

CONVERSATIONAL SELF FOCUS IN YOUTHS' FRIENDSHIPS

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Master of Arts

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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## ABSTRACT

The present research considered conversational self-focus, a previously unstudied variant of normative self-disclosure in which one conversation partner re-directs conversations to focus on the self. It was hypothesized that having a friend who is self-focused, especially during conversations about problems, would be related to negative friendship and emotional outcomes. These hypotheses were addressed in two studies. The first was a school-based study in which youth in grades 5, 8, and 11 reported on their own and their friends' self-focus as well as their own adjustment. The second study was a laboratory study in which the conversational self-focus of youth and their friends was assessed using observational methodology. Generally speaking, the results of the two studies were mixed regarding whether having a friend who is self-focused is linked with (friendship and emotional) adjustment problems or whether one's own self-focus is linked with (emotional) adjustment problems. In particular, Study 1 suggested that youth with internalizing symptoms tend to perceive their friends as being self-focused and report lower friendship quality than youth without internalizing symptoms. However, no significant relations emerged when friends' reports of the friends' self-focus were used. Study 2, on the other hand, suggested that youth with internalizing symptoms tend to self-focus themselves but did not report lower friendship quality. Thus hypothesized relations only emerged when using a single reporter and not when using more stringent methods (observations). Future research should incorporate both survey and observational methods. Additionally, applied contributions of this research (e.g., interventions for self-focused youth) are discussed.

# Conversational Self-focus in Youths' Friendships

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Late childhood and adolescence is a developmental stage in which youth experience significant stressors (Berndt & Hanna, 1995). Given the increased importance of close friends at this time (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Sullivan, 1953), it is likely that these youth will often turn to their friends to seek support. One way in which these relationships may afford youth the support they seek is through the process of self-disclosure. For instance, when youth share sensitive information about themselves with friends and are supported, they likely feel a sense of validation and self-worth. Self-disclosure within the context of friendship is associated with other aspects of positive friendship quality (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993) and better emotional adjustment (e.g., Buhrmester, 1990; Jourard, 1964). However, research with both adults (Vangelisti, Knapp, & Daly, 1990) and youth (Belle, 1989; Rose, 2002; Zahn-Waxler, 2000) indicates that not all types of self-disclosure may be similarly beneficial.

The present research considers a previously unstudied variation of self-disclosure in youths' friendships, conversational self-focus. Self-disclosure normally involves a give-and-take process (Roy, Benenson, & Lilly, 2000), but conversational self-focus is proposed to be an aberration of normative self-disclosure. Conversational self-focus is



defined as the tendency of one conversation partner to re-direct a conversation to focus on himself or herself. Despite the generally positive implications for self-disclosure in friendships, having a friend who is self-focused was expected to be related to negative friendship and emotional outcomes. These hypotheses were addressed in two studies. One was a questionnaire school-based study of youth in grades 5, 8, and 11. Another was a laboratory observational study and involved youth in grade 10.

### *Functions of Self-Disclosure*

Self-disclosure is commonly defined as the revealing of personal information to others (Cozby, 1973). This type of communication involves an individual divulging his or her thoughts, self-evaluations, intense feelings, or important past experiences (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The content of self-disclosure varies greatly. For example, self-disclosure messages may refer to information or facts about oneself or may refer to personal feelings, opinions, and judgments (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993).

In addition, the majority of the self-disclosure literature acknowledges reciprocity as a norm (e.g., Cozby, 1973; Derlega et al., 1993; Jourard, 1971). That is to say that when one person discloses personal information, it is expected that the recipient will, in turn, divulge similarly personal information (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Miller & Kenny, 1986). Reciprocity of self-disclosure may be thought of as a ‘give-and-take’ process. As described below, Derlega and Grzelak (1979) discuss five functions of self-disclosure that aid in understanding of the central role of these conversation processes in close relationships.

*Social validation.* Self-disclosure to close others is a viable means of gaining social validation (Prager, Fuller, & Gonzales, 1989). According to Derlega and Grzelak

(1979), one reason why people self-disclose may be to gain feedback that alerts them to the appropriateness and validity of their thoughts. Two related concepts may help to explain how self-disclosure processes lead to feelings of social validation: social approval and self-acceptance (Berg & Archer, 1982). When individuals self-disclose, they invite evaluative social cues from the listener that provide a gauge of social approval (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Individuals may feel socially validated if their partners express approval of the thoughts and feelings that they disclose. Second, the desire for self-acceptance may motivate people to self-disclose in the hopes of achieving social validation (Berg & Archer, 1982). Self-disclosure to this end may provide social feedback assuring an individual that he or she is not alone in his or her thoughts, feelings, or experiences (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). This idea is in line with the thinking behind Cooley's concept of the "looking glass self" (1902), which asserts that people come to view and value themselves based on the perceptions and values of others.

*Social control.* Self-disclosure is also a means by which people achieve self-presentation goals (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). The disclosing and/or withholding of particular pieces of information may be used to lead others to form certain desired impressions of the self. The interpersonal nature of self-disclosure fosters the speaker's conformity to social norms (Baumeister, 1982). Thus self-disclosure for self-presentational purposes may enable individuals to manipulate the ways in which they are perceived by others and to be regarded as socially acceptable.

*Self-clarification.* Disclosers in the communication process are forced to more clearly express themselves to a listener than if they were thinking alone (Jourard, 1971). Thus self-disclosure may be a way for individuals to gain self-clarification of opinions,

beliefs, attitudes, values, and standards. Self-disclosure of this sort may generate a dialogue between two people in which both participants' evolving ideas are clarified (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979).

*Self-expression.* Derlega and Grzelak (1979) also believe self-disclosure to be a viable means through which people may express pent-up feelings or thoughts in a cathartic manner. Disclosing emotional information about the self can be therapeutic in two ways. Disclosers may feel a release of sorts from the venting of distressing information (Mahoney, 1995). Likewise, disclosers may invite emotional support and problem-solving assistance by the divulging of emotional or problem-type information (e.g., Thoits, 1986).

*Relationship development.* A final function of self-disclosure cited by Derlega and Grzelak (1979) is the cultivation of intimacy in relationships. Intimacy has been defined in a number of ways in the psychological literature (Derlega et al., 1993; Furman & Robbins, 1985; Reisman, 1990) but is often discussed as feelings of emotional closeness (Reis & Shaver, 1988). For the purposes of studying self-disclosure and relationship development, intimacy is best conceptualized as emotional closeness. Self-disclosure should lead to emotional closeness in relationships as it provides a sounding board for thoughts and feelings (Buhrmester, 1996) and promotes trust, acceptance, and feelings of being understood (Furman & Robbins, 1985). As relationships develop, both the disclosure and emotional closeness levels should increase (McKinney & Donaghy, 1993). The ability to disclose about personal thoughts and feelings with a confidant is often considered to be a defining feature of an emotionally-supportive relationship (Kessler, McLeod, & Wetherington, 1985).

### *The Role of Self-Disclosure in Youths' Friendships*

Late childhood and adolescence are particularly crucial developmental periods in which peer relations are important for youth. H. S. Sullivan's interpersonal theory of social development (1953) provides a strong rationale for why adolescence is such a remarkable developmental period for friendship development. The theory (1953) states that a youth's need for social benefits (e.g., tenderness, companionship, acceptance, and intimacy) organizes his or her personal relationships and personality development. Thus, different relationships can help youth to acquire these social needs at different stages of the lifespan. During late childhood and early adolescence, youth first experience the need for interpersonal intimacy in friendships as they begin to develop autonomy from their parents (Sullivan, 1953). This is a time in which youth perceive their friendships as increasingly important sources of companionship, support, and feelings of affection (Sullivan, 1953).

Given this theoretical basis for predicting that dyadic friendships are important in the lives of youth (Sullivan, 1953), it is not surprising that there is a great deal of research indicating that participation in dyadic friendships is linked with positive adjustment outcomes. Much of this research involves community samples. For example, with regard to social outcomes, having friends is associated with higher levels of social competence, sociability, and cooperation (Hartup, 1993), as well as higher ratings of popularity among peers (Cauce, 1986). Emotionally, youth with friends experience higher levels of self-esteem (McGuire & Weisz, 1982), lower levels of loneliness (Hartup, 1993), and fewer problems with identity development (Papini, Farmer, Clark, Micka, & Barnett, 1990).

With regard to school outcomes, children with friends have higher levels of scholastic involvement and achievement (e.g., Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999).

Moreover, research further indicates that youth with peer relationship problems, including problems with their friendships, often experience clinically significant socioemotional difficulties. In particular, peer difficulties are a common referral problem for youth in therapy (Hawley & Weisz, 2003). Further, clinic-referred children are especially likely to be friendless (Rutter & Garnezy, 1983). Additionally, peer relationship problems are a poor prognosticator for future emotional adjustment (Ollendick, Weist, Borden, & Greene, 1992).

Self-disclosure is one aspect of friendship in adolescence that may contribute to positive adjustment among youth. It is during this particular developmental stage that friends become increasingly important sources of social support (Sullivan, 1953). For example, disclosure to peers increases during adolescence, whereas disclosure to parents does not (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). This likely reflects not only increased time spent with peers (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995), but also the increasingly important role of peers in terms of providing social support. Notably, Sullivan emphasized the importance of intimacy in adolescent friendships and suggested that self-disclosure was a significant pathway to this coveted emotional closeness (1953).

Self-disclosure serves a variety of functions within friendships. Buhrmester and Prager (1995) provide an excellent discussion of the social-developmental functions and benefits of self-disclosure in youths' friendships with particular attention paid to the uniqueness of adolescent development. As described in the following sections, the

authors use Derlega and Grzelak's five functions of self-disclosure (1979) as a framework for their discussion.

### *Social validation*

Children's concerns about social validation increase with age (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Increased cognitive ability may in part help to account for this increase in concern regarding social validation. For with the acquisition of formal operational abilities, adolescents are able to reflect upon abstract conceptualizations of themselves (Damon & Hart, 1982). This increase in self-consciousness may be related to the increased concern regarding social validation as youth are likely to seek approval for their newly developed self-perceptions. In addition, as children move from middle childhood into adolescence, concerns regarding social approval shift from parents and other adults to the peer group (Berndt, 1979). Thus, many youth may use self-disclosure to friends to gain social validation of thoughts, feelings or actions from age-mates (Prager, Fuller, & Gonzales, 1989).

### *Social control*

As discussed above, self-disclosure can be used to achieve self-presentation goals (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Due to the confluence of particular cognitive and sociocultural factors, adolescence is a time where youth experience heightened self-presentation goals, especially in the peer context (Parker & Gottman, 1989). That is, as adolescents are able to engage in increased perspective-taking, many youth come to feel that peers evaluate their thoughts and actions (Harter, 1989). This concern is justified, as many conversations among adolescent youth may be for the purpose of evaluating peers (i.e., gossip; Eder & Enke, 1991). Accordingly, it is understandable that youth could use

self-disclosure as a means of strategic self-presentation. Thus by either disclosing or withholding certain pieces of information, youth may use self-disclosure as a tool to achieve particular self-presentation goals.

### *Self-clarification*

Self-disclosure can promote clarification of opinions, beliefs, attitudes, values, and standards (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Buhrmester and Prager (1995) discuss two reasons why adolescent youth, in particular, may use self-disclosure for self-clarification purposes. First, by sharing thoughts and opinions, youth may begin to develop their own standards of conduct and moral values (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Second, self-disclosure may lead to clarification of a youth's identity and self-understanding (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Both moral concerns and identity concerns are particularly salient for adolescent youth (Harter, 1990). Clarification of moral and identity concerns may be easier for youth within the egalitarian forum of friendship (Youniss, 1980) than within the unequal power structure of the parent-child relationship.

