\chi^2_{A/D}=16.82$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=24.32$, $p<.001$), social exclusion ($\chi^2_{A/D}=19.32$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=21.44$, $p<.001$), relational aggression ($\chi^2_{A/D}=16.68$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=24.02$, $p<.001$), and overt aggression ($\chi^2_{A/D}=16.17$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=25.71$, $p<.001$). They were more likely than non-gossipers to score below the median on positive gossip ($\chi^2_{A/D}=20.02$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=20.00$, $p<.001$). Gossipers were also more likely than non-gossipers to have below-median scores on peer acceptance ($\chi^2_{A/D}=18.27$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=21.78$, $p<.001$). Interestingly, their scores on friendship intimacy ($\chi^2_{A/D}=18.37$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=22.13$, $p<.001$) and affective perspective taking ($\chi^2_{A/D}=12.03$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2_{B/C}=29.17$, $p<.001$) were more likely to be above the median than the scores of non-gossipers.

Importance of Relational and Overt Aggression for Peer Acceptance

Standard multivariate regression analyses were performed separately for younger and older age groups using peer acceptance scores as the dependent variable and relational and overt aggression scores as independent variables, to attempt to replicate the findings of previous research (see Table 4). For younger subjects, the combination of relational aggression and overt aggression significantly predicted peer acceptance, accounting for 32% of the variance. However, only relational aggression was a significant predictor of peer acceptance. The regression of peer acceptance on overt and relational aggression was not significant in older subjects.

Significance of Gossip and Social Exclusion for Social Competence

To test the hypothesis that gossiping and social exclusion would predict children's acceptance by peers and ability to take the perspective of others, a series of standard multiple regression analyses were performed. To allow for potential age

differences, analyses were conducted separately for each age group. There was a high degree of collinearity between negative gossip and exclusion. As the negative gossip score was more highly correlated with positive gossip than was exclusion, negative gossip was dropped from the multiple regression analyses (Hay, 1988; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1995; Edwards, 1985). Separate bivariate regression analyses employing the negative gossip score to predict peer acceptance and affective perspective-taking were conducted.

Standard multiple regressions using peer acceptance as the dependent variable and exclusion and positive gossip scores as independent variables revealed that positive gossip and exclusion behaviour significantly predicted peer acceptance for both age groups (see Table 5). In the younger age group, both exclusion and positive gossip contributed significantly to peer acceptance, and about half of the variance in peer acceptance scores was predicted by the combination of positive gossip and exclusion. In the older age group, the combination of positive gossip and exclusion scores predicted 19% of the variance in peer acceptance; however, only positive gossip behaviour emerged as a significant predictor. Bivariate regression analyses indicated that negative gossip significantly predicted peer acceptance in both age groups, accounting for 47% of the variability in the younger age group and 10% in the older age group. Affective perspective-taking was not predicted significantly by either exclusion and positive gossip or by negative gossip (see Table 6).

Significance of Gossip and Social Exclusion for Friendship

It was hypothesized that engaging in gossip and social exclusion would affect the quality of children's friendships, as measured by their self-reported intimacy with

best friends and their satisfaction with these friendships. The dysfunctional model of relational aggression predicts that children who engage in these behaviours will have less intimate and less satisfying friendships, whereas the functional model predicts that children engaging in these behaviours should have more intimate and satisfying friendships. To test these hypotheses, friendship intimacy, and friendship satisfaction scores were regressed onto positive gossip and exclusion scores separately in the two age groups. Separate analyses were once again conducted for negative gossip, due to the issue of multicollinearity.

The linear combination of positive gossip and exclusion scores significantly predicted approximately 17% of the variability in friendship intimacy for younger subjects (see Table 7). Examination of the standardized regression weights revealed that exclusion alone significantly contributed to the prediction of friendship intimacy scores, although the contribution of positive gossip approached significance. The multiple regression analysis was not significant for the older age group. Negative gossip did not significantly predict intimacy with best friend in either age group, and positive gossip, exclusion, and negative gossip did not significantly predict friendship satisfaction in either age group. The results with regard to friendship satisfaction should be interpreted with caution, however. Examination of the range of scores for the friendship satisfaction measure revealed a restricted range of scores: the majority of children rated their friendship at the highest level of satisfaction (a score of 30). This ceiling effect calls into question the validity of this measure in this sample.

It was hypothesized that, if friendship is affected by gossip and exclusion, children with reciprocal friendships should differ from those who did not have a reciprocal friendship on these variables. To test this aspect of this hypothesis and to examine other ways in which those who had reciprocal friendships differed from those who did not, a 2 (reciprocal vs. non-reciprocal best friend) X 2 (younger vs. older subjects) MANOVA was carried out using exclusion, positive gossip, peer acceptance, perspective-taking, and friendship intimacy as dependent variables. Thirty-six children (41%) in the study had been identified as having reciprocal best friendships, and forty-five (52%) were identified as not having a reciprocal best friend. Six children (7%) reported friendships outside the classroom that could not be verified as reciprocal; these children were not included in analyses. Significant main effects were found for both age (Wilks' $\eta^2(5,69)=.56, p<.001$) and best friend status (Wilks' $\eta^2(5,69)=.80, p<.01$). The interaction effect was not significant. Follow-up ANOVAs indicated significant effects of best friend status on positive gossip ($F(1,79)=5.61, p<.05$), peer acceptance ($F(1,79)=7.78, p<.01$), and friendship intimacy ($F(1,79)=8.99, p<.01$). Children who had reciprocal best friends had higher scores on all of these variables; however, they did not differ from children without reciprocal best friends on exclusion. An additional univariate ANOVA was performed using negative gossip as the dependent variable due to the issue of multicollinearity. There were no significant differences between children with and without reciprocal friends on negative gossip.

DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to fulfil two goals. The first was to gain a more detailed understanding of the dynamic processes and interpersonal context of female social behaviour, especially gossiping and exclusion from play, through individual interviews with the children who were engaging in these behaviours. Through the apparent openness and honesty of the girls participating in the study, a rich base of experiential information regarding relational aggression and victimization was obtained. The second goal was to test the hypothesis that gossip and exclusion may play an important role in the normative, non-deviant social development of females, in contrast to previous research which suggests that these behaviours (as part of the general relational aggression construct) are generally dysfunctional in nature. The data obtained partially supported the idea of the functionality of these acts. Specific patterns differed between older and younger subjects, but there was some evidence that gossip and exclusion positively influenced the maintenance of intimate dyadic friendships (in younger children), believed to be important to female social development. Exclusion predicted friendship intimacy for younger children and positive gossip, that is, saying nice things about others, was higher in those who had a mutual best friendship. However, although positive gossip and exclusion appear to serve some adaptive functions for friendship, they do not appear to have the same positive benefits for relations within the larger peer group. Engaging in negative gossip (for both age groups) and exclusion (at least in younger children) was predictive of lower acceptance by peers.

Early studies in the area of female aggression were aimed primarily at establishing relational, or indirect, aggression as a distinct construct separate from physical and verbal aggression (Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). The magnitude of the correlation found between relational and overt aggression in the present study is consistent with past research, which reported that overt and relational aggression were moderately correlated, but separate behaviours (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997).

Prior studies have examined the relationship between relational aggression, physical aggression, and social-psychological adjustment. Studies by Crick and others, using extreme groups designs, have revealed that both relationally aggressive and overtly aggressive children are significantly more disliked by their peers than non-aggressive children (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). These results were not replicated in the present study. While the combination of relational and physical aggression predicted a significant amount of the variability in peer acceptance scores in the younger age group, only relational aggression significantly contributed to this prediction. In the older age group, neither relational aggression nor physical aggression significantly predicted peer acceptance. It is possible that the decision to sample from the entire population in this study, as opposed to the extreme groups designs used in prior research, may have accounted for discrepancies between findings.

Previous research also revealed developmental changes in relationally aggressive acts. Originally, it appeared that these behaviours were identifiable as early as age three, became more salient by around the age of eight, peaked around age

11, and then began to decline, perhaps due to the evolution of dating relationships. More recent research has been somewhat less consistent in supporting this developmental trend. Some studies have found general support for the pattern (Xie, 1998), while others have reported that these behaviours actually continue to increase through the early adolescent years (Osterman et al., 1998). Methodological differences may play a role in explaining the different findings. Studies which have evaluated developmental changes in relational aggression by comparing boys and girls have revealed that these behaviours decrease in frequency with the approach of adolescence (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). When data are examined in proportional scores (i.e., how large proportions of the total aggression scores were formed by physical, verbal and relational aggression), females were found to use relational aggression more than any other type from the age of eight years on, and the proportion of total aggression it accounted for increased from age eight to age 15 (Osterman et al., 1998). In the present study, patterns emerged that were specific to each age group, but, overall, the frequency and strength of the associations and predictions were stronger for the nine- and ten-year-old participants: for example, positive gossip, exclusion, and negative gossip accounted for more variance in peer acceptance scores in younger subjects than they did in older subjects, and exclusion significantly predicted the friendship intimacy scores for younger participants, but not older subjects. Thus, these behaviours may be more important to social development processes prior to the onset of adolescence.

The results of the present study were not entirely consistent with previous research regarding developmental changes in friendship patterns. Past studies had

revealed that the friendships of nine- and ten-year old children are not as intimate as those of older children (ages 11-14 years) (Jones & Dembo, 1989) and that younger children (eight to twelve years) engage in lower levels of self-disclosure and gossip than their older counterparts (age 13 and older) (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). In the current study, ratings of friendship intimacy and friendship satisfaction were *lower* in older subjects. However, findings from reciprocal best friendships were more consistent with the previously established pattern: for older children, reciprocal best friendships were more intimate, and involved higher levels of positive, but not negative, gossip than the reciprocal best friendships of younger children. It may be that friendships become more complex with age; thus, ratings of friendship intimacy and satisfaction may be lower overall among older children, while at the same time the mutual best friendships of older children may be more intimate than those of a younger child. The finding that greater intimacy with best friend predicted higher peer acceptance levels supports the importance of dyadic friendships for social development.

The Context of Gossip and Exclusion

Individual interviews with the female participants of this study corroborated past findings of the high prevalence of gossip and exclusion within the social interactions of young females: only three children reported in questionnaires that they had not been involved in, or witnessed, gossip or exclusion. Moreover, the girls interviewed were open and appeared comfortable describing their own actions and those of others; they did not seem to experience any significant shame or

embarrassment as a result of engaging in these behaviours, which suggests that they did not perceive them as deviant.

The girls interviewed reported that gossip and exclusion occurred more frequently in groups of three or more; however, it was almost unanimously agreed that these acts were most likely to occur in the presence of a best friend, especially in the case of gossip. Thus, there appears to be an important dyadic component to these behaviours, despite the fact that they tend to occur within the context of the extended peer group. The girls reported that they gossiped with their best friends more often than with any other peer, and that they had excluded others in order to preserve a best friendship. In addition, girls identified by their peers as frequent gossipers rated their best friendships as more intimate than did non-gossipers. All of these findings support the notion that gossip and exclusion may serve to protect and reinforce the dyad.

The interview data suggested that children who are most gossiped about and excluded from playgroups are generally disliked or perceived as "different". Negative affect toward the victims, in the form of dislike, anger or jealousy, was reported as the main reason for gossiping about and excluding them. Children nominated in interviews as the most frequent victims of gossip and exclusion were less likely to have reciprocal best friendships, were more frequently nominated as both relationally and overtly aggressive and were more likely to have low scores on peer acceptance and friendship intimacy. These findings are consistent with past research which indicated that victims of relational aggression are more maladjusted overall and rejected by their peers (although the causal direction of this association is

unclear). Further study with larger samples of victimized children are warranted before solid conclusions can be drawn. It should be noted that the majority of subjects interviewed indicated that anyone could be the target of gossip, and anecdotal comments made during the interviews further suggested that victimization may not be particularly stable: girls repeatedly indicated that, while one girl is gossiped about or excluded for a time, the group will then move on to someone new.

Some of the most popular reasons given for gossiping about or excluding someone also were inconsistent with the notion of victimization as a stable construct based on individual, negative characteristics: the second most popular reason given was anger at the victim, which implies a transitional state, and the third was jealousy of the person, which implies envy of *positive* characteristics. These reasons were given especially often for gossiping. Similar reasons were given by the girls interviewed by Paquette & Underwood (1999), who reported that 51% of girls stated that the aggressor was trying to get revenge; the next most popular reason was jealousy of the victim. If victim status is transient, then conclusions drawn in longitudinal studies regarding the correlates of victimization may be overly positive: if a child is nominated as a victim at one point in time, and outcome variables are measured later when the child may no longer be being victimized, the scores on those variables may be less deviant than they might have been at the time the child was being targeted. The stability of victimization was not examined in this study; however, it appears important that future study of victims of relational aggression track victimization over time, and not assume that a child who is victimized at one point in time will always be so later on.

More recent research has made a distinction between "social" or "indirect" aggression, defined as a non-confrontative, relatively anonymous type of behaviour (gossip, rumour spreading, alienation), and "direct relational aggression", which involves confrontative acts (threats to withdraw friendship, deliberately ignoring someone, not talking to a person to take revenge on them)(Xie, 98; Xie, Cairns & Cairns, 1998). Interviews with the children in the present study about the dynamics of gossip and exclusion indicated that, while gossip may be considered nonconfrontational and relatively anonymous, social exclusion (which has been included as one aspect of social/ indirect aggression) appears to be seen as a generally nonanonymous and confrontative act. This suggests that "non-confrontational" and "anonymous" may not be the best ways to differentiate between social or indirect aggression and other types of aggression. The girls interviewed reported that the main ways of excluding a peer involved direct confrontation (telling them directly, insulting them, or whispering about them), especially among the nine and ten-year-olds. Even the less confrontative techniques reported (running away, ignoring) did not seem particularly anonymous in nature. This contradicts an assertion by Crick and others (1999) that relationally aggressive behaviours are generally more covert in middle childhood. It has also been argued that children's choice of aggressive strategy can be explained by the "effect/danger ratio", according to which the aggressor assesses the relation between the effect of the intended strategy and the danger involved (physical, psychological or social), trying to maximize the effect while exposing him or herself to as little danger as possible. Osterman et al. (1994) theorized that girls engage in more relationally aggressive acts because they have

maximum effect (as friendships are highly salient to girls), but hold little danger of counter-attack due to the anonymity of the behaviours employed. This argument seems questionable, if, as the interview responses suggest, these behaviours are actually quite confrontational and nonanonymous in nature. If researchers are to continue to view anonymity as an important motivating factor for children engaging in relational aggression, it seems that social exclusion (ostracism/alienation) should no longer be included in their definitions and measures of relational aggression.