### *Self-expression*

Youth may use self-disclosure as a coping mechanism, as self-disclosure is a form of self-expression, or cathartic release (Mahoney, 1995). Because youth spend less time with parents and more time with peers, self-expression is increasingly directed toward peers. It may be that self-expression becomes increasingly common at this age because adolescents experience an increase in social pressures (e.g., appearance, puberty) which could contribute to their need for a cathartic release. Thus adolescents, much more than younger children, may rely on self-disclosure to peers as a coping tool. Self-disclosure also may prompt social support in the form of emotional support or problem-solving

advice (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Youth who self-disclose may engage friends in discussions of problems, their nature, and possible avenues to resolution (Parker & Gottman, 1989). Use of self-disclosure for cathartic release and to prompt social support seems to increase in adolescence (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995).

### *Relationship development*

Finally, self-disclosure in friendship is essential to positive relationship development among youth (Parker & Asher, 1993). At adolescence, youth reduce their emotional dependency on parental figures, and the importance of emotional closeness in friendships increases (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Sullivan, 1953). As was previously discussed, emotional closeness can be achieved through self-disclosure in relationships (Furman & Robbins, 1985). Accordingly, personal self-disclosure is regarded as a critical feature of friendship relations in the adolescent stage (Berndt, 1982). In fact, adolescents self-disclose significantly more to friends than to their parents (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Papini, et al., 1990). By self-disclosing to friends, youth may be able to work through adolescent issues (e.g., changing schools; first romantic relationships) whilst still maintaining the independence asserted by withholding personal information from their parents (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977).

### *Self-Disclosure and Friendship Quality*

Multiple researchers (e.g., Bukowski, Boivin, & Hoza, 1994; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993) have identified core aspects of friendship quality. Although there is not complete overlap among measures of friendship quality in which features are assessed, they typically include various positive aspects of youth's friendships, such as reliable alliance, affection, companionship, help and guidance, and



validation and caring. They also include negative aspects of friendships, such as conflict and betrayal, antagonism, and criticism. Intimate self-disclosure is typically thought to be one feature or quality of friendships (Parker & Asher, 1993). Consideration of the five functions of self-disclosure as presented by Derlega and Grzelak (1979) and discussed again by Buhrmester and Prager (1995) supports the idea that self-disclosure should be related to both positive and negative aspects of friendship quality among youth.

For example, through the social validation function, self-disclosure should contribute to affective aspects of friendship quality, such as affection. This is because the experience of confiding and having a friend provide a sounding board for thoughts and feelings can promote feelings of emotional connectedness and closeness (Camaera, Sarigiani, & Peterson, 1990). More specifically, the function of social validation also should contribute to feelings of validation and caring within the friendship. By definition, this function involves friends providing validation and support for one's disclosures. In addition, the functions self-clarification and self-expression may each contribute to the friendship being perceived as helpful. That is, youth may appreciate the opportunity to work through ideas about problems with friends through the self-clarification process and appreciate the friends' role in the cathartic process of self-expression.

On the other hand, low levels of self-disclosure in friendships should be related to negative aspects of friendship quality. For instance, if friends have few opportunities to provide youth with social validation, youth may feel unsupported in their friendships which could become a source of conflict in the relationship. As another example, if youth are not able to achieve self-presentation goals through the function of social control and

so are not able to present themselves in the best light, this may open the door to their feeling like their friends are critical of them.

In line with these predictions, there is empirical support for the idea that self-disclosure is related to other aspects of positive and negative friendship quality. Self-disclosure has been found to be moderately positively correlated with other aspects of positive friendship quality, such as companionship, affection, and help and guidance (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). Additionally, self-disclosure is negatively correlated with aspects of negative friendship quality like conflict and betrayal, antagonism, and criticism (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). Consistent with these findings, Matsushima and Shiomi (2001) also found that adolescents who did not disclose about internal aspects of the self tended to feel strongly that they could not get along with their friends.

#### *Self-disclosure and Emotional Adjustment*

The self-disclosure functions (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979) of social validation, social control, self-clarification and self-expression further aid in the understanding of the link between self-disclosure and emotional adjustment. Because adolescence is a developmental period in which youth encounter new and challenging stressors, friends' validation of youths' thoughts and feelings may help to buffer youth against a decrease in feelings of well-being. Sullivan (1953) similarly proposed that people feel better when they gain the assurance that others share their thoughts, opinions and insecurities. In regards to social control, as adolescents can be consumed with worries related to others' perception of the self, self-disclosure as a means of social control (i.e., withholding or disclosing particular pieces of information about the self in order to achieve certain self-

presentation goals) can also serve to alleviate anxiety related to peers' perceptions of the self. The function of self-clarification may also be useful for emotional well-being. That is, because adolescents are concerned with the issues of morality and identity development (Harter, 1990), self-disclosure may allow a forum for clarification of ideas and alleviation of stress related to these concerns. Finally, the function of self-expression may help to explain the association between self-disclosure and emotional adjustment. Self-disclosure as a cathartic release may help youth cope with stress and associated negative affect and may also prompt friends to provide social support (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995).

There is empirical support that is consistent with the conceptual rationale for the association between self-disclosure and positive emotional adjustment. For example, young adults who report competency in self-disclosure rate themselves as less anxious and depressed (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). In terms of youth, Buhrmester (1990) also found that self-disclosure was related to better psychological adjustment (e.g., lower levels of anxiety and depression) among adolescents (but not younger children). Further, people who are nondisclosing about internal aspects of the self tend to feel elevated loneliness (Parker & Asher, 1993; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2001). Even the simple act of talking to friends for a short period of time in a laboratory setting has been found to alleviate negative affect (Denton & Zabatany, 1996).

### *Self-Focus in Adolescent Friendships*

The current research investigated a previously unstudied subtype of self-disclosure, conversational self-focus. Conversational self-focus is defined as an aberration of normative self-disclosure in which one conversation partner continually re-

directs a conversation to focus on himself or herself. This subtype of self-disclosure is a deviation from the give-and-take processes associated with normative (i.e., reciprocal) self-disclosure. If one conversation partner engages in self-focus and dominates discussions, then reciprocal self-disclosure is by definition impeded. Further, conversational self-focus differs from support seeking conversational processes associated with normative self-disclosure. That is, conversational self-focus is not merely talking at length about one's problems; it involves active re-direction of conversations to focus on the self. As discussed in detail in the following sections, it was proposed that self-focus in friendship interferes with the functions of self disclosure described previously and, therefore, may have a negative effect on youth's friendship quality and emotional adjustment.

To date, very little attention to this particular subtype of self-disclosure has been paid in the literature. To the best of current knowledge, no previous research has examined self-focus within youths' close friendships. However, there was one study involving a construct similar to conversational self-focus among adults. An empirical investigation with adults by Vangelisti and colleagues (1990) evaluated an idea called "conversational narcissism" (Derber, 1979). Derber (1979) originally defined conversational narcissism as the "ways that American conversationalists act to turn the topics of ordinary conversations to themselves without showing sustained interest in others' topics" (p.5). The authors (1990) slightly amended this definition for their study and defined conversational narcissism as "typified by an extreme self-focusing in a conversation, to the exclusion of appropriate concerns for the other" (p.251). Their study examined conversations between adult strangers and found that this type of extreme self-

focusing of one conversation partner during experimental interactions did, in fact, impede reciprocal self-disclosure.

Although there is little empirical evidence related to conversational self-focus, the study of conversational narcissism is consistent with the idea that one-sided disclosure processes are problematic and should be studied further. Moreover, given the increased importance of self-disclosure in adolescence, studying these processes in late childhood and adolescence may be especially useful. Despite the generally positive impact of self-disclosure on adjustment among youth, self-focus in friendships may be related to adjustment difficulties. Thus the current studies sought to extend past research on self-disclosure processes in adolescent friendships by examining conversational self-focus and its effects on adjustment.

In particular, the current research considered self-focus in the context of youth talking about problems. Conversational self-focus could occur in any context. For example, youth may self-focus in conversations about positive events (e.g., excelling in sports or academics). However, the context of discussing problems was chosen because it seems especially likely that the inability of one conversation partner to give due attention to the other's problems and concerns could be particularly problematic. An important component of friendship is that friends are there to help one another deal with problems and concerns (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). Thus, the impact of self-focus on adjustment outcomes may be especially important in the context of youth discussing problems. However, these implications may be different for youth having a friend who is self-focused and youth who are self-focused themselves.

### *Having a Friend Who is Self-Focused: Implications for Adjustment*

When youth seek support from a friend for a problem or concern, they ideally receive the support they seek (Cohen & McKay, 1984). Thus the onus is on the friend to determine what type of support is necessary, given the problem or concern presented (Cohen & McKay, 1984). However, in the case of self-focus, presumably the friend fails to identify what type of support if any is required of them to convey. This inability to deliver support may convey negative messages to youth about the status of the friendship as well as their own self-worth, thus impacting their adjustment in an undesirable way.

More specifically, consider how having a self-focused friend could interfere with the positive functions that self disclosure is generally thought to serve (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Youth attempting to gain social validation through self-disclosure to a friend who engages in conversational self-focus would not get very far in having their thoughts or concerns validated. Rather, they would be directed to the role of listener by nature of their friend's dominant conversation style. Likewise, youth unable to equally participate in a conversation may not be afforded the opportunity to self-disclose for the purpose of social control. Self-clarification functions could also be impeded. That is, if youth are unable to engage a self-focused friend in a reciprocal discussion of opinions and beliefs, then they will be unable to reap the same benefits from self-disclosure as youth who are allowed equal participation in conversations with their friends. In regards to self-expression, youth with a friend who is self-focused may not be able to express, on an equal level, their feelings and concerns in a cathartic manner. Further, even if they are able to express their concerns, youths' self-focused friends may not spend an adequate amount of time attending to these thoughts and concerns. Finally, relationship

development may be affected by conversational self-focus. That is, youth with a friend who is self-focused may not experience the emotional closeness normally afforded youth through reciprocal self-disclosure.

#### *Links with Friendship Quality*

Youth with a friend who is self-focused may not be able to receive the relationship benefits of self-disclosure in the same way as youth who experience more normative self-disclosure between friends. In particular, youth with a friend who is self-focused were hypothesized to perceive their friendships as lower in quality. That is, if interactions are typically one-sided, the emotional connection between friends afforded by normative self-disclosure would be impeded for these youth.

The self-disclosure functions of social validation, social control, self-clarification, and self-expression, and relationship development illustrate this point. Youth with a friend who is self-focused may not receive the social validation they seek, as their friend may not give the time and attention necessary to convey that the youth's thoughts and concerns are indeed, valid. Perceiving a friend as invalidating is likely to lead youth to consider their friendships to be lower in positive qualities, such as affection and validation and caring. Perceiving a friend to be invalidating could also become a source of conflict in the relationship. Youth also may feel criticized by a self-focused friend who does not allow them to pursue self-presentation goals through the function of social control. Moreover, youth who have a self-focused friend may be less likely to perceive the friendship as helpful if the friend does not allow them to engage in the processes of self-clarification or self-expression. Last, according to the relationship development function, self-disclosure should contribute to feelings of emotional closeness and

associated positive friendship qualities. When a youth finds that reciprocal self-disclosure processes are not possible due to a self-focused friend, they should be unlikely to develop these positive perceptions of their friendships.

#### *Links with Emotional Adjustment*

Having a friend who is self-focused also might prevent youth from gaining the emotional benefits afforded youth by normative self-disclosure. In particular, having a friend who is self-focused was hypothesized to be related to greater internalizing problems like anxiety and depression. That is, not having the opportunity to receive support for one's personal expressions could lead youth to feel unsupported, thus compromising their emotional well-being.

Specifically, the self-disclosure functions of social control, self-clarification and self-expression may not be served. If the self-focused friend does not give youth the opportunity to participate in the social control function of alleviating anxiety regarding others' perceptions of the self, this anxiety may persist and may contribute to more global symptoms of distress. Likewise, youth who are unable to participate in conversations on an equal level because their friend self-focuses may be unable to obtain the self-clarification that they seek for their ideas. Lacking the opportunity for this type of self-clarification could lead to anxious or depressed feelings because youth would be unable to gain clarification of ideas related to their problems or concerns in a supportive environment. Further, youth may not have ample time or attention given them by a self-focused friend for self-expression. This may prevent youth from obtaining the cathartic benefits of self-expression and also from obtaining problem-solving advice and/or



emotional support that could help to alleviate symptoms of emotional distress associated with the troubles.

#### *Being a Self-Focused Friend: Implications for Adjustment*

It is yet unclear what effect self-focus would have on the friendship and emotional adjustment of youth who are, themselves, self-focused. Presumably, self-focused youth have many of their relationship and emotional needs met during self-disclosure conversations, as they and their thoughts and/or problems are the primary focus. Accordingly, self-focused youth may not experience concurrent problems in terms of their perceptions of the quality of their friendships or their emotional well-being. Although it is possible that self-focused youth experience future relationship and emotional difficulties, the current research did not assess prospective relationships and so focused on hypotheses regarding concurrent well-being.

#### *Links with Friendship Adjustment*

Perhaps a friend who dominates conversations perceives his or her friendship to be high-quality. That is, youth who self-focus may enjoy the self-disclosure functions of social validation and relationship development, as their thoughts and concerns receive primary attention. Although this interpersonal style may contribute to relationship problems later in development or over the longer-term course of the relationship, it is unlikely that current associations with problematic adjustment will be observed.

#### *Links with Emotional Adjustment*

It also is possible that youth who self-focus may be receiving the benefits of self-disclosure associated with positive emotional adjustment (e.g., lower levels of anxiety and depression). This is understandable as the majority of time spent discussing thoughts

or concerns with friends may be focused on themselves and/or solving their problems. For example, youth who self-focus may be able to more effectively use self-disclosure to achieve their social control, self-clarification, and self-expression goals simply because they have more time during conversations to do so. Thus, the current emotional adjustment for youth who engage in conversational self-focus may not, in fact, be poor.

### *Developmental and Gender Differences*

The present research allowed for the examination of both developmental and gender differences in conversational self-focus. Study 1 was a questionnaire study that involved male and female same-sex friendship dyads in grades 5, 8 and 11. This sample allowed for the examination of both developmental and gender differences. These age groups were selected in order to examine age differences across a late childhood and adolescent sample. Study 2 was an observational study that involved male and female same-sex friendship dyads in grade 10. This study allowed for the examination of gender differences.

First consider possible developmental differences. With age, youth experience an increase in perspective-taking ability and social-cognitive skills (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Given older youths' greater ability to potentially empathize with friends' perspectives, mean-level differences in self-focus for younger and older youth were expected. In particular, younger youth were expected to self-focus more than older youth. Further, given the increasing importance of self-disclosure to peers with age (Buhrmester, 1996; Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), older youth were hypothesized to experience greater adjustment difficulties related to conversational self-focus. More specifically, older youth with friends who self-focus were expected to

perceive their friendships as especially low in quality to experience greater emotional difficulties compared to younger youth with self-focused friends.

Gender differences were also expected in the frequency of self-focus. Past research indicates that girls are typically more empathetic and able to politely take turns in conversations than boys (e.g., Maccoby, 1990). Given these qualities, girls were hypothesized to self-focus less than boys. However, relations between self-focus and friendship and emotional adjustment were hypothesized to be especially strong for girls. Girls perceive their friendships to be higher in social support than boys (e.g., Colarossi & Eccles, 2000) and it is thought that girls strongly value social support from friends (Maccoby, 1990). Therefore, receiving low levels of social support from a self-focused friend may be especially upsetting to girls. This may contribute to girls with self-focused friends perceiving their friendships as of particularly low quality and also to their experiencing more emotional distress compared to boys with self-focused friends.

#### *Summary of Current Research*

As stated, the present research considered conversational self-focus, a previously unstudied subtype of self-disclosure in youths' friendships. Despite the normally beneficial functions of self-disclosure, having a friend who is self-focused was expected to be related to perceptions of negative friendship quality and to poor emotional outcomes. In contrast, being self-focused oneself may not be concurrently related to perceiving one's friendships as being of low quality or to emotional adjustment problems. The current research also examined possible mean-level developmental and gender differences in self-focus and developmental and gender differences in relations between self-focus and adjustment.

The current studies aimed to explore the relations between self-focus and adjustment using survey and observational methodologies. The first study was a school-based study that used self-reports to assess conversational self-focus in the friendships of youth in grades 5, 8, and 11. For this study, same-sex reciprocal friendships were identified. This meant that reports from each friend regarding their own self-focus and their friend's self-focus could be obtained. Having both a self-report and a friend-report of self-focus for each youth is a strength of the study in that two perspectives of the same behavior were obtained. For example, this approach allowed for the examination of whether the relation between a friend's self-focus and youth's own adjustment differed depending on whether the report of the friend's self-focus came from the focal youth or the friend.

The second study involved an observational methodology with a sample of tenth-grade same-sex friend dyads. Because of the time- and labor-intensive nature of observational research, it was not possible to involve several age groups in this study. Tenth-grade students were selected for participation in given the theoretical importance of self-disclosure processes during adolescence (Sullivan, 1953). The observational approach allowed for a more objective assessment of conversational self-focus. Additionally, an observational approach allowed for a more fine-grained assessment of self-focused disclosure processes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STUDY 1

Study 1 was a school-based questionnaire study which assessed both youth and friend reports of conversational self-focus within the context of reciprocal friendships. Relations with socioemotional adjustment, namely friendship quality and internalizing symptoms, were examined.

#### *Method*

##### *Participants*

Youth in grades 5, 8, and 11 were invited to participate in this study. Participants were recruited from four local schools located in a Midwestern community. Parental consent was obtained in the following manner which has been used successfully in similar research (e.g., Rose, 2002). Trained graduate students visited each classroom to introduce themselves and the project. Parental consent forms were mailed home to the parents of each student. The forms contained information about the study and asked parents or guardians to check either “Yes,” “No,” or “I would like more information about this study” to indicate whether or not they agreed to let their child participate in the study or required more information before making a decision. Returned consent forms were collected from the students’ classrooms the following week. First and second reminder letters were mailed to the homes of students who had not yet either provided consent or declined participation. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included with

each reminder letter for convenience. Graduate research assistants visited the classrooms several times during this period to collect returned parental consent forms and provide extra consent forms where necessary or requested. Finally, a fourth consent form and self-addressed stamped envelope were hand-delivered in class to each child for whom no response had been given. Student addresses were provided by all but one school. At the school that did not provide addresses, consent forms and reminder letters were sent home with students by the classroom teacher. Of the 283 students recruited for participation, 88% ( $n = 249$ ) returned consent forms. Of those who returned the consent forms, 86% ( $n = 214$ ) indicated consent to participate, and 14% ( $n = 35$ ) declined participation in the study.

In addition, because the study investigated dyadic friendship interactions, unique, reciprocal friendship dyads were chosen to be included in analyses for this study. As a result, 104 youth were included in the final sample. More information about the friendship nominations procedure used to link friends together is given below. The final sample of participants ( $N = 104$  students in 52 dyads) included 30 students in the fifth grade (14 boys, 16 girls), 34 students in the eighth grade (20 boys, 14 girls), and 40 students in the eleventh grade (18 boys, 22 girls). The student sample was 89% Caucasian, 4% African American, and 4% Native American. Three percent of participants described themselves as “Other.”

### *Procedure*

Data collected for this study were part of a larger project investigating social relationships and adjustment. Data collection took place in a group format during regular class time for students whose parents had given consent for them to participate in the

study. Participating students were first asked to sign a youth assent form. Trained graduate or undergraduate research assistants then read aloud all questionnaire items and were available for questions. Each group of students took part in two data collection sessions of approximately 45 minutes each and spaced approximately two weeks apart. Administrators made additional trips to the schools in order to collect data for those youth who were absent during one or both of the group sessions.

### *Measures*

*Demographics.* Participants were asked to answer a brief questionnaire to provide basic demographic information. Youth responded to three items that assessed gender, ethnicity/racial background, and age.

*Friendship Nominations.* When self-focus and friendship quality were evaluated, the constructs were assessed in regards to a specific friendship. For the measures assessing self-focus (Self-Focus Questionnaire; developed for the present study) and friendship quality (Network of Relationships Inventory; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985), youth answered the questions in regards to their two closest friends. The friends who they answered the questions about were chosen using a friendship nomination procedure (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993; Rose, 2002; Rose & Asher, 1999).

For the friendship nominations procedure, rosters including the names of participating classmates were presented to each youth. Fifth-grade participants were given names of participating children in their self-contained classrooms. Since eighth- and eleventh-grade students did not remain in a particular classroom throughout the school day, these students were presented with names of participating students in their entire grade. This procedure is similar to those used in other studies involving

elementary, middle, and high school youth (e.g., Rose, 2002). Participants were instructed to circle the names of their “three best friends.” Youth also were asked to identify their closest friendship by drawing a star next to the name of their “very best friend.” Youth were considered to have a reciprocal friendship if one of the three classmates who they circled also circled their name. Similar to past research, of the 214 participants, 157 (73%) had reciprocal friends (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993).

As mentioned, participants were assigned to report on their two closest (i.e., highest-priority) friendships. Priority was determined with a procedure used in similar past research (Rose, 2002; Rose & Asher, 1999). First priority was given to friendships in which a youth “starred” his or her very best friend and that friend “starred” him or her in return (a best friend-best friend relationship). Next, priority was given to friendships in which a youth “starred” a very best friend and that friend circled his or her name in return (a best friend-friend relationship). Third, priority was given to friendships in which a youth circled (but did not star) the name of a friend and was “starred” in return (a friend-best friend relationship). Finally, priority was given to a situation in which two friends circled each others’ names but did not star one another (a friend-friend relationship).

Youth with two or three reciprocal friendships reported on their two highest priority friendships. Those participants with one reciprocal friendship reported on that friendship and one non-reciprocal friendship. Youth who were not identified as having any reciprocal friendships reported on two non-reciprocal friendships. As in past research (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993; Rose & Asher, 1999), data regarding nonreciprocal friendships were excluded from analyses.