In the interviews, participants were asked to report on the content of their gossip. The majority of the girls reported that it is the *interpersonal behaviour* of others, as opposed to personal characteristics (e.g., clothing, appearance), that is the main topic of gossip. Their responses support the notion that gossip is an act of social comparison which helps individuals to learn which behaviours are acceptable within the larger social group. The finding that half the girls felt that anyone could be a target of gossip, as opposed to a particular girl, also supports this notion. If the main purpose of gossip is general social comparison, then any person's behaviour can be up for discussion. Exclusion, on the other hand, appears to be the more extreme of the two behaviours. In findings similar to those obtained for gossip, respondents reported that girls were excluded due to peers' disapproval of their behaviour (as opposed to exclusion due to how they looked or other personal characteristics). However, the girls' responses suggested that, unlike the case for gossip, *specific* girls within the classroom were excluded from groups. Thus, it appears that girls gossip to establish what behaviours are generally acceptable, but, if particular peers continue to

behave in ways that do not coincide with these norms, they are excluded from the social group.

In summary, the information gained from individual interviews with the female participants in the study provided partial support for the notion that gossip and exclusion may play an important function for female social development. It appears that these behaviours are an important element of dyadic interactions and may also serve to teach (in the case of gossip) and enforce (in the case of exclusion) the norms of the social group. This study was the first to use interviews to examine the dynamics of the victim-aggressor relationship. The results suggest that the social behaviour of victims, as opposed to their appearance or abilities, contributes to victimization. However, the interview data render questionable the idea that victim status is very stable over time, as the children's responses suggest that certain peers are targeted for a time, but then the group will move on to someone else. Future research might track victimization over time, and explore the possibility that there may not be a clear division of "aggressors" and "victims". If victimization status truly is fickle by nature, then the aggressors at one point may become the victims later on. For this reason, longitudinal studies are warranted.

Finally, the girls' responses in interviews regarding the dynamics of gossip and exclusion suggest that these behaviours may not be as anonymous as prior research has suggested. Direct confrontation (eg. telling peers they are not wanted in the group) appears to be a popular approach to excluding peers. This finding calls into question the utility of the effect/danger ratio hypothesis that girls engage in these

behaviours because they are relatively anonymous and generate a low risk of retaliation.

Positive Gossip

The prevalence of gossip in the social interactions of both children and adults is well established. In a recent study by Paquette and Underwood (1999), interviews with young adolescents revealed that gossip was the most frequent type of social aggression reported, with 67% of children reporting having been the target of it (16% of children said they had been the target of exclusion). Gossip is discussed as a component of relational aggression by the majority of researchers. The Bjorkqvist group include gossiping, saying bad things behind another's back, and criticizing the appearance of another as part of their definition of relational, or indirect, aggression (Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Bjorkqvist et al., 1988), and Underwood and colleagues also include gossiping in their definition of social aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Although Crick discusses gossiping and rumour spreading as part of relational aggression in some of her studies (Crick, 1997), in others she dropped the item that refers to gossip ("tells mean lies or rumours about a person to make other kids not like the person") from her measure due to the fact that it cross-loaded on the overt aggression factor as well as the relational aggression factor (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996)).

Some researchers might take the position that positive gossip is not true gossip. However, Gottman & Mettetal (1986) argue that positive gossip has an important role in the social interactions of adolescents. They suggest that, by the teenage years, children are attempting to have a balanced view of people, and are

capable of understanding that the same person can have both positive and negative aspects to their personality, and that positive gossip begins to occur in their conversations, in addition to the negative gossip that dominated in middle childhood, as a result of this change. The current study revised Crick's gossip and rumour spreading item by splitting it into two items that tapped these two different types of gossip (positive and negative). Interviews with participants suggested that children in these age groups conceptualized gossip only in terms of negative evaluation; however, on questionnaires, the girls had no difficulty nominating peers as positive gossipers (people who said nice things about others when they were not there), suggesting that this type of gossip does occur.

Analyses revealed that positive gossip was highly predictive of peer acceptance in both age groups, and approached significance in predicting friendship intimacy in younger subjects. In all cases, its relationship with social competence was positive, in contrast to negative gossip, which was negatively correlated with sociometric ratings. Thus, it appears that positive gossip may have a function in children's social development prior to the onset of adolescence as a construct distinct from negative gossip, exclusion, and general relational aggression. Future research is warranted to clarify the role of positive gossip in social development. It is possible that it could simply be a form of prosocial behaviour, which is positively correlated with peer acceptance and negatively associated with peer rejection (Crick, 1996); however, the fact that it takes place when the person being complimented is not there appears to separate it from other prosocial behaviours. It is possible that positive gossip, like negative gossip, may be a form of social comparison. It may allow

children to gain an understanding of what behaviours are *acceptable* within the social group; thus, the children who engage in it may have increased social understanding, and, consequently may be better accepted by peers.

Gossip, Exclusion, and Social Competence

The central research question addressed in this study concerned the importance of gossip and exclusion for the development of children's social competence, which was operationalized as a combination of peer acceptance and affective perspective-taking ability. Neither gossip nor exclusion significantly predicted affective perspective taking. This finding does not appear to be a function of a lack of sensitivity of the Rothenberg measure for children older than eight, as suggested in some research (Rothenberg, 1970). In the original article describing the Rothenberg measure (Rothenberg, 1970), teacher and peer ratings of social adjustment were more strongly correlated with perspective-taking for eight-year-olds than they were for ten-year-olds. The author argued that this result could be due to the fact that eight-year-olds rate more visible children as globally high or low across a number of social adjustment dimensions more frequently than do ten-year-olds. Although the oldest group used in the current study was somewhat older than that used in prior studies, a ceiling effect did not seem to be affecting the results in the present study, as a broad range of affective perspective-taking scores was obtained for both age groups. Perspective taking correlated only with one measure, overt aggression, and then only in the older group. Moreover, the relationship was contrary to expectations in that higher perspective-taking scores predicted higher levels of overt aggression. Nevertheless, the measure may have accurately identified real

individual differences in perspective-taking ability, to the extent that we are currently able to measure this variable. The measurement of affective perspective-taking remains problematic, and although the Rothenberg measure is reasonably supported in the literature, evidence of the validity of perspective-taking measures in general remains sparse (Rubin, 1978).

In contrast to the results obtained for affective perspective-taking, peer acceptance was significantly predicted by gossip and exclusion behaviour. The significant amounts of variability predicted by gossip and exclusion scores suggest that these behaviours play an important role in determining peer preference within the larger peer group, especially among younger children. Across age groups, children who engaged in greater amounts of negative talk about peers were more disliked within the larger social group. In younger children, exclusion also predicted lower peer acceptance ratings. In contrast to positive gossip, which was positively related to peer acceptance, it appears that these more negative behaviours (negative gossip and exclusion) result in a negative reputation within the larger peer group.

Overall, the findings relating the components of relational aggression to general social competence are consistent with past research, and generally support the model of relational aggression as a dysfunctional behaviour. Children engaging in gossip and exclusion were not more skilled at taking the perspective of others, and they were generally more disliked in the broader peer group. It should be noted, however, that the children who engaged in higher levels of gossip and exclusion, although lower on peer acceptance, were just as likely to have mutual friendships as their peers who engaged in lower levels of these behaviours.

Gossip, Exclusion and Friendship

Much of the peer relations literature has focussed on children's sociometric preferences, or popularity within the broad peer group (Parker & Asher, 1987; Schneider, Wiener & Murphy, 1994). If these types of outcome measures alone were considered, the results of this study would suggest that gossip and exclusion are dysfunctional behaviours. However, more recent research has looked beyond broad peer acceptance to specific friendships, since many children who are not popular within the larger social group have mutually satisfying friendships that provide them with levels of companionship similar to that of more popular children (Schneider et al., 1994). It is possible that having a few, close friendships may be even *more* important than being accepted in the larger social group: children with close friends have been found to score higher on measures of altruism and affective perspective-taking, regardless of their peer group status (McGuire & Weisz, 1982). Schneider et al. (1994) have noted:

"to consider only overall peer group status may be to underestimate the interpersonal skills of children who, while not widely accepted in their peer groups, are able to maintain several close friendships"
(p. 326)

It was hypothesized that gossip and exclusion would play an important role in creating and maintaining dyadic friendships. According to this hypothesis, children engaging in gossip and exclusion more frequently should score higher on friendship intimacy, and should also spend more time interacting in dyads, and children with reciprocal friendships should engage in more gossip and social exclusion. The results of this study partially supported these hypotheses. In line with results from previous

studies, which indicated that relationally aggressive children had more intimate friendships (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996), exclusion scores did significantly predict friendship intimacy in the present study, but only for younger subjects. Negative gossip was not predictive of the quality of friendships at any age. Children with reciprocal best friends had significantly more nominations for positive gossip, but there was no difference between those with mutual friendships and those without mutual friendships on nominations for negative gossip or exclusion². This last finding is consistent with past research which indicated that relationally aggressive children were just as likely to have reciprocal friendships as their nonaggressive peers (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996).

Results of this study suggest a developmental trend in the relationship between social exclusion and friendship (see models, Figure 14). More frequent nominations for social exclusion significantly predicted higher levels of intimacy within the best friendships of the junior elementary group, but not the senior elementary group. It is possible that, in middle childhood, exclusion behaviour functions to create and maintain intimate, dyadic friendships. At this stage of development, children have acquired the cognitive abilities necessary to engage in these types of behaviour (vocabulary, planning skills, perspective taking) and are highly focussed on the same-sex peer group. In addition, they have acquired impulse control and are able to delay their reactions to negative affect. It is possible that all of these conditions come together around the age of eight to ten years to create a scenario that is ripe for the development of the intimate friendships that research has shown to be important for positive social and emotional adjustment. By adolescence,

best friendships may already be quite well established, and exclusion may no longer be necessary in order to maintain them. This notion is supported by the finding that, while the mutual friendships of older children were more intimate than those of younger children, exclusion predicted friendship intimacy only among younger subjects. By adolescence, interest in cross-sex peers begins to increase, and the same-sex peer group is no longer the sole focus. As a result, in the adolescent period, compared to middle childhood, exclusion may be less important for building same-sex friendships. Support for these ideas can be found in Gottman & Mettetal's (1986) research, which suggests that intimacy is only a secondary goal in the close friendships of adolescents, and is maintained in the service of the primary goal of this stage of development, namely self-exploration. Further study is warranted, however, as the design of the present study was correlational, and the direction of causality between friendship intimacy and exclusion could not be determined. It is possible that children with intimate friendships are more likely to exclude others, as opposed to exclusion increasing intimacy. However, the finding that engaging in social exclusion among older children did not predict higher friendship intimacy scores, despite the fact that mutual friendships in this age group were more intimate, would support the notion that exclusion serves to increase intimacy in younger children.

The present study defined friendship as a dyadic process and the measures chosen related only to dyadic best friendships. The children nominated only one best friend; larger social groupings (e.g., cliques, social networks) were not examined. Past research has suggested that children who engage in more relationally aggressive behaviours are more likely to occupy central status within their social networks (Xie,

1998; Xie, Cairns & Cairns, 1999); thus, it is possible that, there may be important relationships between engaging in gossip and social exclusion serves an important function not only in dyadic relationships but also in larger groups. The fact that the girls reported in interviews that both gossip and exclusion are more likely to take place in groups of three or more supports this possibility.

Data from social journals collected for the present study were not analysed because of low response rates. Nevertheless, inspection of these data suggested that negative gossip may play a role in maintaining the dyad, as nominations for negative gossip predicted the amount of time participants reported they spent with best friend for younger subjects and time reportedly spent in dyads for older subjects. Among older subjects, exclusion and perspective-taking ability also significantly predicted more time spent interacting in dyads. While future research is needed to clarify the role of negative gossip for the quality of friendship, for now, it appears that exclusion may indeed be a key behaviour for friendship quality, and may be important in promoting the intimacy of friendships in the middle childhood years prior to adolescence.

Contributions of the Present Study

The present study improved upon previous research in several ways. First, the incorporation of individual interviews provided further insight into the dynamics and processes of social behaviour from the perspective of the children themselves. Prior research has focussed only on whether or not these behaviours occur; the interviews gave us more information on how and why they occur. The responses of the participants provided insights into the social comparison aspect of gossip, the reasons

that children are targeted, and the stability of victimization. These interviews also provided information to validate and elaborate on the data obtained from questionnaires.

This was the first study to break down relational aggression into components of negative gossip and exclusion, and gossip into positive and negative gossip. In some cases, the individual components were predictive of outcome variables when relational aggression as a whole was not: for example, exclusion predicted friendship intimacy, while relational aggression did not; thus, important relationships between variables might have been missed if only the general construct had been employed. In addition, separation of the behaviours allowed the construct of positive gossip to emerge as an important factor in female peer relations. The high correlation between negative gossip and exclusion may be viewed as indicating that relational aggression is a generally highly cohesive construct; however, the existence of some distinctive patterns of relationships (e.g. exclusion predicted friendship intimacy, but negative gossip did not) warrants the separation of these two behaviours.

The present study was one of the first to suggest that relationally aggressive behaviours may be functional within the normative social development of females. Past research had suggested that gossip was a high frequency behaviour in middle childhood and adolescence (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Paquette & Underwood, 1999), and both the questionnaire data and the interview responses in the present study supported these findings. It seems highly unlikely that behaviours which are wholly dysfunctional should be so prevalent. Many of the studies that have linked relationally aggressive behaviours with negative outcome variables have used

extreme groups designs, where only children with the very highest scores on relational aggression have been included in the aggressive group. It is possible that these highly relationally aggressive children may suffer maladjustment, but that more moderate levels of the behaviour are normative. Some support for the model of relational aggression as a normative, nondeviant behaviour was found in this study. There was strong evidence to suggest that positive gossip has an important impact on both peer acceptance and maintenance of dyadic friendships. Exclusion played a role in promoting friendship intimacy, and interview data suggested that gossip may also be important in this regard. Future research could expand upon these findings by investigating these relationships in more detail. For example, other aspects of social competence (e.g. altruism, empathy, social skills) and friendship (conflict, caring) could be related to gossip and exclusion, and a more detailed investigation of the relationship between negative gossip and time spent in dyads could be carried out by having children record their social interactions over an extended period of time.