For this study, it was preferable to identify mutually exclusive friendship dyads for analyses in which both youth were assigned to report on one another rather than using all of the available data regarding reciprocal friendships (i.e., youths' reports on reciprocal friends who were not also assigned to report on them). Therefore, not all youth with reciprocal friendships were included in analyses. The mutually exclusive dyads were chosen using the priority criteria described previously. First, within every classroom (fifth-graders) or grade (eighth- and eleventh-graders), all friendships of the highest priority (i.e., with youth who each "starred" each other or best friend-best friend friendships) were identified. These youth could be included as mutually exclusive dyads because each friend was always assigned to report on the other. Of the remaining youth, youth with the next highest priority friendships were identified (i.e., in which the youth starred the friend who circled but did not star the youth or best friend-friend friendships). These youth were always assigned to report on that friend (because they had starred that friend). However, it was necessary to determine whether the friend also was assigned to report on them because the friend might have been assigned to report on two higher-priority friendships. If the friend had been assigned to report on the youth, then the dyad was chosen for analyses. Of the remaining youth, youth with the third highest-priority friendships (i.e., in which the youth circled a friend who starred the youth or friend-best friend friendships) were identified next. Again, to be included as a mutually exclusive dyad, both friends had to have been assigned to report on one another. Finally, of the remaining youth, youth with fourth-priority friendships (i.e., in which the youth circled but did not star one another or friend-friend friendships) were identified. If each youth had been assigned to report on the other, then these relationships were included as well.

Following this procedure meant that some youth with reciprocal friendships could not be included in a mutually exclusive dyad. Specifically, 33 of the 157 youth with reciprocal friendships only had friends who were assigned to report on higher-priority friendships and were unable to be included. In addition, of the remaining 124 youth who could be classified into mutually exclusive dyads, 40 youth in 20 dyads had to be excluded due to missing data. It was required that youth complete 90% of a scale in order to be included in analyses, and in 20 dyads, one or both youth were missing too much data. This resulted in 104 youth in 52 dyads to be included in analyses.

*Self-Focus Questionnaire.* A new 12-item measure was developed for this study to assess conversational self-focus. In the present research, youth completed this 12-item measure for two separate friendships (the criteria described above was used to choose these two friendships). The measure was customized by using a word processing program to insert the names of each youth's two best reciprocal friends into the items. The Self-Focus Questionnaire contains two sections. The first section (6 items) asks youth to report on the degree to which their conversational patterns with their friend are self-focused when they are talking about problems. The second section (6 items) asks youth to respond to items assessing the degree to which the conversational patterns of their friend is self-focused when they are talking about problems. This measure is presented in Appendix A.

In terms of evaluating own self-focus, items in the first section assessed the degree to which youth reported turning conversations about a friend's problems to focus on themselves. Example of items are, "When [MY FRIEND] tells me about a problem, I often interrupt to tell her/him about my own problem" and "Even if [MY FRIEND]

comes to me with a problem first, I bring up my own problems anyway.” Youth rated each of these items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 “Not at all true” to 5 “Really true.”

In terms of evaluating the friend’s self-focus, the same items were revised to assess the degree to which youth perceived the friend as turning a conversation about the youth’s own problem to focus on the friend. Accordingly, example items in this section are, “When I tell [MY FRIEND] about a problem, [MY FRIEND] often interrupts to tell me about her/his own problem” and “Even if I come to [MY FRIEND] with a problem first, he/she brings up his/her own problems anyway.” These items are also rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 “Not at all true” to 5 “Really true.”

Cronbach’s alpha was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the measure’s two subscales. Both the first subscale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and the second ( $\alpha = .91$ ) demonstrated high internal consistency (using the sample of 104 youth retained for analyses). The coefficient alphas indicated good internal reliability of this new measure. Additionally, youth’s reports of their own self-focus were significantly related to youths’ reports of their friends’ self-focus. ( $r = .74$ ). However, youths’ reports of their own self-focus were not significantly related to their friends’ reports of their self-focus ( $r = .00$ ).

*Network of Relationships Inventory.* To assess the quality of youth’s two highest-priority friendships, youth responded to the Network of Relationships inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). The measure was customized by inserting the names of each youth’s two best friends into the items. The NRI assesses the following positive features of friendships: affection, admiration, companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, reliable alliance, support, and overall satisfaction with the relationship. In addition the NRI assesses the following negative features: antagonism, conflict, criticism,

and dominance. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “Little or none” to 5 “The most.” The measure has been found to be internally reliable (e.g., Buhrmester, 1990; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992) and past research also indicates the validity of the measure (for a review, see Furman, 1996).

As in past research (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), youth were given scores for both positive and negative friendship quality. Scores for positive friendship quality were created by calculating the mean of 27 items of the NRI assessing positive features (i.e., affection, admiration, companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, reliable alliance, support, and satisfaction). To create a negative friendship quality score, the 12 items assessing antagonism, conflict, criticism, and dominance were used. The positive friendship quality ( $\alpha = .97$ ) and negative friendship quality scales ( $\alpha = .88$ ) yielded good reliability with the sample of 104 youth retained for analyses.

*Youth Self-Report.* The Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) was used to assess children’s and adolescents’ self-reported emotional and behavioral symptomatology. The YSR includes 112 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 “Not True” to 2 “Very True or Often True”. Youth were asked to report on their behavior and adjustment over the past six months.

The items of the YSR are grouped according to three broad-band subscales: internalizing, externalizing and other problems. Additionally, each broad-band subscale contains narrow-band scales. The internalizing subscale includes three narrow-band scales: anxious/depressed (13 items; e.g., “I am too fearful or anxious”), withdrawal/depressed (8 items; e.g., “I would rather be alone than with others”), and somatic complaints (10 items; “Parts of my body twitch or make nervous movements”).

The externalizing subscale includes two narrow-band scales: rule-breaking behavior (15 items; e.g., “I lie or cheat”) and aggressive behaviors (17 items; e.g., “I destroy things belonging to others”). The third broad band-scale, other problems, includes three narrow-band scales: social problems (11 items; e.g., “I would rather be with younger kids than kids my own age”) thought problems (12 items; “I see things that other people think aren’t there”) and attention problems (12 items; “I am inattentive or easily distracted”). Additionally, there are 14 social desirability items that most youth endorse about themselves (e.g., “I enjoy being with people”). The YSR has been widely used to assess youth adjustment, and past research has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Achenbach, 1991; Belter, Foster, & Imm, 1996; Lexcen, Vincent, & Grisso, 2004; McConaughy, 1993).

The original YSR was altered slightly (with permission) for use in this study. Some items were dropped due to expressed concern from parents and participating school personnel. The two suicidality items (i.e., “I deliberately try to hurt or kill myself,” and “I think about killing myself”) were removed. Three items pertaining to sex/gender identification were also removed (i.e., “I think about sex too much,” “I act like the opposite sex,” and “I wish I were of the opposite sex”). Additional items assessing substance use (i.e., “I drink alcohol without my parents approval (describe),” “I smoke, chew, or sniff tobacco,” and “I use drugs for nonmedical purposes (don’t include alcohol or tobacco) (describe)”) were also not included in this version of the YSR. One item allowing youth to write in physical problems without known medical causes (i.e., “Other (describe)”) was also removed.

Because of the focus of the present study on affective internalizing symptoms, only the anxiety/depression subscale was used. The original anxiety/depressive subscale included 13 items. In the current version, the subscale included 12 items because one of the suicidality items (“I think about killing myself”) was removed. The anxiety and depression subscale ( $\alpha=.81$ ) yielded good reliability with the sample of 104 youth retained for analyses.

## *Results*

### *Representative analyses*

Representative analyses were conducted in order to compare those youth who were included in analyses to those who were not included. Two sets of representative analyses were conducted. The first set of analyses used *t* tests to compare included friended youth (those youth placed in mutually exclusive dyads and included in analyses) to friendless youth (those youth with no reciprocal friends). Recall that friended youth reported on their closest reciprocal friend, while friendless youth reported on a non-reciprocal friend. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. The groups differed on two of the five comparisons. Friended youth reported significantly that their friend was less self-focused compared to friendless youth. Additionally, friended youth reported significantly higher levels of positive friendship quality than did friendless youth. The groups did not differ on self-reports of own self-focus, negative friendship quality, or anxiety/depression.

A second set of representative analyses were conducted to compare friended youth included in analyses with friended youth unable to be included in analyses (i.e., unable to be placed in a mutually exclusive dyad or excluded because of own or partner

missing data). The results of these  $t$  tests are presented in Table 2. For all variables, friended youth included in analyses did not differ significantly from friended youth who were unable to be included in analyses.

#### *Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics*

Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics for all predictor and criterion variables are found in Table 3. Coefficient alphas for all measures ranged from acceptable to very high (range .78-.97), indicating good internal reliability of each self-report questionnaire. Confirming acceptable internal reliability was especially important for the new measure of self-focus.

Mean levels of each variable also are presented in Table 3. In terms of self-focus, means for youths' perceptions of their own self-focus and of their friend's self-focus were relatively low. Further, these means were similar to one another. Overall, participants reported having high levels of positive friendship quality and low to moderate negative friendship quality. These results are similar to those found in past research (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Additionally, the sample was relatively well-adjusted as participants reported low levels of internalizing symptoms. Other community samples also have been found to be relatively well-adjusted overall (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001).

#### *Use of multilevel models for primary analyses*

In the following analyses examining mean-level gender and grade differences and examining the associations between self-focus and adjustment among the 98 youth in 49 friendship dyads, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used (using PROC MIXED in SAS). In these analyses, youth are nested within the friendship dyads. HLM has been

used in similar research involving peer interactions and partner influences on individuals' outcome variables (e.g., Burk & Laursen, 2005; Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2005; Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005).

HLM was the most appropriate analytic approach for two reasons. First, observations from each friend are not considered independent sources of information because friends tend to be similar to one another (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). Standard methods (e.g., such as ordinary least squares and analysis of variance) are less appropriate because the independence assumption is violated (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Second, HLM allows for the examination of both the effects of youths' own characteristics and the effects of youths' friends' characteristics on youths' outcome variables. This is important because both individual and friend characteristics (i.e., self reports and friend reports of self-focus) may contribute to the social and emotional outcomes for each youth.

The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000) is a type of multilevel model created to address the confluence of actor and partner effects on individuals' outcome variables. The APIM is intended for use with dyads whose members are indistinguishable (i.e., 'exchangeable'; Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995). Indistinguishable members of a dyad are those that do not characteristically differ in a way that is relevant to the outcome variable(s). For example, members of heterosexual couples are distinguishable in terms of gender, whereas homosexual couples are not. Because members of the same-sex friendship dyads involved in this study do not characteristically differ in a way that is meaningful to the outcome variables, they were treated as indistinguishable.



Given that HLM is typically performed when there is interdependence of data of observations (i.e., that there is similarity between the reports of each friend nested within a dyad), this similarity was tested before performing the HLM analyses. The analysis performed to confirm non-independence of data is the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). ICC is based on repeated-measures ANOVA-style partitioning of variance and is an index of within-group similarity. For example, an ICC of zero indicates independent observations, whereas non-zero ICCs indicate interdependent observations. Higher numbers reflect more similarity (i.e., shared variance) among members of a group (or dyad, in this case). For each variable, ICCs were calculated to examine similarity between friends. The ICCs for each variable were as follows: focal youth's report of focal youth's self-focus (.00), focal youth's report of friend's self-focus (.04), positive friendship quality (.50), negative friendship quality (.08), anxiety/depression (.00). With the exception of positive friendship quality, these analyses indicated less interdependence than might be expected within friendship dyads. However, even seemingly small ICC values (e.g., .05) can lead to significantly large alpha inflation (Barcikowski, 1981) and it is not inappropriate to conduct HLM using a data set in which some variables are not interdependent. Therefore, the decision was made to use HLM in analyzing these nested data.

#### *Mean-level gender and grade differences in study variables*

For the purposes of investigating gender and grade differences, two-level random coefficient models in which youth were nested within friendship dyads were created. The equations for these models are found in Appendix B. For each variable (i.e., own self-focus, friend self-focus, positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and

anxiety/depression), a multilevel model was conducted to simultaneously test the effects of gender, grade, and the Gender x Grade interaction. None of the Gender x Grade interactions were significant, thus the Gender x Grade interaction term was dropped from all models (Aiken & West, 1991).

Each model was tested again, but instead of including gender, grade, and the Gender x Grade interaction as predictors, each model included only the main effects of gender and grade. The means for each variable are presented separately for boys and girls in Table 4. The *t* values for the main effects of gender from the multilevel model analyses also are presented. There was one main effect of gender. For positive friendship quality, girls reported significantly higher positive friendship quality than boys.

In Table 5, the means for each variable are presented separately for grades 5, 8 and 11. The *t* values for the main effects of grade from the multilevel model analyses also are presented. There were main effects of grade for positive friendship quality and for negative friendship quality. For positive friendship quality, the means indicated that positive friendship quality increased with age. In contrast, for negative friendship quality, the means indicated that negative friendship quality decreased with age.

#### *Relations between self-focus and adjustment*

In this section, analyses were conducted to test the associations of focal youths' and friends' self-focus with focal youths' positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and anxiety/depression. In the first subsection to follow, relations between self-reported self-focus and self-reported adjustment are discussed. Next, relations between friend-reported self-focus and self-reported adjustment are discussed. Finally, analyses

examining whether these relations were further moderated by gender or grade are presented. Equations for these models are presented in Appendix B.

*Links between self-focus and adjustment using self-reports of self-focus.* In the analyses in this section associations were examined between self reports of one's own and one's friend's self-focus with self reports of one's own adjustment. For these analyses, two level random coefficient models were created. A separate model was tested for each independent variable, namely, positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and anxiety/depression. In each model, the focal youth's report of the focal youth's own self-focus as well as the focal youth's report of the friend's self-focus were simultaneous predictors. The focal youth's report of the focal youth's own self-focus and the focal youth's report of the friend's self-focus were entered as simultaneous predictors in each model in order to examine the unique effects of the focal youth's self-focus and of the friends' self-focus on focal youth's own adjustment.

Relations between the focal youth's report of own and friend's self-focus with the focal youth's report of own adjustment are summarized in Table 6. In particular, the  $\beta$  and  $t$  values for the effects of youths' self-focus and friends' self-focus on each adjustment variable are presented. The focal youth's report of his/her own self-focus was not significantly related to positive friendship quality. Likewise, the focal youth's report of the friend's self-focus was not significantly related to positive friendship quality. Similarly, the focal youth's report of his/her own self-focus was not significantly related to negative friendship quality. However, the focal youth's report of the friend's self-focus did significantly predict negative friendship quality, such that higher levels of friend self-focus predicted higher levels of negative friendship quality. The focal youth's report of

his/her own self-focus did not significantly predict anxiety/depression. However, the focal youth's report of the friend's self-focus did significantly predict anxiety/depression, such that higher levels of friend self-focus predicted higher levels of anxiety/depression. To summarize, the focal youth's report of his/her own self-focus was not related to friendship or emotional adjustment, but perceiving one's friend as self-focused was related to perceiving the friendship as high in negative quality and to experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

*Links between friend's self-focus and focal child adjustment using friend's report.*

An identical series of analyses were performed for each of the dependent variables using the *friend's* report of the focal youth's self-focus and the friend's own self-focus. These analyses examined relations between the friend's reports of each youth's self-focus with the focal youth's reports of friendship and emotional adjustment. A separate model was tested for the focal youth's report of positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and anxiety/depression. In each model, the friend's report of the focal youth's self-focus as well as the friend's report of the friend's own self-focus were simultaneous predictors. Relations between friend's report of focal youth's self-focus and of the friend's own self-focus with the focal youth's report of his/her adjustment are summarized in Table 7. The  $\beta$  and  $t$  values for the effects of the friend's report of the focal youth's self-focus and for the friend's report of the friend's own self-focus are presented for each adjustment variable. No significant relations were found between the friend's report of the focal youth's self-focus or the friend's report of the friend's own self-focus with positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, or anxiety/depression.

*Gender and grade differences in the relations between self-focus and adjustment.*

This section describes analyses conducted to determine whether or not the relations between self-focus and adjustment were moderated by gender and/or grade. The first series of analyses used the focal youth's reports of the focal youth's own self-focus and the friend's self-focus. A separate model was tested for the following outcome variables: positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and anxiety/depression. For each model, predictor variables included youths' reports of their own self-focus, their friend's self-focus, gender, grade, and a series of interactions. In particular, the interactions were the two-way interactions between gender and grade, between own self-focus and gender, between own self-focus and grade, between friend's self-focus and gender, and between friend's self-focus and grade. The three-way interactions among own self-focus, gender, and grade and among friend's self-focus, gender, and grade were also included. Of all the interactions with gender and grade tested in these models, none were significant. These findings indicated that the associations between focal youths' reports of own and friend self-focus with focal youths' reports of their own adjustment were not further moderated by gender and/or grade.

A second series of models were tested using the friend's report of the focal youth's self-focus and of the friend's self-focus. A separate model was tested for focal youth's reports of positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, and anxiety/depression. These models each included as predictors the friend's report of the focal youth's self-focus, the friend's report of the friend's self-focus, gender, grade, and a series of interactions. The series of interactions tested were identical those described above except that the friend reports of self-focus were used instead of the focal youth's

reports of self-focus. Of all the interactions tested, none were significant. This indicated that the relations between friend reported self-focus and adjustment were not further moderated by gender and/or grade.

### *Discussion*

In general, the results of Study 1 support the hypothesis that youths' perceptions of their friends' self-focused conversational style are related to poor adjustment outcomes for youth. Interestingly, though, relations between friends' conversational self-focus and youths' own adjustment depended on whether focal youths' reports of their friends' self-focus were used or the friends' reports of the friends' self-focus were used. Results indicated that youths' reports of their friends' conversational self-focus were related to youth's own reports of their adjustment. Specifically, focal children's reports of friends' conversational self-focus were significantly associated with youths' own self-reported lower friendship quality as well as youths' self-reported emotional adjustment problems. However, no significant relations emerged between friends' self-focus and youth's own adjustment when friends' reports of the friends' self-focus were used. Last, youths' own self-focused conversational style, as assessed by either own or friend reports, did not impact youths' own adjustment.

In this section, relations between friends' self-focus and focal youths' adjustment will be considered first. In particular, these relations will be discussed first in regards to the findings that emerged when focal youths' reports of the friends' self-focus were used. Next, the findings that emerged when the friends' reports of the friends' self-focused were used will be discussed. Then, this section considers the relations between focal youths' own self-focus and the focal youths' adjustment.

Consider first associations of youths' reports of their friends' self-focus with youths' reports of their own friendship and emotional adjustment. In terms of friendship quality, focal youths' reports of friends' conversational self-focus were related to youths' own self-reported negative friendship quality. Youth who perceive that their friend is self-focused may perceive themselves to be consistently directed to the role of listener during conversations about problems. Thus, consistent with hypotheses, youth who consider their friend to be self-focused may see themselves as being unable to achieve the relationship benefits of normative self-disclosure like social validation, social control, self-clarification, self-expression, and relationship development. Youth unable to achieve these goals may perceive the friendship as one-sided, which would lead to conflict within the relationship. For example, lack of social validation may lead youth to believe that their friend does not value their concerns, perhaps leading them to feel criticized by their friend. Likewise, if youth are unable to achieve self-presentation goals through the function of social control, they may become irritated with their friend, which could lead to conflict within the relationship. When youth perceive their friend to be self-focused, they also may view them as dominant if the youth wish to utilize self-disclosure for the purposes of self-clarification and self-expression, as they would be prevented from disclosing on an equal level with their friend.

This study also examined relations between youths' reports of friends' conversational self-focus and positive friendship quality. No significant relations emerged between youths' reports of friends' self-focus and youths' reports of positive friendship quality. This lack of findings is surprising, given that as friends' self-focus impedes normative self-disclosure and its expected benefits, one might expect youths'

perceptions of friends' conversational self-focus to be related to decreases in aspects of positive friendship quality like affection, admiration, companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, reliable alliance, support, and/or overall satisfaction with the relationship. Because this relation was unclear, supplementary analyses were conducted. In particular, instead of using a composite score for positive friendship quality (i.e., an average of all items from all subscales loading on the positive friendship quality factor of the NRI), a series of additional models were tested in which focal youths' reports of friends' self-focus predicted each individual subscale of the NRI (i.e., affection, admiration, companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, reliable alliance, support, overall satisfaction). Still no significant effects emerged.

Focal youths' reports of friends' conversational self-focus were also related to youths' self-reports of their own negative emotional adjustment. In this study, an index of anxiety and depression symptoms was used as an indicator of emotional adjustment. As predicted, youth who perceived their friend to be self-focused during conversations about problems also reported higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms. Perceiving that one is consistently being directed to the role of listener during conversations about problems may prevent youth from gaining the emotional benefits of normative self-disclosure. That is, youth who see their friend as monopolizing conversations may be unable to gain the benefits of social control, self-clarification, and self-expression. Youth may then be unable to alleviate anxiety regarding others' perceptions of the self if they perceive that their friends do not afford them adequate time during conversations about problems. This anxiety may persist and contribute to more global symptoms of distress. Youth who perceive their friend to be self-focused may also have trouble gaining self-



clarification of thoughts and ideas during conversations about problems. This may lead to increases in depression and anxiety symptoms, as youth may feel unsupported or unassisted during times of stress. Finally, youth may be unable to self-express during conversations about problems if they think that the interactions are consistently focused on their friend. This may prevent youth from obtaining the cathartic benefits of self-disclosure and from obtaining emotional support that may alleviate feelings of depression and/or anxiety.

Interestingly, although focal youths' reports of friends' self-focus were significantly related to youths' reports of their own friendship and emotional adjustment, the *friends'* reports of friends' conversational self-focus were not related to youths' own reports of friendship quality and internalizing symptoms. In particular, youth whose friends reported themselves to be self-focused during conversations about problems did not report lower friendship quality or increased internalizing symptoms. If these results had been consistent with the previous findings that indicated that when youth perceive their friends to be self-focused, they also report friendship and emotional problems, there would be an increased amount of support for the hypotheses that having a friend who is self-focused is detrimental to youths' friendship quality and emotional adjustment. However, since relations between friends' self-focus and focal youths' adjustment were only significant when considering focal youths' perceptions of friends' self-focus, the possibility is raised that focal youths' perceptions may not accurately reflect friends' behavior. For example, youth with conflictual friendships and/or emotional problems may be especially likely to see their friends as self-focused regardless of their friend's actual behavior. This possibility speaks to the importance of observational assessment.

More objective measures of self-focus (e.g., observations) may help to clarify the relation between friends' self-focus and focal youths' adjustment.