Limitations of the Present Research

At the time that this study was designed, the majority of the extant research was in agreement that relational aggression was much more prevalent in girls than in boys. As a result, only females were employed as subjects. Since that time, however, the evidence regarding gender differences in relational aggression has become more equivocal, with some studies finding no differences, and others actually finding that boys have higher rates of relationally aggressive behaviour than girls. It appears that methodology may be responsible for at least some of these differences: when gender differences are evaluated using continuous relational aggression scores, the findings

have been mixed, with some studies finding that girls engage in these behaviours more often, and others finding that girls and boys are relationally aggressive to a similar extent, or that boys engage in more relational aggression (Henington et al., 1998; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). When extreme groups of relationally and physically aggressive children are identified, the relationally aggressive group is composed primarily of girls, and the physically aggressive group is comprised mainly of boys (Crick et al., 1999). Findings from other studies have contradicted the notion that relationally aggressive behaviour is not normative for males, or is associated with greater maladjustment. For example, one study found that boys who were highly relationally aggressive were unlikely to be rejected by their peers unless they were also overtly aggressive (Henington et al., 1997), and another found that relational aggression was equally negatively regarded in girls and boys (Osterman et al., 1994). Consequently, it seems to be important that the present findings be replicated with a sample of boys.

The use of interviews in this study added a more molecular, personal perspective to the data. However, there are some limitations to the use of interviews in research. Because the information was collected face-to-face, it is possible that social desirability may have biased the results: there may be some gap between actual behaviour/ motivations and reported behaviour/motivations, as subjects may be hesitant to appear mean or deviant to the experimenter. Some evidence for the existence of such a bias could be inferred from the fact that a small number of girls reported that neither they nor any of their friends had ever gossiped about or excluded anyone. In addition, information obtained retrospectively via introspection may not

always be wholly accurate or reliable; thus, results may have been further biased.

Nevertheless, in support of the validity of the information obtained, in general, it was observed that the majority of the girls appeared comfortable discussing their own gossip and exclusion behaviours, and seemed to have clear opinions and recollections with regard to their behaviour. However, research using observational techniques would avoid some of the biases discussed, and could add significantly to our understanding of these behaviours.

The present study examined the relationship between gossip and exclusion and three elements of social behaviour that have been commonly accepted in the research as components of social competence: peer acceptance (measured using likeability ratings), friendship quality, and affective perspective-taking. As there is no widely agreed upon definition of social competence, future studies may contribute further to the research by examining the role of gossip and exclusion in other skills and behaviours which could also be considered indicators of social competence: e.g. social skills, empathy, dominance behaviours, altruism, conflict resolution, and social support. Further clarification of the role of gossip and exclusion in the ability to take the perspective of others is also warranted, when more sensitive measures become available.

Evidence from a social journal used in the present study to ask about time spent in different social contexts did not generate enough data for analyses. Nevertheless, preliminary findings from this measure suggested that there may be some important relationships between gossip and exclusion and time spent in dyadic interactions. Having children complete the journals in their classrooms with the

researcher present worked well in the pilot investigation, and appeared to resolve the problem of poor return rates. Future research might use a more finely-tuned version of the journal with clearly defined response categories (e.g. how to define in-school vs. outside-of-school interaction; how many hours of interaction does a sleep over qualify for?), administered over a more prolonged period of time, to learn more about how the extent of experiences in dyads and larger groups relates to relationally aggressive behaviours.

Conclusions

The study of relationally aggression is relatively new. To date, the consequences of being relationally aggressive for the individual have been described as unequivocally negative. However, closer examination of the results of these studies revealed several aspects which were not wholly dysfunctional, including the fact that relationally aggressive children were just as likely to have positive, reciprocal friendships as nonaggressive children and that there was little solid evidence of long-term difficulties associated with engaging in these behaviours. The present study focussed on examining the "other side of the coin" and sought to explore children's perceptions of relational aggression (in the form of gossip and exclusion), and investigate its possible adaptive function in the social development of females.

The findings were consistent with previous research: gossip and exclusion were associated with concurrently measured maladjustment in the form of lower peer group acceptance. Nevertheless, there also appeared to be a positive function of gossip and exclusion for friendship. Talking positively about others and maintaining

the best friend dyad by excluding other peers made positive contributions to friendship intimacy in younger subjects. These findings add to the growing evidence of a positive side to these relationally aggressive behaviours. Further investigation of the function of gossip (both positive and negative) and exclusion in children's dyadic friendships is warranted given the importance of dyadic friendships for social development. This does not imply that gossip and exclusion in the extreme may not be hurtful, and should not be monitored; however, they are highly prevalent and may possibly be adaptive at certain points in development, and their functions need to be understood more fully in order to help children in their social interactions with peers.

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Footnotes

1. STATISTICA REGRESSION and STATISTICA MANOVA were used to perform the major analyses. Prior to statistical analysis, the data were screened for missing values and basic assumptions concerning univariate and multivariate outliers and normality were examined.

Missing data were examined for each variable, and very few cases were found. On measures where subjects responded to a majority of items that comprised a subscale (i.e. Intimate Friendship Scale, Affective Perspective-Taking measure), the subscale score was prorated based on responses to other items within that subscale. In all cases, only one item was missing. Other missing data (failure to complete an entire measure) were minimal (friendship satisfaction - 1 case, perspective-taking - 4 cases) and these cases were merely deleted from analyses. Casewise deletion of missing data resulted in a maximal 5% loss of data within each analysis.

Univariate outliers were identified for each variable, and their influence was minimized by reducing these extreme scores to that for a score three standard deviations from the sample mean. Using Mahalanobis distance set at the value for $p < .001$, no multivariate outliers were identified.

When the normality of the distributions of the variables was examined, it was found that several of the variables were significantly skewed. Square root transformations and logarithmic transformations (when the square root transformations were ineffective) were performed on these variables to reduce the skew. Analyses were performed using both the transformed data and the non-transformed data. In all cases, these analyses were very similar; thus, only the results using the non-transformed data are reported.

2. The exclusion techniques question was the only interview item which showed a potentially different response pattern between the two age groups. In the junior elementary age group, girls reported using primarily confrontative strategies (in most cases, telling the victim they could not join the group) for excluding peers from play groups (64% of responses). The senior elementary subjects reported using confrontative strategies only 29% of the time. However, as expected cell frequencies fell below five for some cells, valid chi square values for these data could not be computed.

3. It should be noted, however, that all of the children in the study perceived themselves to have a best friend, and that only one best friendship nomination was elicited; thus, the children without reciprocal friendships may still have had close friends.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Grade 4		Grade 8		\bar{F}
	M	SD	M	SD	
Age	9.33	.66	12.85	.36	
Revised Crick Measure					
Negative Gossip	.18	.18	.16	.20	.23
Positive Gossip	.32	.24	.24	.20	2.94
Exclusion	.65	.54	.49	.52	1.93
Relational Aggression	1.01	.84	.74	.84	2.16
Overt Aggression	.34	.38	.30	.44	.22
Peer Acceptance	3.13	.86	3.51	.74	4.80*
Friendship Satisfaction	29.18	2.33	27.69	3.00	6.40**
Friendship Intimacy	5.41	.64	5.05	.55	8.06**
Perspective-taking Ability	4.76	2.36	7.41	1.63	35.96***

Note.

* = $p < .05$

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

Table 2.

Intercorrelations among Measures of Aggression, Exclusion, Gossip, Peer Acceptance, Perspective Taking, Friendship Satisfaction and Friendship Intimacy as a Function of Age of the Child

Variable	NG	PG	EX	RA	OA	PA	FS	FI	PT
Revised Crick Measure									
Negative Gossip		-.49**	.83***	.90***	.76***	-.71***	-.06	.13	-.16
Positive Gossip	-.45***		-.28	-.33*	-.34*	.58***	.09	.20	.06
Exclusion	.83***	-.35*		.98***	.63***	-.55***	-.07	.32	-.10
Relational Agg.	.90***	-.40**	.98*		.69***	-.57**	-.04	.29	-.14
Overt Agg.	.62***	-.46***	.61*	.62*		-.48*	-.12	.14	-.06
Peer Acceptance	-.32*	.43**	-.16	-.23	-.29*		.26	.08	.09
Friendship Satis.	-.05	.09	-.17	-.15	-.19	.32*		.32	.02
Friendship Intimacy	.15	.06	.08	.10	-.04	.38**	.63***		.07
Perspective Taking	.18	-.05	.20	.21	.31*	.10	-.02	.00	

Note. Intercorrelations among measures for the junior elementary school group are above the diagonal. Those for the senior elementary school group are below the diagonal. NG=negative gossip, PG=positive gossip, EX=exclusion, RA=relational aggression, OA=overt aggression, PA=peer acceptance, FS=friendship satisfaction, FI=friendship intimacy, PT=perspective taking

* $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

Table 3.

Correlations between Interview-Derived Nominations for "Victim of Negative-Content Gossip and Exclusion" or "High Levels of Gossip" and Questionnaire-Derived Measures as a Function of Age of the Child

Variable	Junior Elementary Subjects		Senior Elementary Subjects	
	Victim	Gossiper	Victim	Gossiper
Revised Crik Measure				
Negative Gossip	.01	.38*	.36*	.66***
Positive Gossip	.05	-.08	-.12	-.14
Exclusion	.06	.50***	.31*	.66***
Relational Aggression	.08	.47**	.41**	.72***
Overt Aggression	.07	.44**	.10	.34
Peer Acceptance	.05	-.09	-.43**	-.17
Friendship Satisfaction	.15	.13	-.25	.02
Friendship Intimacy	-.31	-.30	-.16	.07
Affective Perspective Taking	.09	.38*	.11	.16

Note.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 4.

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis Using Relational and Overt Aggression Scores to Predict Peer Acceptance Ratings

Variable	Beta	B	p	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p
Junior Age Group (N=39)						
Relational Aggression	-.454	-.467	<.05	.317	.279	<.001
Overt Aggression	-.142	-.324	ns			
Intercept		3.71	<.001			
Senior Age Group (N=48)						
Relational Aggression	-.074	-.065	ns	.087	.046	ns
Overt Aggression	-.242	-.42	ns			
Intercept		3.68	<.001			

Table 5.
Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analyses Using Positive Gossip, Negative Gossip and Exclusion Scores to Predict Peer Acceptance Ratings

Variable	Beta	B	p	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p
Junior Group (N=39):						
Positive Gossip	.477	1.73	<.001	.497	.469	<.001
Exclusion	-.408	-.65	<.01			
Intercept		2.30	<.001			
Negative Gossip	-.686	-3.26	<.001	.471	.457	<.001
Intercept		3.70	<.001			
Senior Group (N=48):						
Positive Gossip	.425	1.61	<.01	.185	.147	<.01
Exclusion	-.012	-.018	ns			
Intercept		3.123	<.001			
Negative Gossip	-.317	-1.20	<.05	.101	.082	<.05
Intercept		3.69	<.001			

Table 6.

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analyses Using Positive Gossip, Negative Gossip and Exclusion Scores to Predict Affective Perspective-Taking Scores

Variable	Beta	B	p	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p
Junior Group (N=38):						
Positive Gossip	.036	.364	ns	.011	na	ns
Exclusion	-.090	-.393	ns			
Intercept		4.90	<.001			
Negative Gossip	-.163	-2.13	ns	.027	na	ns
Intercept		5.15	<.001			
Senior Group (N=45):						
Positive Gossip	.021	.175	ns	.040	na	ns
Exclusion	.208	.647	ns			
Intercept		7.02	<.001			
Negative Gossip	.177	1.44	ns	.031	.009	ns
Intercept		3.69	<.001			

Table 7.

Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analyses Using Positive Gossip, Negative Gossip and Exclusion Scores to Predict Friendship Intimacy with Best Friend Scores:

Variable	Beta	B	p	R ²	Adjusted R ²	p
Junior Group (N=39):						
Exclusion	.285	.776	<.05	.170	.124	<.05
Positive Gossip	.383	.460	ns			
Intercept		4.85	<.001			
Negative Gossip	.119	.421	ns	.014	NA	ns
Intercept		5.36	<.001			
Senior Group (N=48):						
Exclusion	.114	.122	ns	.015	NA	ns
Positive Gossip	.098	.279	ns			
Intercept		4.92	<.001			
Negative Gossip	.155	.436	ns	.024	.003	ns
Intercept		4.98	<.001			

Figure 1. Range of scores for negative gossip measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