Finally, associations between focal youths' own self-focus with focal youths' reports of friendship quality and their own emotional adjustment were considered. Neither focal youths' reports nor friends' reports of focal youths' self-focus were significantly related to focal youth's reports of friendship quality or emotional adjustment. These data fit with the possibility that youth who self-focus during conversations about problems may not experience current relationship or emotional difficulties. For instance, youth who self-focus during problem talk conversations may enjoy the benefits of self-disclosure like social validation and relationship development, as their problems receive primary attention. Youth receiving these benefits may be unlikely to perceive their friendships as lower in quality. Likewise, youth who self-focus may also benefit emotionally from monopolizing conversations about problems. For example, youth who self-focus during conversations about problems may be able to utilize the self-disclosure functions of social control, self-clarification, and self-expression. This may enable them to experience lower levels of anxiety and depression than youth who are unable to receive these benefits.

Additionally, gender and grade differences were considered. However, few differences emerged. Although the possibilities were raised that younger youth would self-focus more than older youth and that girls would self-focus less than boys, no gender or grade differences for conversational self-focus emerged. In terms of friendship and emotional adjustment, gender and grade differences did emerge for friendship quality. As in past research, girls were observed to report higher levels of positive friendship quality

than boys (Parker & Asher, 1993; Rose, 2002). There was also a grade effect for both positive and negative friendship quality. Specifically, positive friendship quality significantly increased with age, while negative friendship quality significantly decreased with age. This finding is consistent with past research which suggests that there is a general increase in positive aspects of friendship and a general decrease in negative aspects of friendship with age (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Gender and grade differences for depression and anxiety symptoms, however, did not emerge. There also was not a significant interactive effect between gender and grade for depression and anxiety symptoms. This is noteworthy since considerable theory and research suggests that internalizing symptoms increase among girls at the transition to adolescence (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994). It may be that, in this study, there were not enough girls and boys at each grade to detect a significant interactive effect.

Gender and grade differences in the relations between friends' self-focus and focal youths' adjustment also were hypothesized but did not emerge. Specifically, girls with self-focused friends were hypothesized to experience greater levels of friendship and emotional distress than boys. However, there were no significant interaction between friends' self-focus and gender when predicting focal youths' reports of friendship quality or emotional adjustment. Additionally, older youth were hypothesized to experience more relationship and emotional distress in response to friends' conversational self-focus than younger youth but this difference did not emerge either. It is yet unclear why girls and boys and older and younger youth did not differ in their reactions to conversational self-focus. Future research should incorporate larger samples of both boys and girls and youth of differing ages in order to be able to address these relations with greater power.

In closing, this study had both notable strengths and limitations. In regard to strengths, this survey study is the first study of conversational self-focus in youths' friendships. Initial investigation of this construct revealed that youth who perceived their friends to be self-focused during conversations about problems were more likely to also report greater negative friendship quality and increased depression and anxiety symptoms than youth who did not perceive their friends to be self-focused. A second strength of this study is that the study considered both youths' own and youths' friends' perceptions of conversational self-focus. This attention to individual perspective allowed for the specific examination of each youths' reports of their own and their friend's conversational styles. Important differences emerged based on whose perspective was taken into account. Although in some ways, considering different perspectives was a strength, it also created a limitation in that the results are difficult to interpret because they differed based on whose perspective was considered. Further, recall that youths' reports of their own self-focus were not significantly correlated with their friends' reports of their own self-focus, which suggests that youth may not be particularly adept at reporting on their own self-focused behaviors. This speaks to the importance of incorporating more objective measures of conversational self-focus. Objective measures would assist in clarifying the relation between self-focus and adjustment.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STUDY 2

Study 2 was an observational study of conversational self-focus within the context of adolescent reciprocal friendships. The observational approach allowed for examination of a more objective indicator of self-focus. Relations with friendship quality and internalizing symptoms were tested once again.

#### *Participants*

Participants were 30 same-sex dyads ( $N = 60$ ) from the tenth grades of two public high schools located in a Midwestern community. Dyads were 50% ( $n = 15$ ) female and 50% ( $n = 15$ ) male. To recruit these dyads, full rosters of all tenth-grade students were obtained with permission from the local school district. In order to obtain the 30 dyads, 146 tenth-graders were initially contacted. These youth were randomly selected for recruitment with the constraint that an equal number of boys and girls were recruited.

The 146 students selected for recruitment were mailed an initial information packet containing a letter inviting the student and a close friend to participate, a detailed explanation of the study, and a parental consent form. Interested students were encouraged to contact the research team. Additionally, students and their parents were informed that a telephone call from a member of our research team would follow the initial letter.

Trained research assistants next attempted to contact all students who received the initial information packet. Initial telephone communication took place between members of the research team and either the students' parents / guardians or the students themselves. Parents and students were given the opportunity to ask any questions and receive additional information about the study. Often, several phone calls were necessary to speak with both parents and students and sometimes the families could not be reached.

Of the 146 students recruited for participation, research assistants were able to speak with 128 of these youth and/or their parents. The remaining 18 families either did not have working telephone numbers ( $n = 10$ ) or were unable to be reached for a other reasons (e.g., unanswered phone calls, consistently busy phone lines, answering machines, etc.,  $n = 8$ ). Of the 128 families who a research assistant was able to speak with, 42 agreed to the youth's participation and 78 declined participation. Reasons for declining participation included difficulty in scheduling, difficulty recruiting a friend to participate, and lack of interest. Lack of interest seemed to be more common among boys than girls. The remaining 8 families that we spoke with lost contact with the research team during the recruitment process. Youth who agreed to participate were scheduled to participate in the study with a close, same-sex friend of their choice. Participants were contacted with a reminder telephone call the day before their scheduled appointment time. The recruitment process and rate of consent were similar to other observational studies (e.g., Underwood, Scott, Galperin, Bjornstad, & Sexton, 2004).

Of the 42 youth who agreed to participate with a friend, 34 youth completed the study. Eight youth who agreed to participate did not attend their scheduled appointment or subsequent re-scheduled appointments. In addition, of the 34 youth who participated, 2

were friends with one another and participated together (forming 1 dyad). The remaining 32 participated with a friend they selected who was not also contacted about the study (forming 32 dyads). Accordingly the total number of dyads collected is 33. Due to technical problems with the videotapes, data for 3 dyads could not be used. This means that data for 30 dyads was available. The sample was 85% Caucasian, 12% African American, and 3% Asian American.

Participants were each compensated with a gift certificate to a local shopping mall. Some participants only participated in the observational and survey parts of the study described below, and they received a \$10 gift certificate. Other participants participated in additional procedures not relevant to the current study and received a \$50 gift certificate.

#### *Procedure*

The study took place in a university lab space. Each of the sessions was conducted by trained graduate or undergraduate research assistants. The sessions lasted approximately one and one-half hours. Each session began with an information session in which any questions from youth or their parents (if the parents attended the session) were answered by a member of the research team. At this point, parental consent forms for both youth were collected. Then, youth read and signed a youth assent form thereby agreeing to participate in the study.

Each member of the dyad was led to a separate room within the lab space. Each friend then filled out a variety of self-report measures on their own. One measure in particular asked youth to think of three problems they had. They were asked to choose one problem that they were willing to discuss with their friend during an upcoming

segment of the study. The youth were next reunited in one of the lab rooms that contained a table, two chairs, and a video camera. The camera fed into an adjacent room where the interaction was recorded. Additionally, experimenters were able to monitor the interaction online in the adjacent room. The friends then participated in the videotaped, observational segment. The observational segment lasted approximately 25 minutes.

During the observational segment, as a warm-up task, the youth first were asked to plan a party together. The experimenter placed on the table an index card with the words “Plan a party” written on it. The youth were told that they were to spend some time planning a party for themselves and/or their friends. This segment is referred to as the plan a party segment. After seven minutes, a member of the research team knocked on the door and entered the room to instruct the dyad in the next task.

For the next task, the experimenter asked each youth to discuss with their friend the problem that they generated during the survey assessment. The experimenter replaced the plan a party index card with two other index cards. Each index card had the name of one of the youth and the word “problem” written on it. For example, one card might read “David’s problem” and the other “Jim’s problem.” The youth were told that they would have about 20 minutes to talk about anything that they wanted to about the problem. They were also told to be sure to talk about each person’s problem for as long as they wanted to. The youth were told that if they finished talking about problems before the time was up, they could play with a puzzle that was placed on the table. This segment lasted 16 minutes and is referred to as the problem talk segment. In terms of the observational data, only the problem talk segment data was used for this study due to the current interest in



how friends talk about problems. Last, the youth were separated again into different rooms in order to complete the final round of questionnaires.

### *Measures*

*Demographics.* Participants were asked to answer a brief questionnaire to provide basic demographic information. Youth responded to items that assessed gender, ethnicity/racial background, age, and friendship status.

*Friendship quality.* In this study, friendship quality was assessed with 18 items from a shortened version of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Rose, 2002, revision of Parker & Asher, 1993). Each youth completed the questionnaire in reference to the particular friend who accompanied them to the lab. The FQQ has six subscales (i.e., validation and caring, conflict resolution, conflict and betrayal, help and guidance, companionship and recreation, and intimate exchange). In the original FQQ, each feature was represented by three to nine items. In this revision of the FQQ, each feature is represented by three items. The name of the friend was inserted into all of the items on the questionnaire. As in past research (Rose, 2002), a score for positive friendship quality was calculated for each friend by taking the mean of the 15 items used to assess validation and caring, conflict resolution, conflict and betrayal, help and guidance, companionship and recreation, and intimate exchange. Likewise each participant was given a score for negative friendship quality that was calculated by taking the mean of three items assessing conflict. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 “Not at all true” to 4 “Really true”. Previous research indicates the reliability and validity of the full Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993) and the shorter version (Rose, 2002). With the current sample, coefficient alphas

for the positive friendship quality items ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and conflict items ( $\alpha = .86$ ) were high, indicating reliability of the two scores.

*Anxiety symptoms.* To assess anxiety symptoms, the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-R (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978) was administered to participants. The 37-item self-report scale consists of 28 anxiety items and nine social desirability items. Only the anxiety items were administered. There are three anxiety scale factors (i.e., physiological, worry/oversensitivity, concentration anxiety). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Not at all true" to 5 "Really true." Participants were given a score for anxiety symptoms by taking the mean of their scores from the 28 anxiety items. The RCMAS has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Reynolds & Richmond, 1985). In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was high ( $\alpha = .93$ ) for the anxiety items.

*Depressive symptoms.* The presence and severity of depressive symptoms were assessed using 26 items of the self-report Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992). Five key features of depression are assessed with this measure: (a) negative mood; (b) interpersonal problems; (c) ineffectiveness; (d) anhedonia; and (e) negative self-esteem. Youth chose from three answers on each symptom-oriented item, selecting the sentence that best describes them (e.g., "I am bad all of the time/many times/once in a while"). As in past research using the Children's Depression Inventory, (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), the item assessing suicidality was dropped. Participants were given a score for depressive symptoms by taking the mean of their scores for all 26 items. The reliability and validity of the Children's Depressive Inventory has been demonstrated in past research (Kovacs, 1985; Nelson & Politano, 1990). In the current sample, reliability of this measure also was high ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

## *Coding*

There were two major types of coding for the problem talk segment. One type of coding was a detailed coding system involving identifying and coding thought units. This fine-grained coding scheme was used to create a self-focus proportion score that represents the frequency with which youth make statements about their own versus their friend's problems. The other type of coding was used to assign a global self-focus score to each participant. The coding system is discussed in more detail below.

Before any coding was done, each videotaped interaction was transcribed verbatim. The transcription process took 7-15 hours to complete for each tape, depending on the amount of conversation between the members of the dyad. Transcribers incorporated established transcription symbols (e.g., West & Zimmerman, 1985) to add further detail (e.g. verbal inflection, relevant non-verbal behaviors, interruptions) to the transcribed conversations. All transcripts were double-checked for accuracy by a second transcriber. The checking process took between 3 and 5 hours to complete for each transcript.

*Self-focus proportion score.* Computing the self-focus proportion score required several steps. First, the transcripts were divided into thought units, logical divisions of speech that rely on contextual and syntactic clues. Thought units are best described as segments of dialogue separated by pauses, changes in idea or thought, or the other person's speech (Leaper, 1991; Leaper, Tennenbaum, & Shaffer, 1999; Strough & Berg, 2000). Six transcripts (20%) were used to calculate inter-rater reliability for the thought unit process. A 92% agreement was achieved between the two raters. Discrepancies were

resolved through discussion between raters before continuing the coding process for the other videotapes.

Next, every thought unit from each youth's dialogue was coded as either problem-relevant or problem-irrelevant. If a youth made a statement about his or her problem or the friend's problem, that statement was coded as problem-relevant. Examples could include: "I am so mad at her," "I've been really bummed out about it", "He sounds like a real jerk," and "You should just break up with her." All other thought units were coded as problem-irrelevant. Problem-irrelevant statements could reflect a variety of conversation topics (e.g., "Is it still raining outside?" or "I aced that math exam!"). Inter-rater reliability was established by calculating Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa=.92$ ).

The next step involved all problem-relevant statements being coded further. Specifically, these statements were coded as either: (a) own-problem relevant or (b) friend-problem relevant. An example of an own-problem relevant statement could be, "I just don't know what to do about my English grade." A friend-problem relevant statement could be, "What are you going to do about your English grade?" Reliability was established by calculating Cohen's kappa ( $\kappa=.90$ ).

Finally, for analyses, a proportion score for each friend was computed as an additional index of self-focus. This score reflected the ratio of own problem-relevant statements to the total number of all problem-relevant statements (i.e., own problem-relevant statements plus friend-problem relevant statements) made by each participant. Specifically, the number of thought units coded as own-problem relevant was divided by the number of thought units designated as problem-relevant for each youth. For example, if a youth made 50 total problem-relevant statements (i.e., statements about the youth's

own or the friend's problems), of which 20 were own-problem relevant (i.e., about the youth's own problems), his or her self-focus proportion score would be 20/50 or .40.

*Global self-focus coding.* A global score for each member of the friendship dyad was given by reviewing the problem talk segments of the videotaped conversations and associated transcripts. The coders rated each friend on a 5-point Likert scale to reflect the degree to which he or she displayed a self-focused conversation style during the problem talk conversation.

Youth receiving a rating of "1" (low self-focus) might refrain from making statements about the self in response to their friend's problem statements. They would also allow their friend ample opportunity to discuss his or her problems. Youth receiving a rating of "3" (an average score) might allow their friend some time to discuss problems but would also display a moderate degree of self-focus at times. For example, they might additionally talk about themselves within the context of the friend's problem (e.g., offering examples of when they found themselves in a similar situation). Youth receiving a rating of "5" (high self-focus), would turn the conversation to focus on his or herself (e.g., "Now let's talk about my problem") when the friend was talking about the friend's problem(s). These youth also might display disinterested behaviors such as looking away, acting bored, verbally conveying disinterest (e.g., "Huh") when their friend was talking about his or her problem(s). Although non-verbal behaviors may co-occur with conversational self-focus, the defining feature of conversational self-focus is the redirection of problem talk conversation. One benefit of the global coding is that raters were able to simultaneously take into account a variety of factors, including the flow of the conversation and both verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

Inter-rater reliability was established by having two trained coders rate 20% (i.e., six) of the videotapes. Percent agreement and Cohen's kappa were calculated to assess inter-rater reliability. Percent agreement between raters was 83%. Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) was .71. This level of inter-rater agreement is similar to those found in other published peer relations studies (e.g., Leaper et al., 1999; Underwood, et al., 2004). Additionally, youths' global self-focus ratings were not significantly correlated with their friends' global self-focus ratings ( $r = .07$ ). Likewise, youths' self-focus proportion scores were not significantly correlated with their friends' self-focus proportion scores ( $r = .00$ ).

## *Results*

### *Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics*

Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics for the observational measures of self-focus are presented in Table 8. As presented earlier, good inter-rater reliability was found. According to self-focus proportion score calculations, youth exhibited moderate levels of self-focused problem talk ( $M = .64$ ). A mean score of .64 indicates that of the statements that youth made about both their problem(s) and their friend's problem(s), 64% of the statements were about their own problem(s). Mean levels of the global self-focus score indicated relatively low levels of self-focused problem talk. Youth were observed to exhibit a mean of 1.92 on a 1-5 Likert scale of conversational self-focus.

Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics are also presented for all self-report criterion variables in Table 9. Coefficient alphas for all self-report measures ranged from acceptable to very high (range .82-.91), indicating good internal reliability of each variable. Mean levels of each self-report variable also are presented in Table 9. In

terms of friendship quality, overall youth reported high levels of positive friendship quality and low levels of negative friendship quality. These results are similar to those found in Study 1. Also similar to the survey study, youth reported relatively low levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, indicating that the sample was generally well-adjusted.

#### *Use of multilevel models for primary analyses*

As in Study 1, the youth in Study 2 were nested within friendship dyads. Specifically, 60 youth were paired into 30 dyads. In the following analyses examining mean-level gender differences and examining the associations between self-focus and adjustment, HLM was used again.

Interdependence of the dyadic data was examined before performing the HLM analyses. ICCs were calculated to examine non-independence of data. The ICCs for each variable were as follows: self-focus proportion score (.03), global self-focus score (.00), positive friendship quality (.40), negative friendship quality (.61), anxiety (.01), and depression (.04). Although the ICCs were relatively small for several of the variables, they were greater than .00 for five of the six variables (thus indicating interdependence). HLM was used again to avoid alpha inflation associated with ICCs greater than zero (Barcikowski, 1981).

#### *Mean-level gender differences in study variables*

A series of two-level random coefficient models were tested to examine gender differences in study variables. Equations for these models are found in Appendix B. A multilevel model for each variable (i.e., self-focus proportion score, global self-focus score, positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety, and depression) was conducted. In each model, the effect of gender was tested.

The means for each observational variable assessing self-focus are presented separately for boys and girls in Table 10. Also included in Table 10 are  $t$  values from multilevel analyses in which gender was used to predict each variable. There were no significant differences between girls and boys in terms of their self-focus proportion scores or global self-focus scores.

The means for each self-report variable assessing friendship quality and emotional adjustment are presented separately for boys and girls in Table 10.  $t$  values from multilevel analyses in which gender was used to predict each variable are also included. As in Study 1, there was a main effect of gender such that girls reported significantly higher levels of positive friendship quality than boys. However, no effects of gender were found for negative friendship quality, depression, or anxiety.

#### *Relations between self-focus and adjustment*

Analyses were conducted to examine the associations of observed own and friend self-focus with positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety, and depression. Equations for these models are also found in Appendix B. First, relations between own and friend's self-focus proportion scores and self-reported adjustment are discussed. In the following subsection, relations between observed global self-focus and self-reported adjustment are discussed. Finally, analyses examining whether these relations were further moderated by gender are discussed.

*Links between self-focus and focal youth adjustment using self-focus proportion scores.* Analyses in this section tested associations between own and friend's self-focus proportion scores and each youths' report of their own adjustment. Two-level random coefficient models were created to test relations between self-focus and adjustment. A



separate model was tested for each dependent variable (i.e., positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety, and depression). In each model, the focal youth's own self-focus proportion score as well as their friend's self-focus proportion score were simultaneous predictors of adjustment. The  $\beta$  and  $t$  values for the effects of own self-focus and friend self-focus proportion scores on each adjustment variable are presented in Table 12.

In terms of friendship adjustment, the focal youth's self-focus proportion score was significantly and positively related to the focal youth's self-reports of positive friendship quality. This result indicates that youth who spent a greater proportion of problem talk conversations focused on the self also report higher levels of positive friendship quality. However, contrary to prediction, the friend's self-focus proportion score was not significantly associated with the focal youth's own reports of positive friendship quality. Moreover, neither the focal youth's self-focus proportion score nor the friend's self-focus proportion score were significantly related to negative friendship quality.

In terms of emotional adjustment, the focal youth's self-focus proportion score significantly predicted self-reported anxiety. Contrary to hypothesis, youth who were observed to self-focus at higher levels also reported higher levels of anxiety. Also contrary to hypothesis, the friend's self-focus proportion score did not significantly predict focal youth's self-reported anxiety. In addition, neither focal youth's nor friend's self-focus proportion scores predicted focal youth's report of depression.

*Links between self-focus and focal youth adjustment using global self-focus scores.* Analyses in this section tested associations between own and friend's global self-

focus scores and each youths' report of their own friendship and emotional adjustment. Two-level random coefficient models were created to test the relations between global self-focus scores and adjustment. Separate models were tested for each of the following dependent variables: positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety and depression. The focal youth's own global self-focus score as well as their friend's global self-focus score were simultaneously used to predict adjustment. The  $\beta$  and  $t$  values for the effects of own global self-focus and friend global self-focus scores on each adjustment variable are presented in Table 13.

In terms of friendship adjustment, the focal youth's global self-focus score was not significantly related to the focal youth's reports of either positive or negative friendship quality. Contrary to prediction, the friend's global self-focus score likewise was not significantly related to the focal youth's reports of either positive or negative friendship quality. These results indicated that the degree of self-focus during problem talk conversations as assessed by the global self-focus score was unrelated to youths' report of friendship quality.

In terms of emotional adjustment, the focal youth's global self-focus score was significantly related to anxiety. Unexpectedly, higher levels of own self-focus predicted higher levels of self-reported anxiety. Also contrary to prediction, the friend's global self-focus score was unrelated to self-reported anxiety. Likewise, only the focal youth's global self-focus score significantly predicted depression, such that higher levels of own self-focus was related to higher levels of self-reported depression. There was no significant association between the friend's global self-focus score and focal child depression.

*Gender differences in the relations between self-focus and adjustment.* Analyses described in this section refer to a series of models which tested whether or not the relations between self-focus and adjustment were moderated by gender. First, a series of multilevel models were tested using both focal youth's and friend's self-focus proportion scores to predict socioemotional adjustment. Separate models were tested for the following variables: positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety, and depression. For each model, predictor variables were focal youth's self-focus proportion score, friend's self-focus proportion score, gender, and the two-way interactions between focal youth's self-focus proportion score and gender and friend's self-focus proportion score and gender. Of all the interactions with gender tested in these models, none were significant. Thus the associations between focal youth's and friend's self-focus proportion scores and focal youth's adjustment were not moderated by gender.

A parallel series of models were created to test whether the relations between the global self-focus score and adjustment were moderated by gender. Separate models were tested for positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, anxiety, and depression. Predictors in each model were focal youth's global self-focus score, friend's global self-focus score, gender, and the two-way interactions between focal youth's global self-focus score and gender and friend's global self-focus score and gender. No significant relations emerged, indicating that the relations between focal youth's and friend's global self-focus scores and focal youth's adjustment were not moderated by gender.