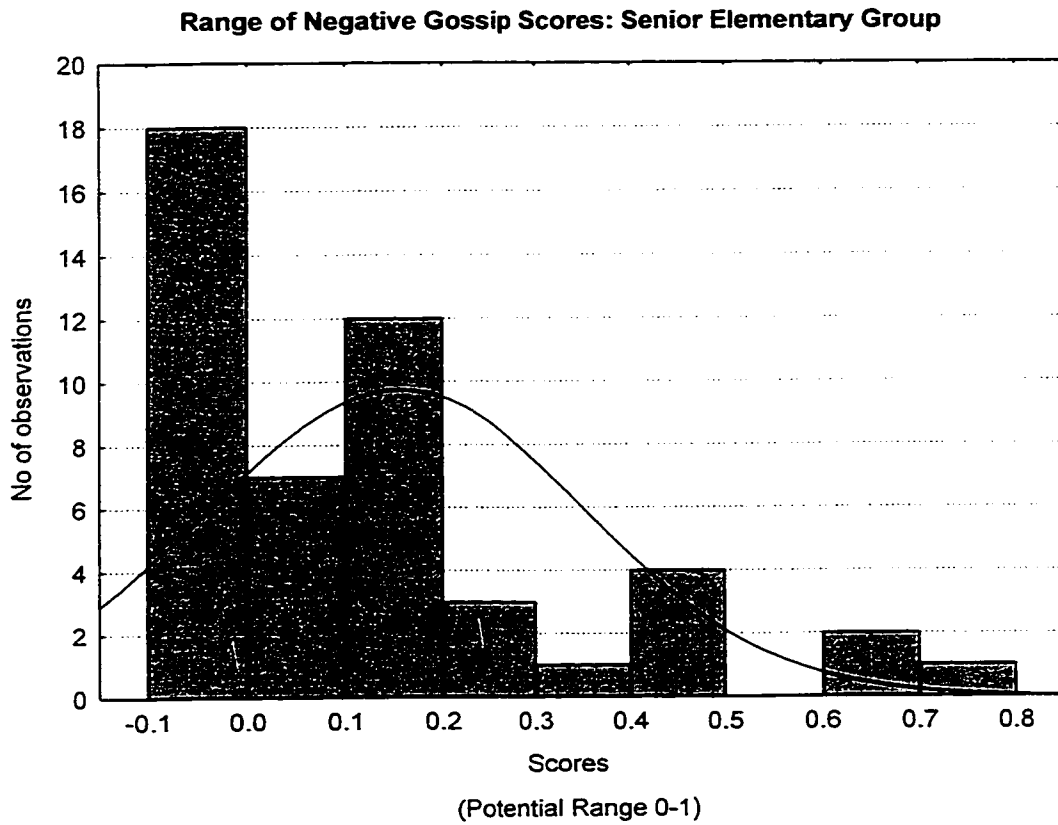
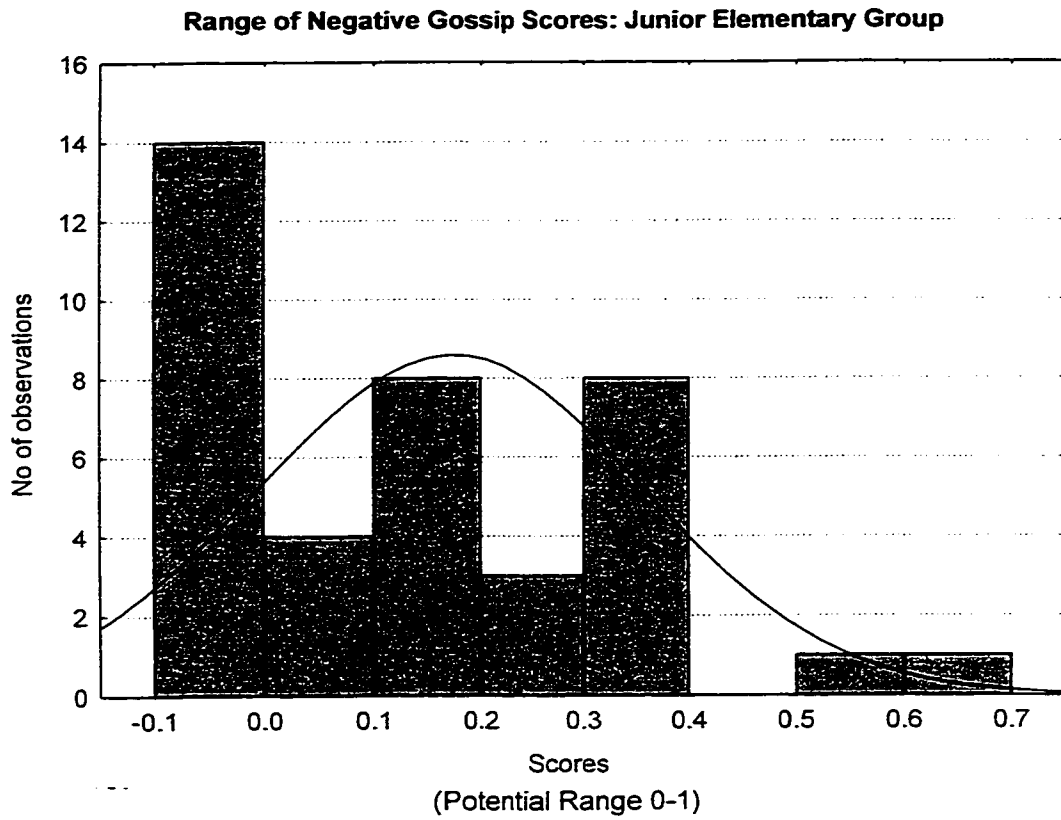


Figure 2. Range of scores for positive gossip measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

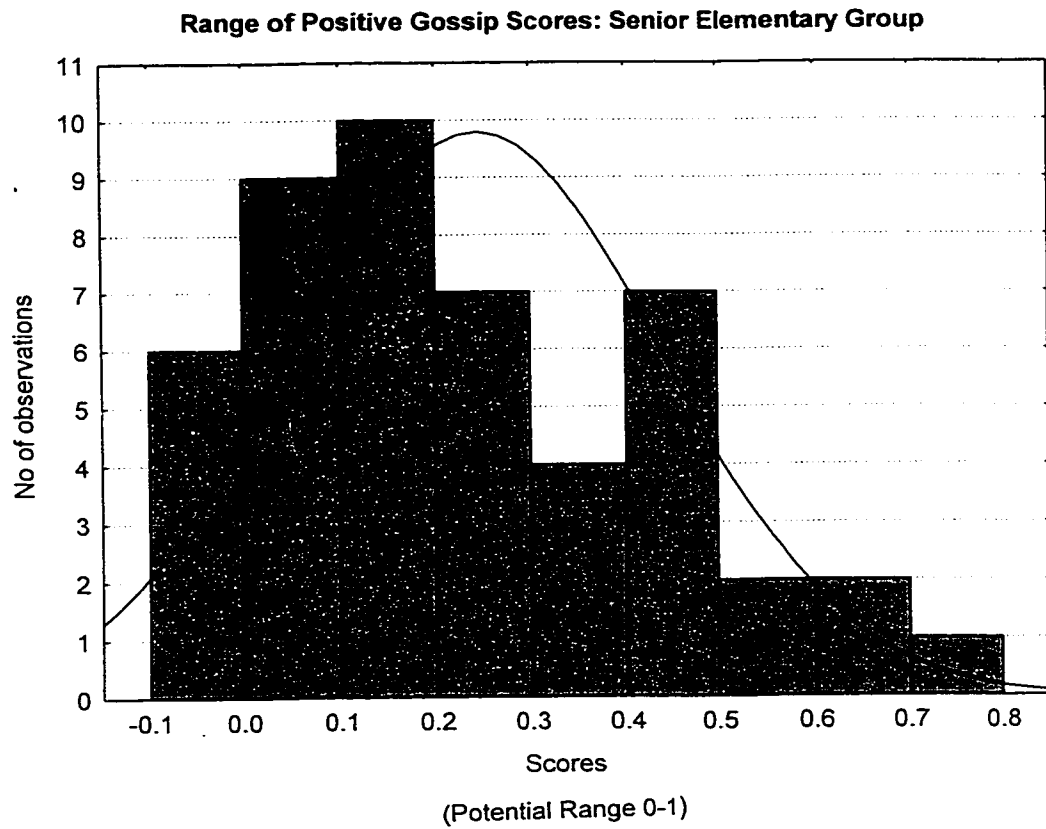
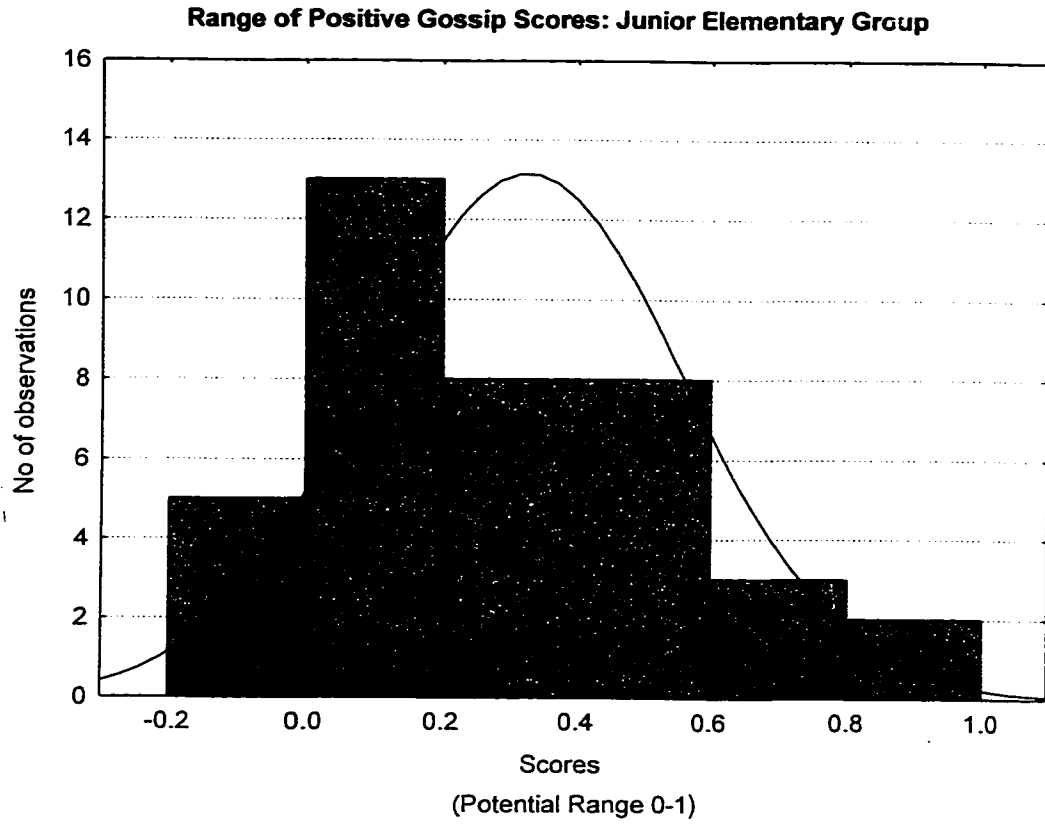


Figure 3. Range of scores for social exclusion measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

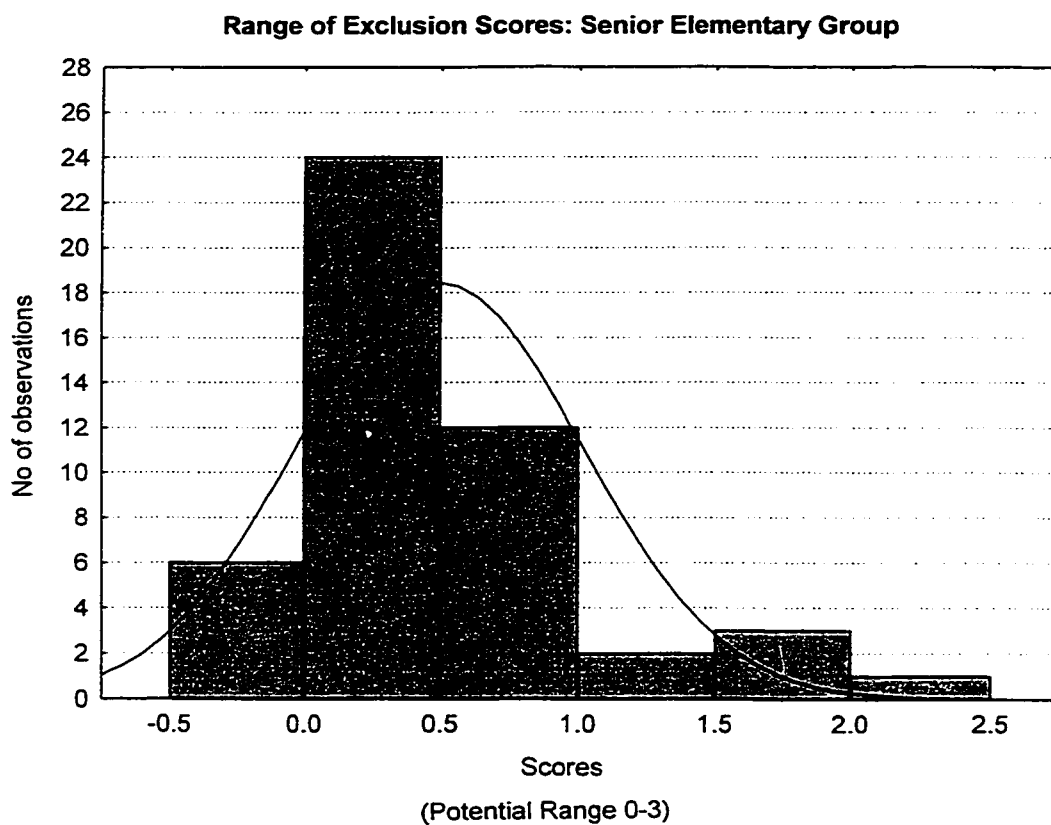
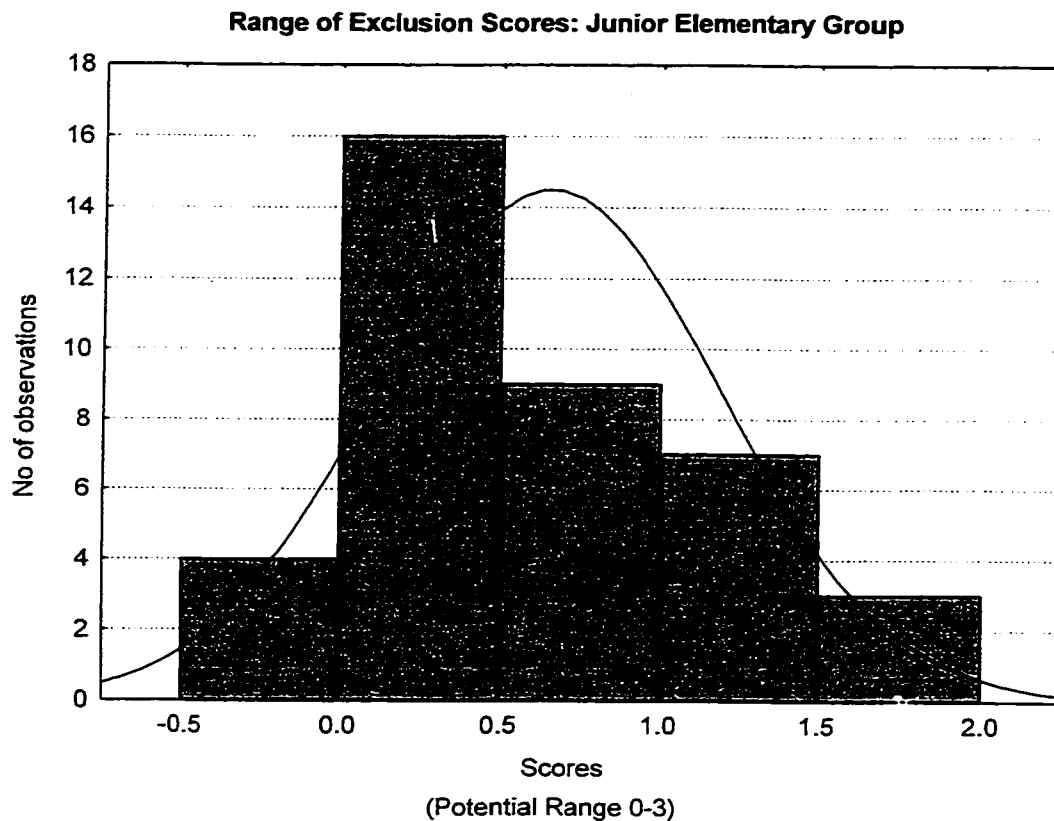


Figure 4. Range of scores for relational aggression measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

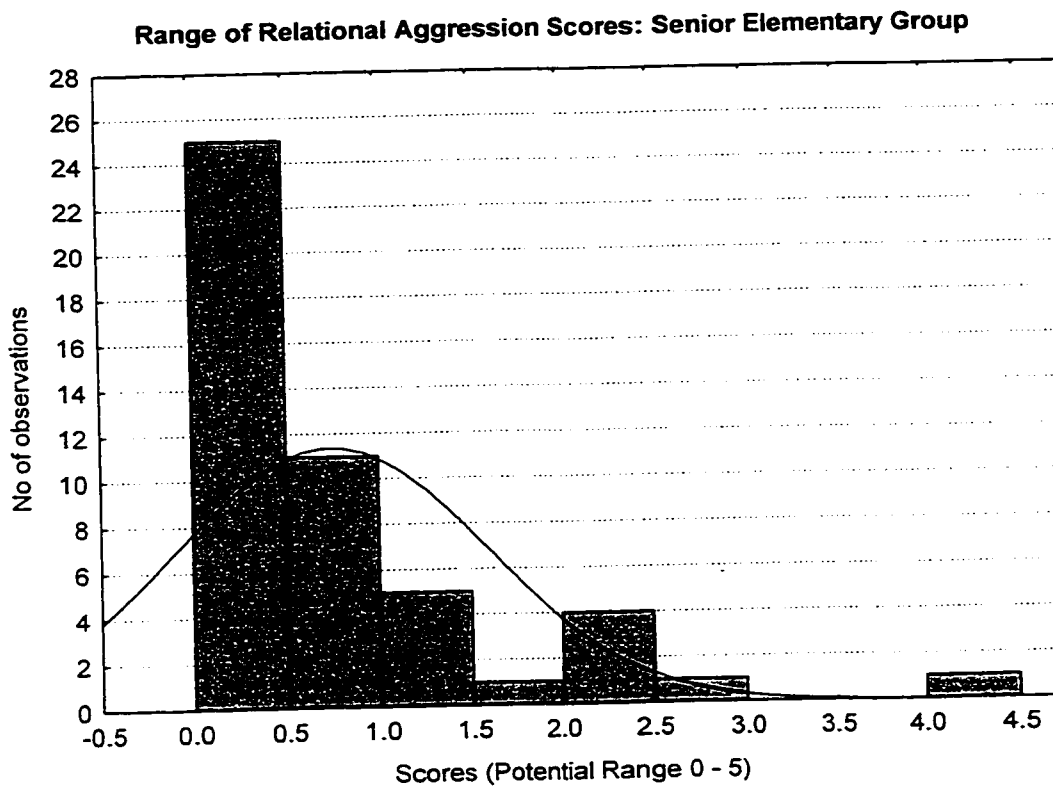
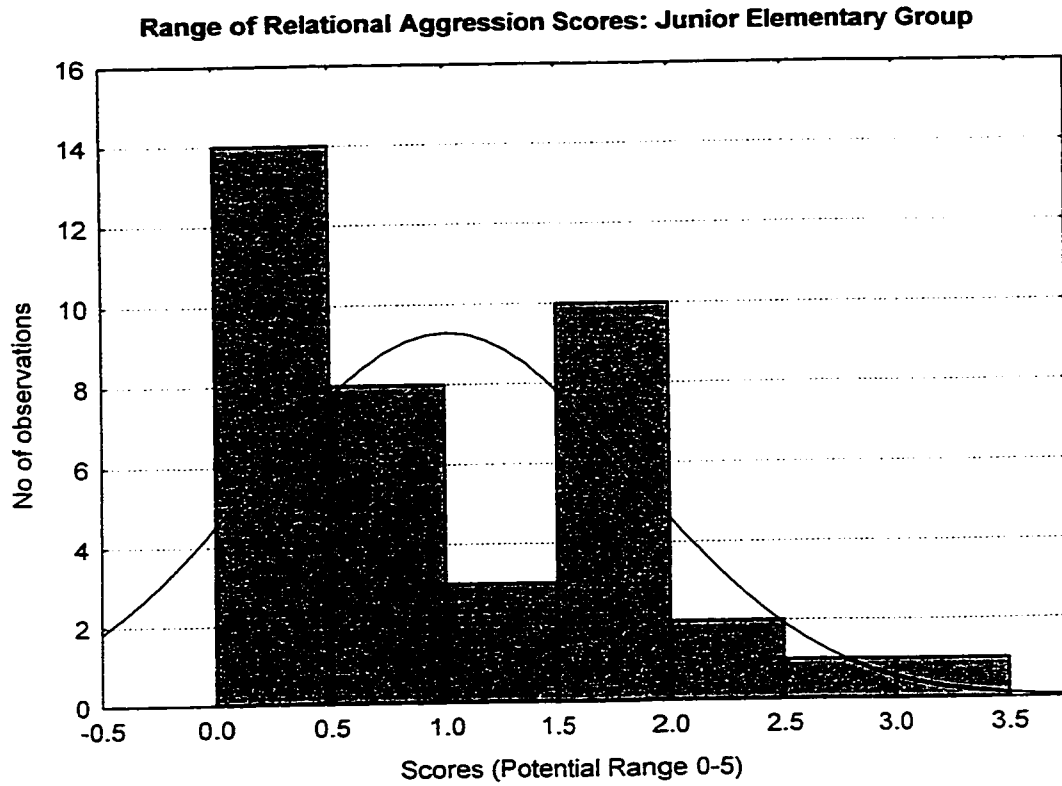


Figure 5. Range of scores for overt aggression measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

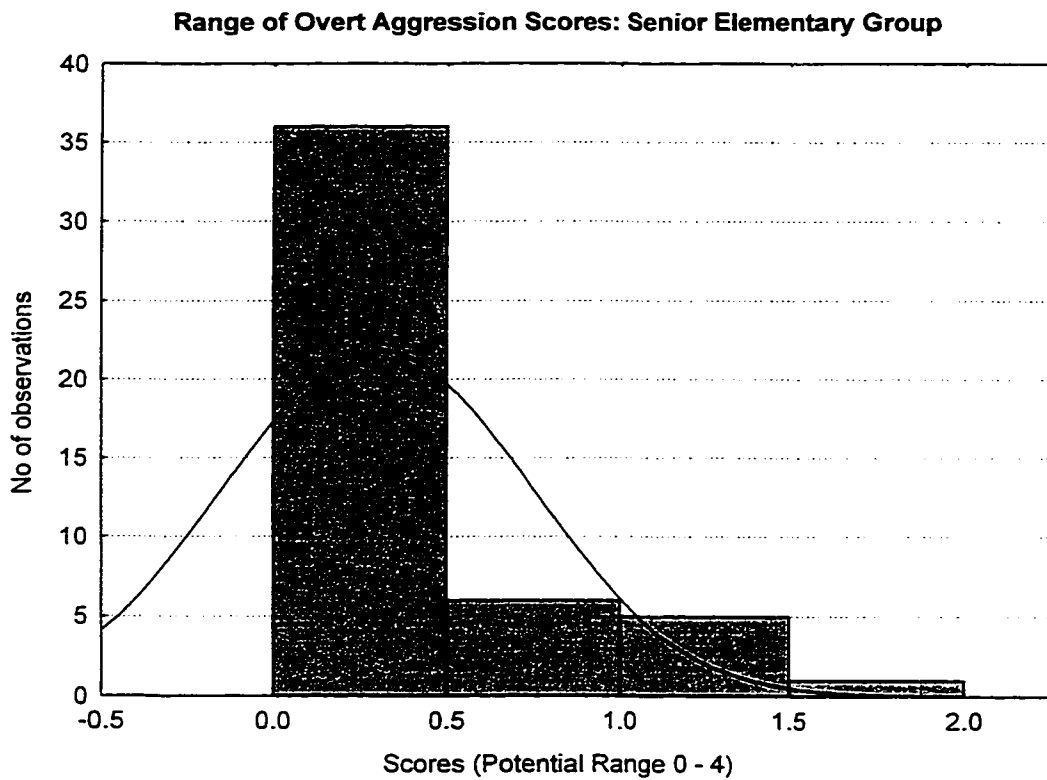
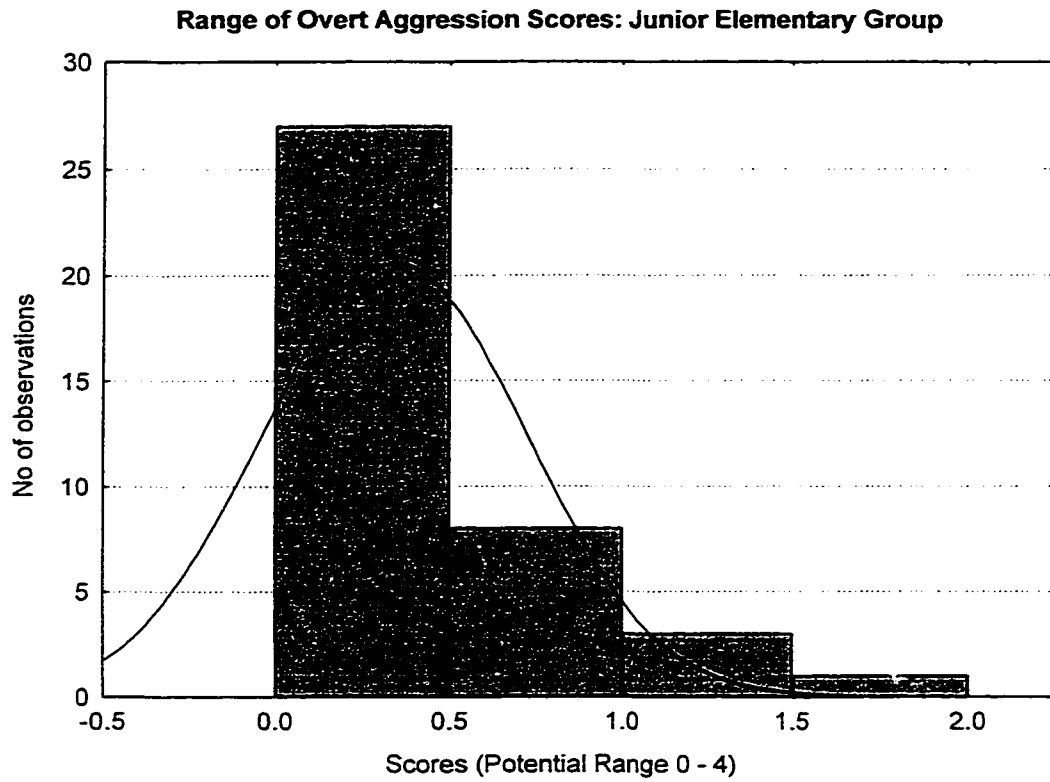


Figure 6. Range of scores for peer acceptance measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

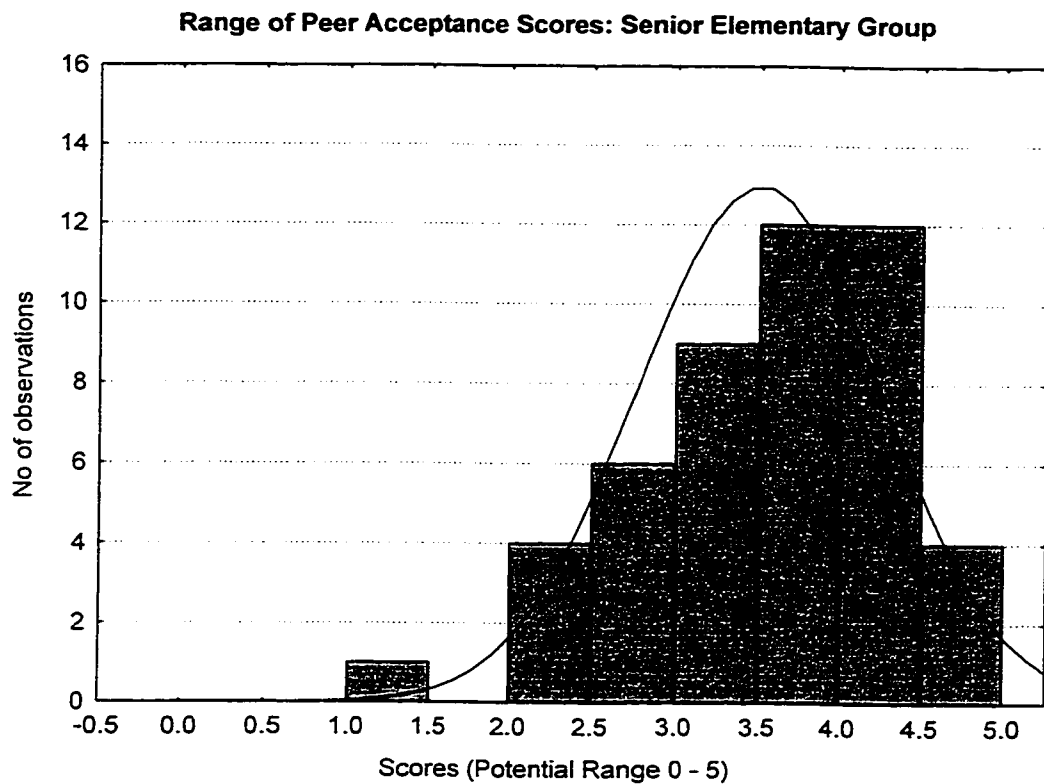
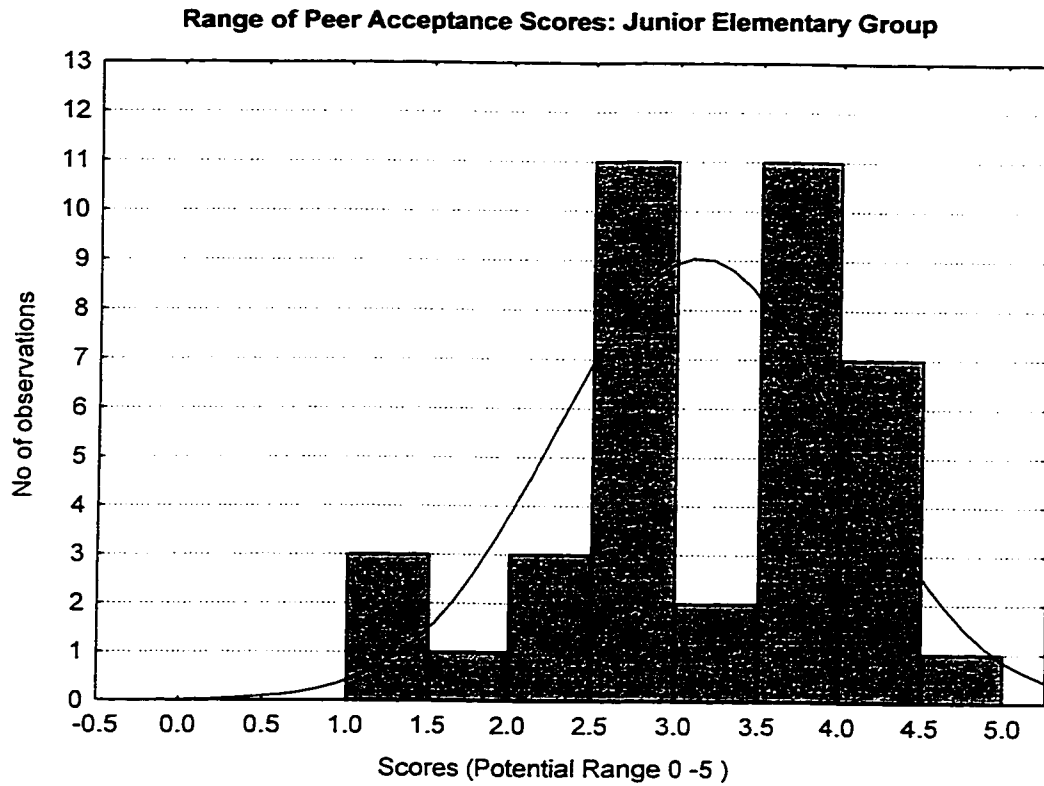


Figure 7. Range of scores for friendship intimacy measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

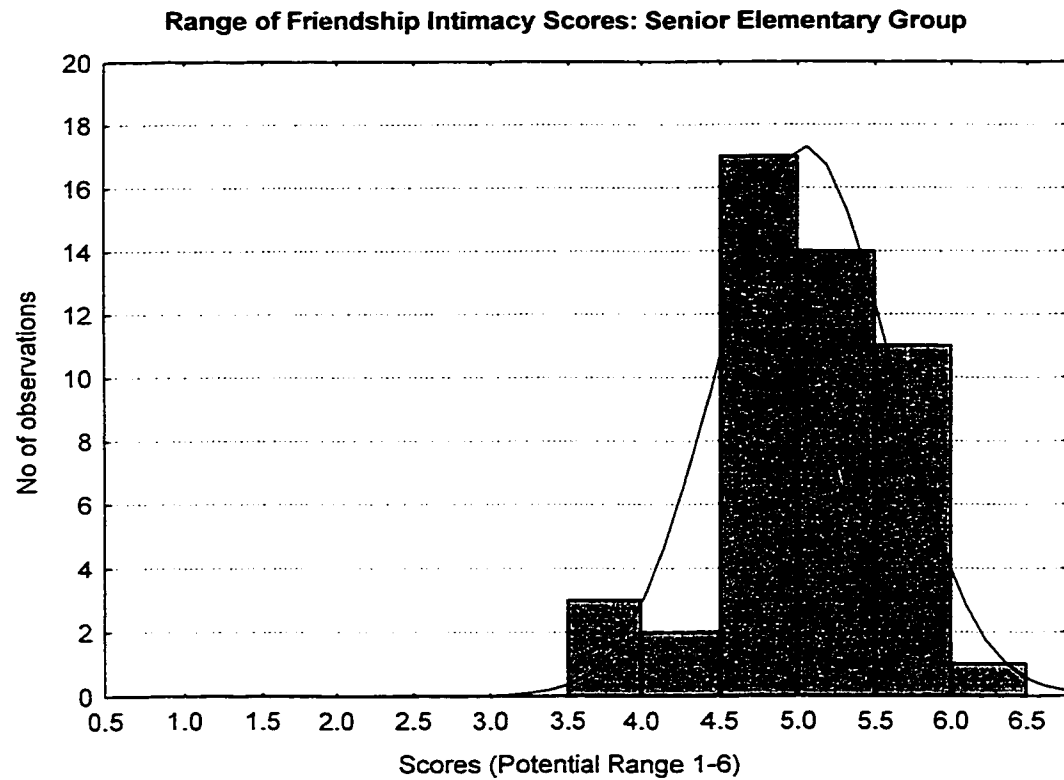
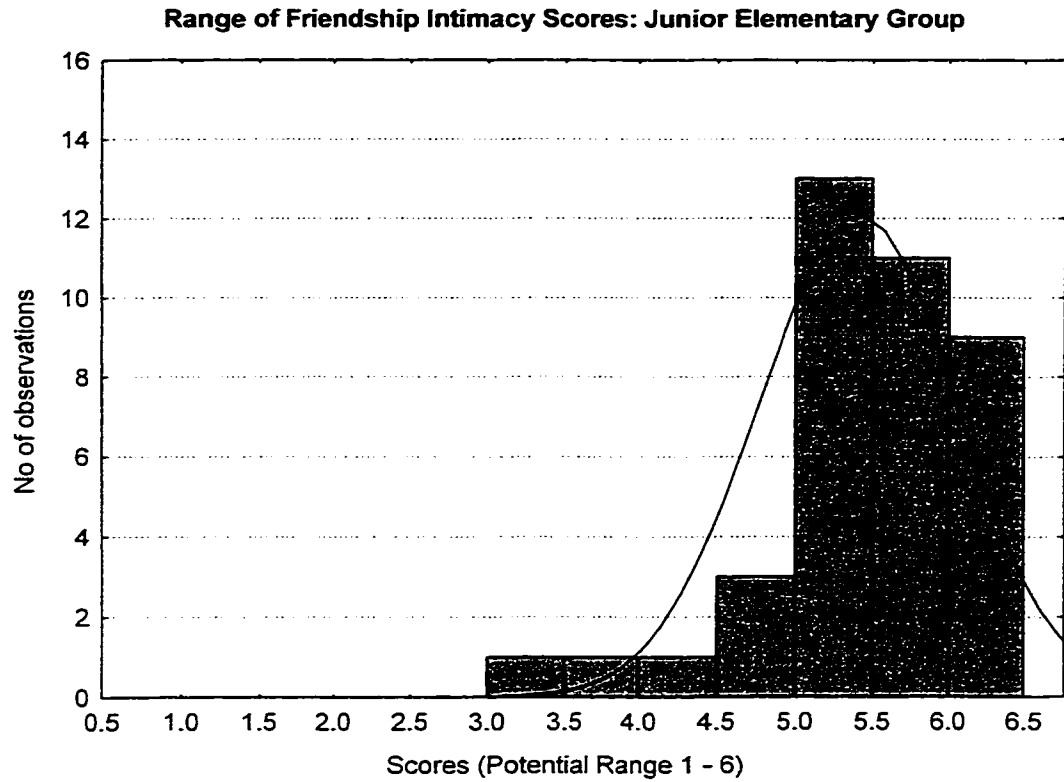


Figure 8. Range of scores for affective perspective-taking measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

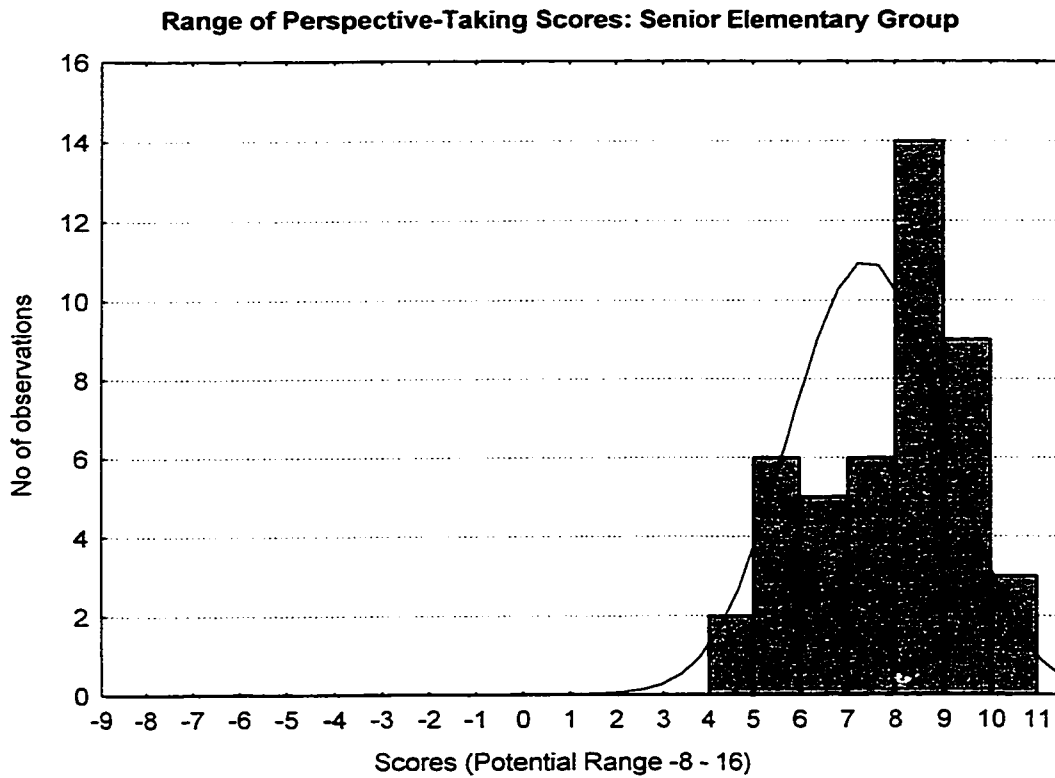
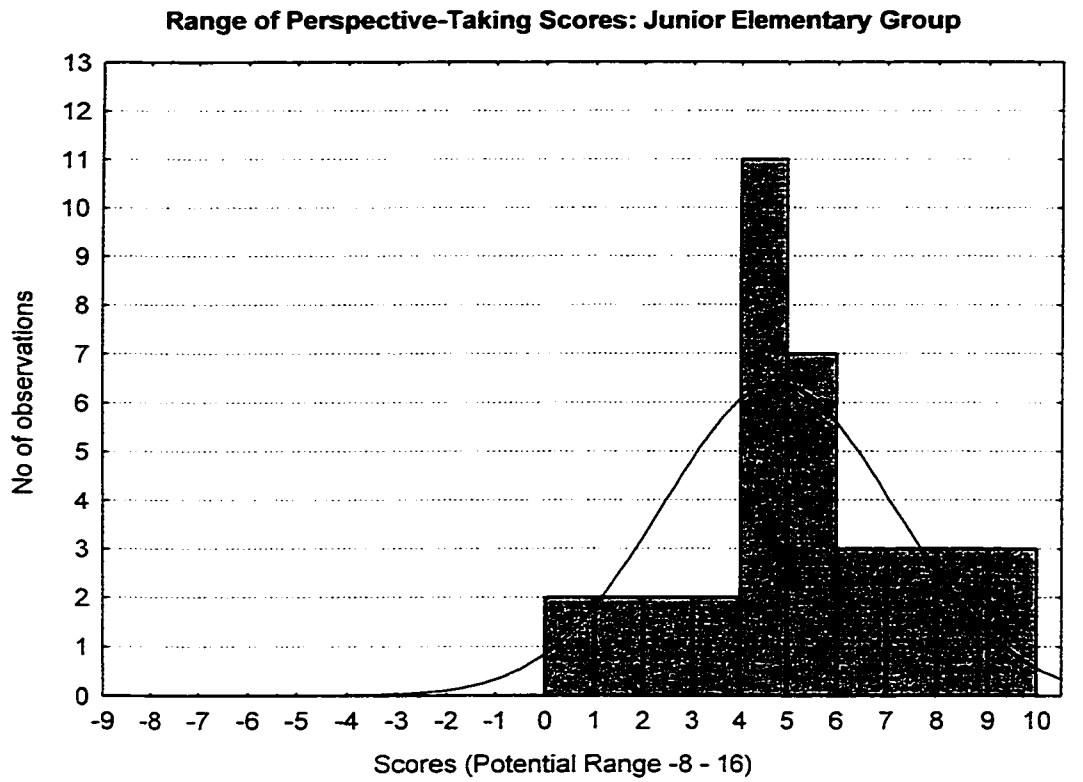


Figure 9. Range of scores for friendship satisfaction measure: Junior and senior elementary subjects.

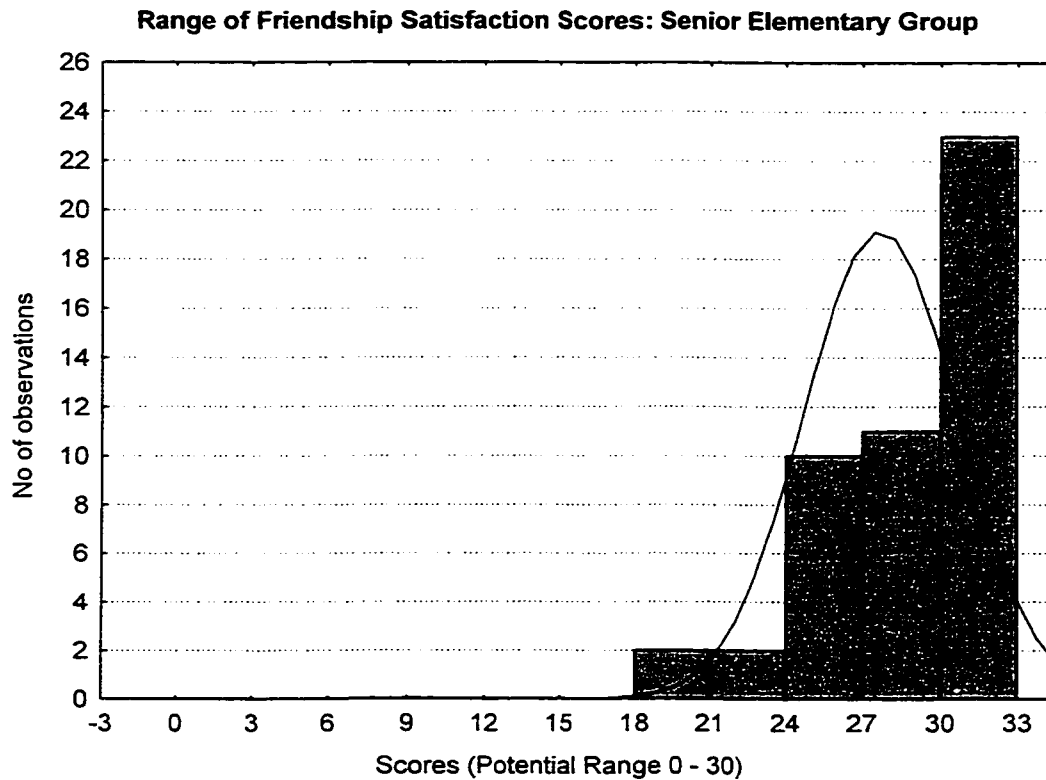
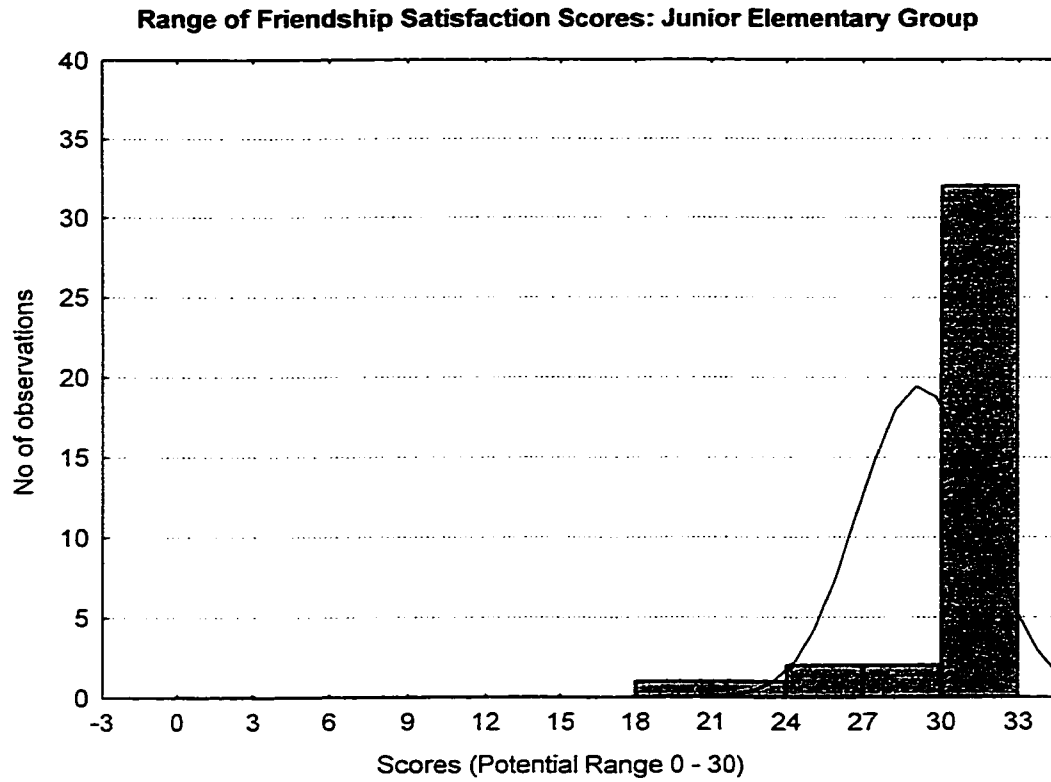


Figure 10. Overall frequency of reports of different categories of gossip provided by participants in interviews.

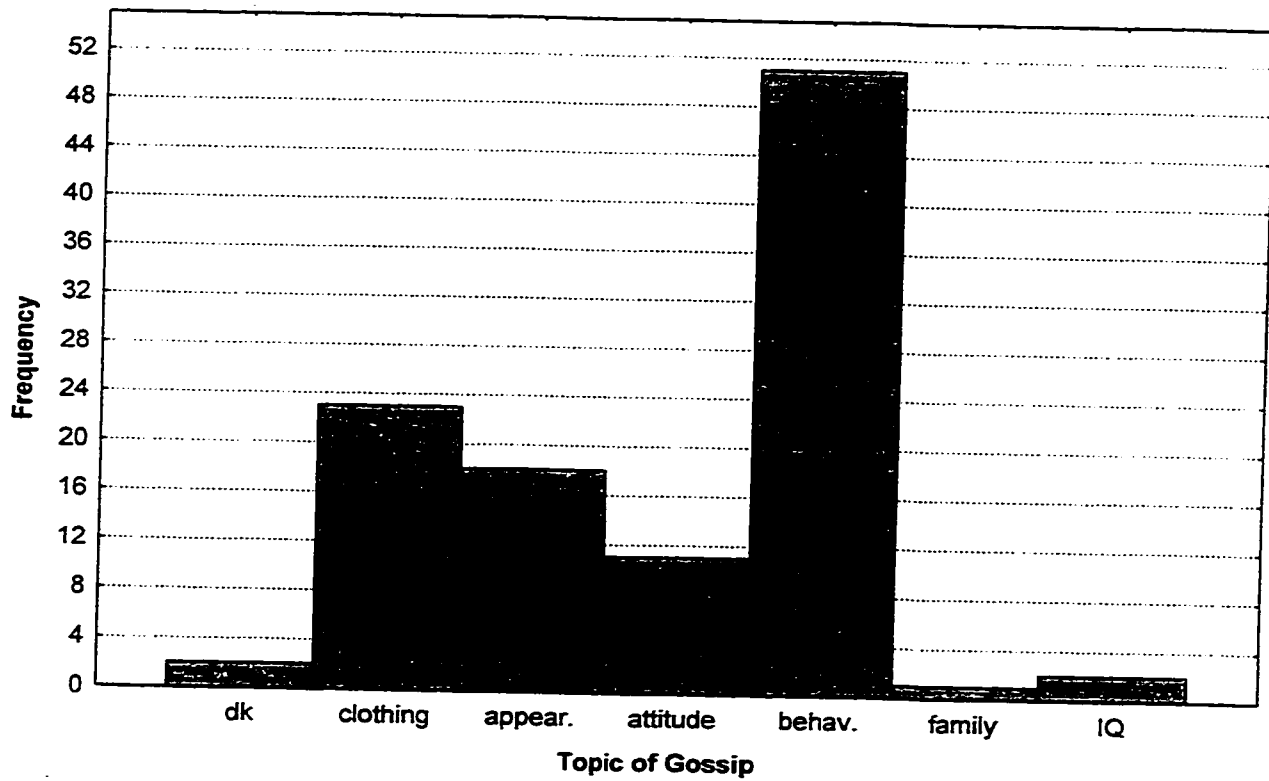


Figure 10. Dk= don't know or not specified; appear.= appearance; behav.= behaviour; IQ= intelligence

Figure 11. Frequency of reports of different approaches to excluding peers from playgroups

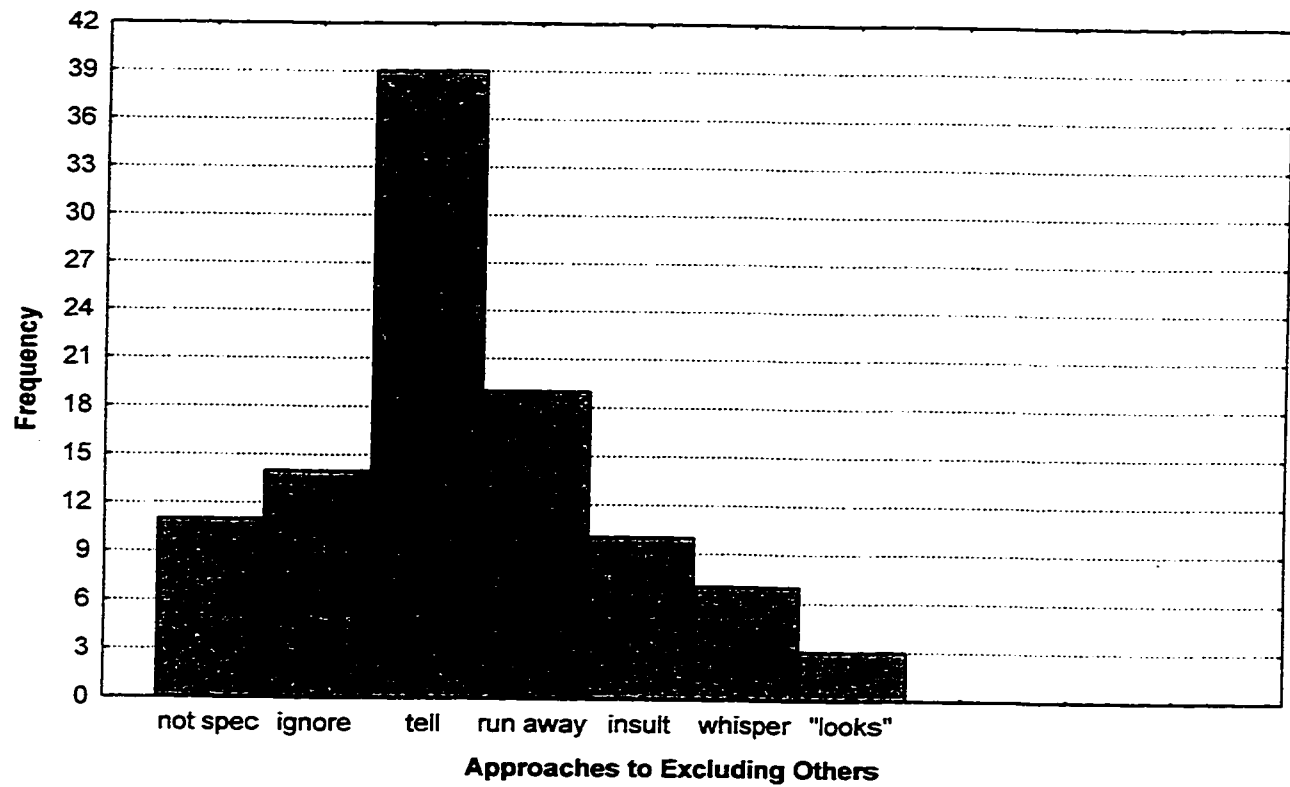


Figure 11. not spec= don't know or not specified; whisper = whisper about the person; "looks"= giving evil looks

Figure 12. Overall frequency of reports of different reasons for gossiping provided by participants in interviews.

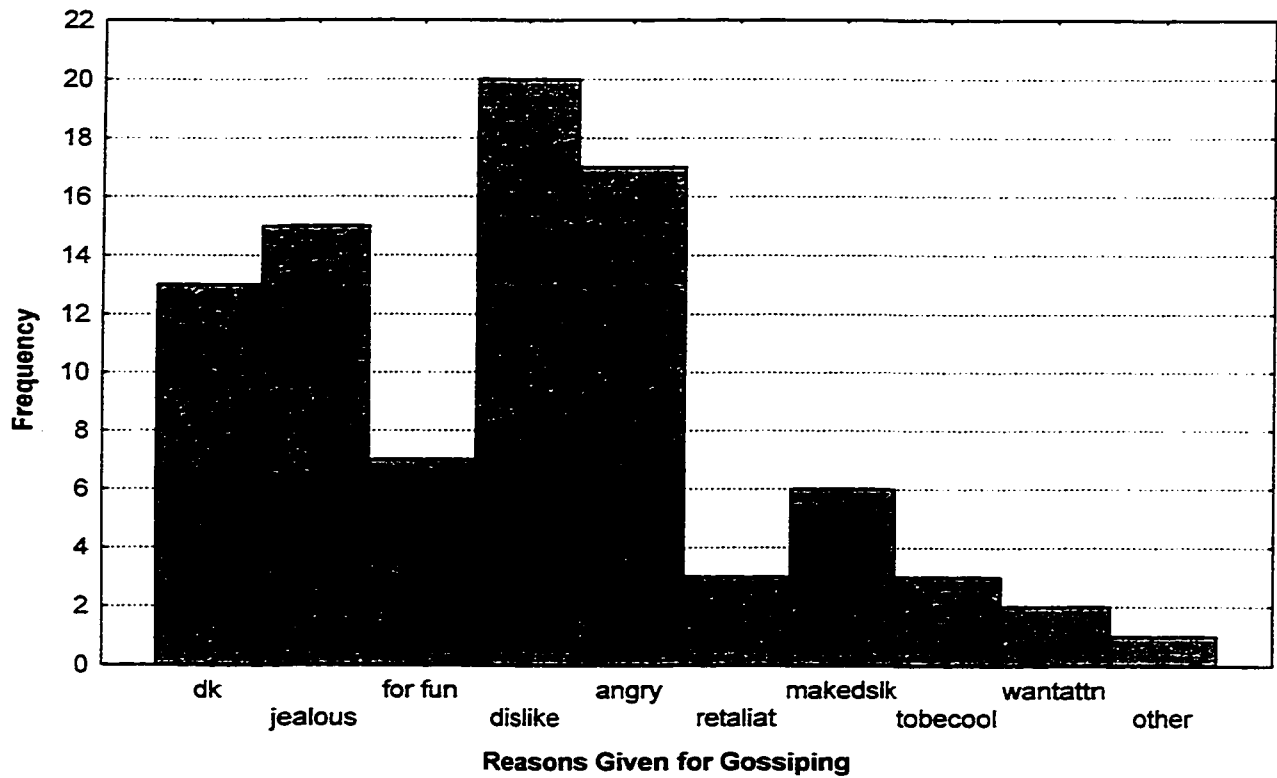


Figure 12. Dk= don't know or not specified; retaliat=retaliation; makedslk=to make others dislike the person; wantattn=want attention

Figure 13. Overall frequency of reports of different reasons given for excluding peers from playgroups.

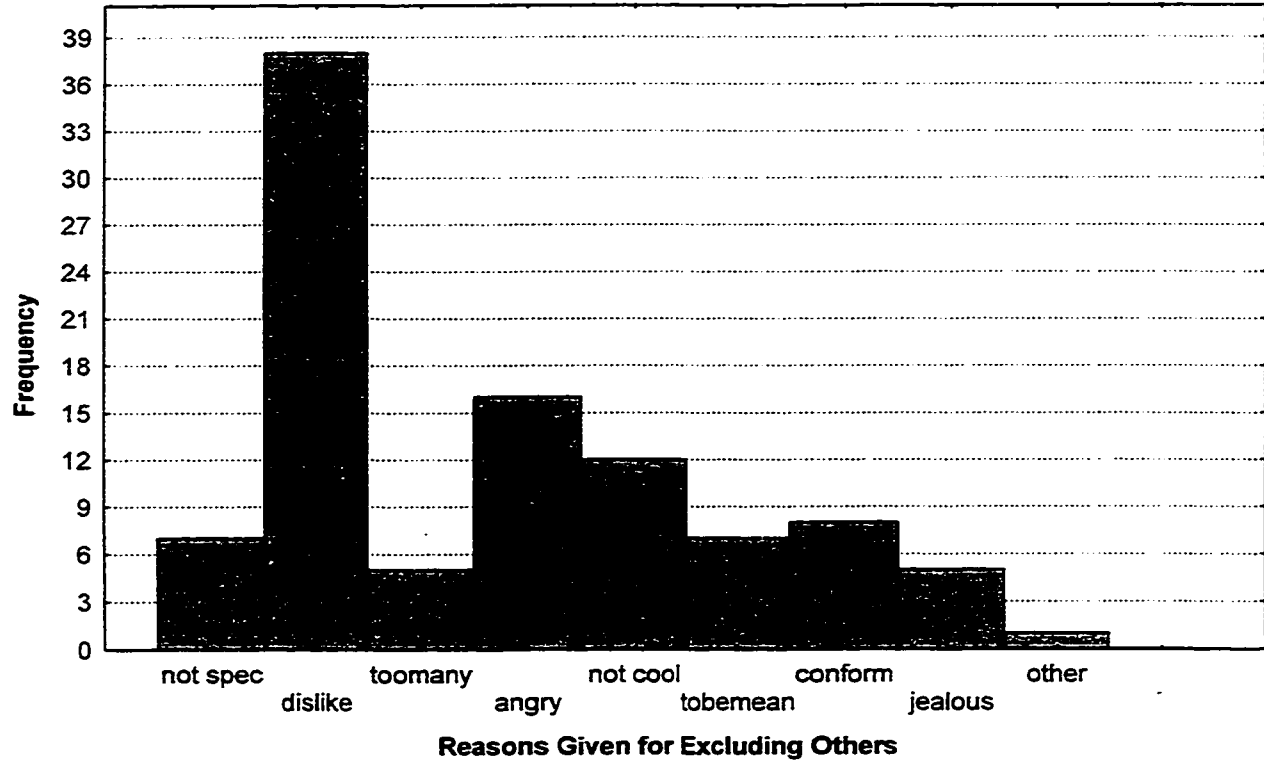
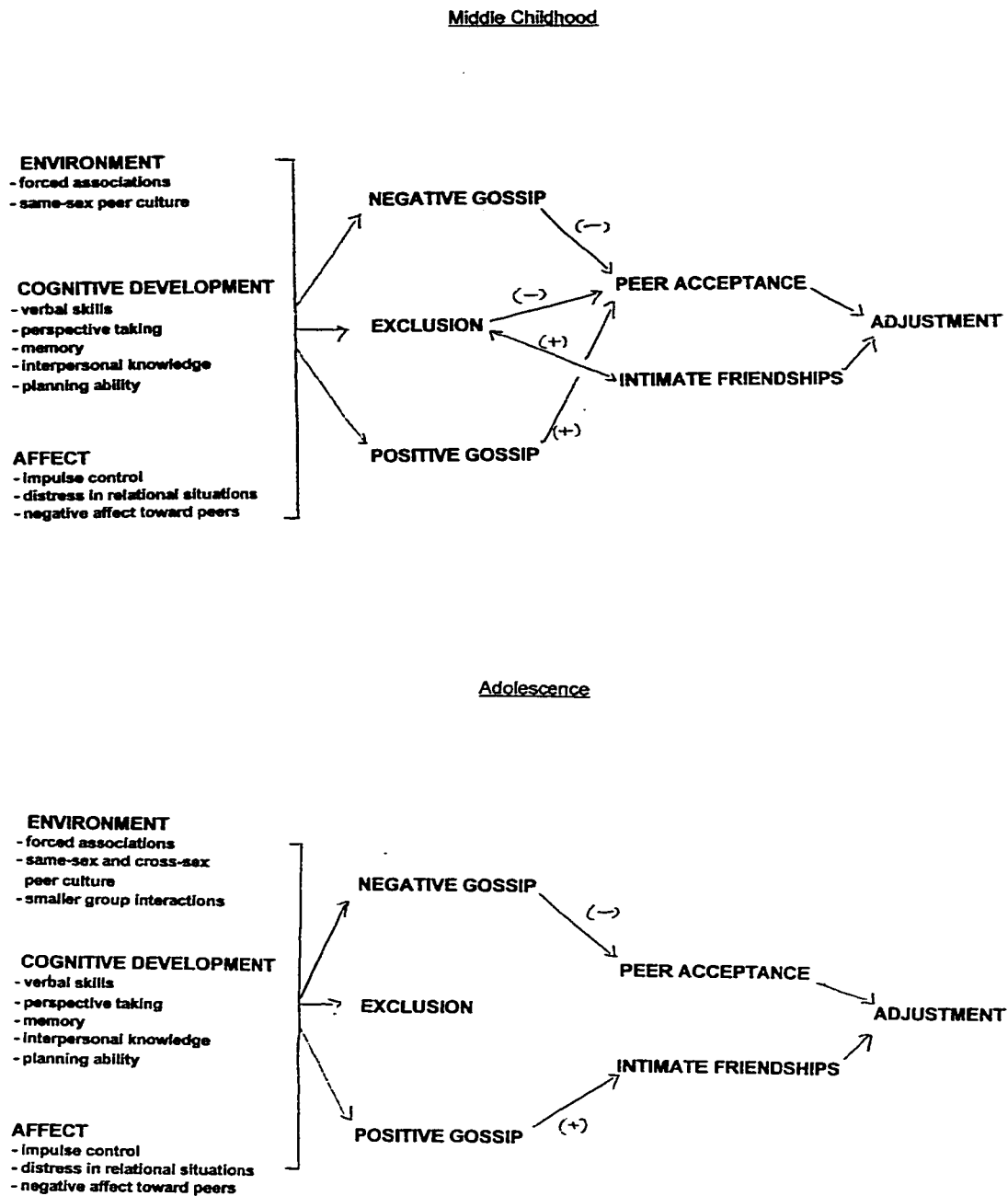


Figure 13. not spec = don't know or not specified; too many= too many people in the group; angry = because angry at the person; not cool= because the person is not cool; conform = too conform, because others excluded someone;

Figure 14. Developmental models of the role of gossip and exclusion in children's friendships and peer-group acceptance in middle childhood and adolescence.



APPENDIX A:
PEER NOMINATION AGGRESSION MEASURE

Peer Nomination Aggression Measure

1. Good Leader

See if you can find the numbers of three kids who you think would make good leaders if you were playing a game. These are the kids you would like to have in charge during a game or activity. When you have found these kids, put their numbers in the blanks next to the words "good leader".

2. Says Mean Things

Find the numbers of three kids who say mean things about other people when they are not there.

3. Hit others

Now find the numbers of three kids who hit, kick, or punch other kids at school. Put their numbers in the three blanks next to the words "hit others".

4. Do Nice Things

Find the numbers of three kids who do nice things for other kids.

5. Keep Out

Find the numbers of three kids who when they are mad at a person, get even by keeping that person from being in their group of friends.

6. Insults

Find the numbers of three kids who say mean things to other kids to insult them or put them down.

7. Help Others

Find the numbers of three kids who help out others when they need it.

8. Ignores Others

Find the numbers of three kids who ignore people or stop talking to them.

9. Push Others

Find the numbers of three kids who push and shove other kids around.

10. Stop Liking

Find the numbers of three kids who tell their friends that they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they say.

11. Cheer Up Others

Find the numbers of three kids who try to cheer up other kids when they are upset or sad about something. They try to make kids feel happy again.

12. Will Beat Up

Find the numbers of three kids who tell others that they will beat them up unless the kids do what they say.

13. Keep People

Find the numbers of three kids who try to keep certain people from being in their group when its time to play or do an activity.

14. Says Nice Things

Find the numbers of three kids who say nice things about other people who aren't there.

15. Unpredictable

Find the numbers of three kids who are unpredictable - you never know what they are going to do next.

16. Good at Math

Find the numbers of three kids who are good at math.

17. Immature

Find the numbers of three kids who are immature - they act younger than other kids their age.

APPENDIX B:
INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP SCALE

APPENDIX C:
MEASURE OF PERSPECTIVE-TAKING ABILITY

Rothenberg Measure of Affective Perspective-Taking Ability
Transcripts of the Four Tape-Recorded Vignettes

Tape 1: Happiness (woman)

M I wonder if there's anything good on TV tonight
W I think there's a good program on at 10:00
M Oh, by the way. I was thinking today about our vacation and you're right.
Going to Yellowstone is our best bet.
W You mean it? (happy and excited)
M Uh-huh
W That's tremendous. When do you think we can go?
M We could leave next Friday.
W Wonderful! I'll have enough time to have the women over for bridge; it's my
turn you know. Then I can do some shopping the next day.
M You'll be ready by Friday then?
W Yes. It's going to be delightful. Sun and lakes and mountains. I can look
forward to it all week.

Tape 2: Anger (man)

M Hi dear. I'm home; have you been outside? It's just a perfect day with a slight
breeze. Not a cloud in the sky.
W Please. I can't be bothered about the weather. There's too many other things
on my mind.
M Is that so! (getting very annoyed). I'm not sure why I even bother coming
home anymore. I get such a friendly greeting from you.
W You never care about what's bothering other people. You just come in
completely unaware of what might be going on here
M Oh. Come on. What do you think I am? A mindreader? Do I bring my
troubles home with me? Well, do I?
W That is not the point.
M No. Of course not. Whatever I say is not the point. Only you can be right, no
one else

Tape 3: Anxiety (woman)

W Well, since you have the evening off, what should we do tonight? Could we go to a movie?

M Oh, I forgot to tell you. I've invited the Jacksons and Greens over for dinner tonight.

W Tonight! Oh no! How can we? I can't be ready.

M Sure you can. Just whip up anything. They're not very fussy.

W But I'd have to clean up the house and pick up some things at the supermarket. I couldn't ever be finished in two hours. How could you expect me to?

M Come on. That's plenty of time.

W Oh! I don't even know where to start.

Tape 4: Sadness (man)

M How about driving over to my sister's house for a little visit now?

W Do I have to go?

M No, of course not. (beginning to sound sad) I just thought you might want to go.

W I guess I just don't like to do the things you like to do.

M Oh please don't say that

W Well, it seems that way to me

M You don't really think we can make our marriage work, do you?

W To be honest, Robert, sometimes I think we're just too different.

M I was afraid that's what you'd say

APPENDIX D:

GOSSIP AND EXCLUSION INTERVIEW

Qualitative Interview:
How Do Girls Relate to One Another?

Part A. Gossip

Sometimes when girls get together they talk about other people: what they look like, what they wear, things they have done, or things they have heard about them.

1. Tell me about a time when you and your friends talked about someone when they weren't there.

What kind of things were said?

How about other times?

2. Why do you think people talk about others?

3. When these things happen, how many girls are usually involved? (probe: two, more than two)

4. Are they more likely to talk about someone when they are with their best friend?

5. What kinds of things do girls say about other people? Are the things usually true?

6. Do girls usually talk about one specific girl, or can it be anyone?

If one: Why do they mostly talk about her? What is this girl like?

7. In your group, does one person talk about others more than the rest? Tell me more about this person.

Part B: Exclusion

Sometimes when girls are hanging out, they might try to keep another girl from joining in and hanging out with them.

8. Tell me about a time when you and your friend(s) kept someone from hanging out with you.

How do they do it?

How about other times?

9. Tell me about a time when a group of girls stopped you from hanging out with them. How about other times?

10. Why do you think girls sometimes exclude others from their groups?

11. When these kinds of things happen, how many girls are usually in the group?
(probe: two, more than two)
12. Is this more likely to happen when people are with their best friends ? Why?
13. Have you ever tried to exclude someone because you were afraid they would "take away" your friend if they hung out with you? Do other people do this?
14. Who does this happen to the most? What is the usual reason? What kind of person is she?

APPENDIX E:
INTERVIEW CODING SYSTEM

INTERVIEW CODING

Part A: Gossip

1. Describe a time when you talked about someone.

a) where:

- 0 - don't know or not specified
- 1 - transit
- 2 - school yard
- 3 - classroom
- 4 - home

b) what said:

- 0 - dk or not specified
- 1 - clothing
- 2 - appearance
- 3 - attitude
- 4 - behaviour
- 5 - family (SES, etc.)
- 6 - IQ

c) no. people involved:

- 0 - dk or not specified
- 1 - 2
- 2 - more than 2

2. Why talk about other people.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - jealous of person
- 2 - for fun
- 3 - don't like person
- 4 - angry with person
- 5 - person talked about you/others
- 6 - to make others dislike the person
- 7 - to go along with the crowd/be cool
- 8 - they want attention
- 9 - other

3. How many usually involved.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - 2
- 2 - more than 2

4. More likely with best friend

- 0 - no
- 1 - yes

b) why

- 0 - dk
- 1 - trust best friend
- 2 - comfortable with best friend

5. What kinds of things are said.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - clothing
- 2 - appearance
- 3 - attitude
- 4 - behaviour
- 5 - family attributes
- 6 - IQ

b) Are the things usually true.

- 0 - no
- 1 - yes
- 2 - sometimes

6. Talk about one specific girl or anyone.

- 0 - no
- 1 - yes

* record subject no.

b) What is she like.

- 0 - nothing specific
- 1 - clothing
- 2 - appearance
- 3 - attitude
- 4 - behaviour
- 5 - family
- 6 - gossips
- 7- popular

7. Does one person gossip more.

- 0 - no
- 1 - yes

b) What is she like.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - positive characteristics
- 2 - negative characteristics

Part B: Exclusion

8. Describe a time when you excluded someone.

a) where:

- 0 - not specified
- 1 - transit
- 2 - school yard
- 3 - classroom
- 4 - home

b) how excluded.

- 0 - not specified
- 1 - ignoring
- 2 - saying can't join
- 3 - run away
- 4 - insulting
- 5 - whispering about the person
- 6 - giving the person evil looks

- c) no. involved.
0 - not specified
1 - two
2 - more than 2

9. Describe a time you were excluded.

a) where:

- 0 - not specified
- 1 - transit
- 2 - school yard
- 3 - classroom
- 4 - home

b) how excluded.

- 0 - not specified
- 1 - ignoring
- 2 - saying can't join
- 3 - run away
- 4 - insulting
- 5 - gossip
- 6 - physical aggression
- 7 - evil looks

c) no. involved.

- 0 - not specified
- 1 - two
- 2 - more than 2

10. Why are people excluded.

- 0 - dk, not specified
- 1 - don't like person
- 2 - too many people in group/activity
- 3 - angry at person
- 4 - the person isn't "cool"
- 5 - to be mean
- 6 - to go along with the group
- 7 - jealous of the person
- 8 - other

11. How many are usually involved.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - two
- 2 - more than 2

12. More likely to happen with best friend.

- 0 - dk
- 1 - no
- 2 - yes

b) why.

0 - dk

1 - want to be alone with bf

2 - afraid of losing bf

3 - trust bf

4 - go along with friend

5 - impress friend

13. Have you excluded in fear of losing a bf.

0 - no

1 - yes

b) Do others do this.

0 - no

1 - yes

14. Who does this happen to most.

0 - anyone

1 - specific girl (* specify sub. no.)

a) What is the usual reason.

0 - dk, not specified

1 - don't like person

2 - too many people in group/activity

3 - angry at person

4 - different

b) What is this person like.

0 - dk

1 - positive characteristics

2 - negative characteristics