### *Discussion*

Study 1 and Study 2 offer very different results with regard to the association between conversational self-focus and socioemotional adjustment. In contrast to Study 1,

which indicated that friends' self-focus was problematic for youths' adjustment, Study 2 did not indicate a significant association between friends' self-focus and youths' adjustment. Instead, in Study 2, youths' own self-focus was significantly related to youths' own adjustment in both positive and negative ways. In particular, there is some support for the idea that youths' own self-focus is significantly related to higher levels of positive friendship quality. However, Study 2 also suggests that youths' own self-focus is significantly related to increased anxiety and depression symptoms.

In terms of friendship adjustment, it was hypothesized that friends' self-focus would be associated with focal youths' reports of lower friendship quality. Four relations of friends' self-focus with friendship quality were examined. In particular, the relations of friends' self-focus proportion scores with positive friendship quality and with negative friendship quality were examined. The effects of friends' global self-focus scores on positive friendship quality and on negative friendship quality were also examined. Of the four effects, no significant relations emerged.

However, a significant relation between focal youths' own self-focus and friendship quality did emerge. Again, four associations were tested. The relations of focal youths' own self-focus proportion scores with positive friendship quality and with negative friendship quality were examined. Additionally, the relations between focal youths' own global self-focus scores with positive friendship quality and with negative friendship quality were examined. Of these four effects, one was significant. Specifically, youths' own self-focus proportion scores were associated with youths' self-reports of higher positive friendship quality.

This result lends support to the idea that perhaps self-focused youth are obtaining the expected benefits of self-disclosure such as social validation, social control, self-clarification, self-expression, and relationship development. This may be due to the fact that their problems are likely getting the most attention within the friendship. Youth who are self-focused may perceive that they are achieving the function of social validation by having an audience for their troubles. This may lead youth to feel that their friendship is supportive and validating. Additionally, youth who self-disclose a disproportionate amount may be better able to achieve self-presentation goals. These youth may perceive their friendships to be more positive as they also are able to consistently self-clarify and self-express during conversations about problems. Finally, youth who are self-focused may perceive their friendships to be strong and supportive, thus contributing to the relationship development function of self-disclosure. Achieving these benefits may lead self-focused youth to perceive their friendship in a positive light.

In terms of emotional outcomes, it was hypothesized that youth with a friend who was self-focused during conversations about problems would report increased depression and anxiety symptoms. To examine this hypothesis, four effects were tested. Relations of friends' self-focus proportion scores with depression and anxiety were tested, as well as the relations between friends' global self-focus proportion scores with depression and anxiety. Of these four effects, none were significant.

Instead, inconsistent with hypotheses, significant relations emerged when considering the effects of focal youths' self-focus on focal youths' emotional adjustment. Relations of focal youths' self-focus proportion scores with depression and anxiety were tested and relations of focal youths' global self-focus scores with depression and anxiety

were tested. Three of these four effects were significant, and the fourth effect approached significance and was in the hypothesized direction. In particular, a significant positive relation emerged between focal youths' self-focus proportion scores and focal youths' anxiety symptoms. This meant that youth who spent a greater percentage of problem talk conversations speaking about their own problems also reported increased levels of anxiety. Focal youths' global self-focus scores also significantly predicted both depression and anxiety. Thus youth who were observed to direct problem talk conversations toward their own problems also reported higher levels of depression and anxiety. Finally, while focal youths' self-focus proportion scores were not significantly related to focal youths' depressive symptoms, this relation was in the hypothesized direction and approached significance.

One explanation for these findings may be that youth with increased internalizing symptoms have a greater number of either real or perceived stressors and may thus be more inclined to speak about problems during conversations with friends. Research with young adults indicates that individuals with internalizing problems tend to deliver more unsolicited self-disclosure statements following a partner's self-disclosure (Jacobson & Anderson, 1982). Additionally, it may be that youth with internalizing symptoms tend to monopolize conversations about problems because they feel overwhelmed by their distress and see their friendships as viable contexts within which they safely may discuss their problems. Youth with a friend who suffers from internalizing problems may also allow their friends to monopolize conversations for this same reason.

Thus, contrary to hypotheses, friends' self-focus, as measured by both self-focus proportion scores and global self-focus scores, was not significantly related to focal

youths' reports of own emotional adjustment. However, it was observed that focal youths' self-focus was significantly associated with focal youths' emotional adjustment. These results are in contrast to those observed in Study 1 which indicated that friends' self-focus, but not one's own self-focus, was significantly associated with focal youths' reports of increased depression and anxiety symptoms. These differences between studies will be considered in more detail in the General Discussion.

As in Study 1, gender differences in study variables were considered in Study 2. However, no mean-level gender differences emerged. Thus boys and girls did not differ in their levels of self-focus (as assessed by either self-focus proportion scores or global self-focus scores), positive friendship quality, negative friendship quality, depression, or anxiety. Additionally, no significant gender differences in the relations between focal youths' and/or friends' self-focus and focal youths' adjustment were found. Again, future research should utilize larger samples with increased power for addressing these differences.

Study 2 had important strengths. This study is the first observational study of conversational self-focus in youths' friendships. Utilizing observational measures allowed for a more objective assessment of conversational self-focus than employing self-report measures. Additionally, this study shed light on interesting associations between conversational self-focus and youths' adjustment. As compared to Study 1, which indicated that *friends'* self-focus is most detrimental for youths' adjustment, Study 2 provided an alternative perspective on the relation between self-focus and adjustment in that it suggested that self-focused youth themselves experience emotional problems.

In addition to strengths, it is important to consider limitations as well. First, Study 2 utilized participants in only one grade. Thus, examination of grade differences was not possible in this study. Future research should incorporate additional grades in order to examine age differences in the relation between observed conversational self-focus and adjustment. Further, while Study 2 employed an objective assessment of conversational self-focus, the study did not also assess youths' perceptions of their own and their friends' self-focused behaviors. Future research which incorporates both observational and self-report measures of self-focus may be better able to address the question of whether or not youth with friendship and emotional problems accurately perceive their own and their friends' self-focused behaviors.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research considered conversational self-focus, a previously unstudied variant of normative self-disclosure in which one conversation partner tends to re-direct conversations to focus on himself or herself. It was hypothesized that having a friend who is self-focused, especially during conversations about problems, would be related to negative friendship and emotional outcomes. These hypotheses were addressed in two studies. The first was a school-based study in which youth in grades 5, 8, and 11 reported on their own and their friends' self-focus as well as their own adjustment. The second study was a laboratory study in which the conversational self-focus of youth and their friends was assessed using observational methodology. Generally speaking, the results of the two studies were mixed regarding whether having a friend who is self-focused is linked with (friendship and emotional) adjustment problems or whether one's own self-focus is linked with (emotional) adjustment problems. The results of both studies will be discussed together in the following sections.

#### *Friends' Self-Focus and Friendship Adjustment*

Both studies addressed the relation between friends' self-focus and youths' own friendship adjustment. It was hypothesized that youth with a friend who is self-focused would experience friendship adjustment problems. In particular, youth with a friend who is self-focused were expected to report lower levels of positive friendship quality and

higher levels of negative friendship quality. Study 1 provided some support for this hypothesis. Specifically, youths' reports of their friends' self-focus were significantly and positively related to youths' reports of negative friendship quality. However, there was no support for this hypothesis when using friends' reports of friends' self-focus to predict youths' self-reported friendship quality. Further, there was no support for this hypothesis from the observational assessments used in Study 2.

Overall, the support for the hypothesis that youth with a friend who is self-focused will report more problematic friendship quality is weak. Of the three assessments of friends' self-focus (youths' self-reports of friends' self-focus, friends' report of friends' self-focus, and observational assessments of friends' self-focus), two of the assessments (friends' reports and observation) provide no support for this hypothesis. Additionally, the one assessment which did provide support for the hypothesis (youths' self-reports of friends' self-focus) has the weakest methodology. Specifically, the other assessments that did not produce significant results considered relations between variables based on reports from different informants (i.e., friends' reports or observational assessments of friends' self-focus with self-reports of friendship quality). Utilizing multiple methods of assessments for study variables is generally thought to be desirable because it reduces common method bias (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). In contrast, only when the data were based on reports from a single reporter (i.e., self-reports of friends' self-focus and self-reports of friendship adjustment) were the relations significant. Methodologically, this is problematic due to the concern that when a single reporter provides the data for all of the variables, relations among these variables may be artificially inflated. Moreover, conceptually, as although it is plausible that youth with a

friend who is self-focused suffer adjustment problems, it is equally plausible that youth with poor quality friendships may misperceive the conversational behaviors of their friends. Thus, taken together, Study 1 and Study 2 do not provide a great deal of support for the hypothesis that friends' self-focus is related to youths' friendship adjustment.

#### *Friends' Self-Focus and Emotional Adjustment*

Studies 1 and 2 also examined the relation between friends' self-focus and youths' own emotional adjustment. With regard to emotional adjustment outcomes, youth with a friend who is self-focused were expected to report increased levels of internalizing distress (i.e., depression and anxiety). Study 1 offered some support for this hypothesis in that youths' reports of their friends' self-focus were positively associated with youths' reports of their own depression and anxiety symptoms. However, friends' reports of the friends' self-focus were not significantly associated with youths' reports of depression and anxiety symptoms in Study 1. Additionally, Study 2 provided no support for this hypothesis, as observed friends' self-focus was not associated with youths' self-reports of emotional adjustment.

Taken together, there is little support for the hypothesis that having a friend who is self-focused is related to one's own emotional adjustment problems. Again, two of the three assessments of self-focus did not support the hypothesis, and the assessment that did provide support (i.e., using youths' self-reports of friends' self-focus) had the weakest methodology because data from only a single reporter was considered. For example, it may be that youth who are depressed and anxious misperceive friends' behavior as self-focused when it may not be. This possibility would fit with other research indicating that

youth with emotional problems perceive situations differently from other youth (Quiggle, Garber, Panak, & Dodge, 1992).

#### *Own Self-Focus and Friendship Adjustment*

The relation between youths' own self-focus and youths' own friendship adjustment also was considered in both studies. It was hypothesized that youth who were self-focused themselves may not experience any current friendship difficulties.

Specifically, self-focused youth were not expected to report their friendships as being lower in quality. This is because self-focused youth were expected to obtain the benefits of self-disclosure during conversations with their friends because their problems get the most attention within these relationships.

With regard to this hypothesis, results were more consistent across studies and more consistent with the hypothesis. In Study 1, there was no significant relation between focal youths' self-focus and focal youths' self-reported friendship quality, regardless of whether focal youths' reports of their own self-focus were used or friends' reports of focal youths' self-focus were used. Likewise, in Study 2, there was generally no link between focal youths' self-focus and focal youths' reports of friendship quality.

Specifically, youths' self-focus global scores were not related to their reports of positive and negative quality and youths' self-focus scores proportion were not related to their reports of negative friendship quality. Interestingly, for the one significant effect that did emerge, youth with higher self-focus proportion scores were actually found to report that their friendships were high in positive friendship quality. Overall, then, the findings across studies were consistent with the proposal that self-focused youth would not see their friendships as being of poor quality.

### *Own Self-Focus and Emotional Adjustment*

Finally, the relation between youths' own self-focus and youths' emotional adjustment was considered in both the survey and observational studies. It was hypothesized that self-focused youth may not experience current emotional adjustment problems. The findings across studies were mixed. Study 1 provided support for this hypothesis. Both when focal youths' self-focus was assessed with self-reports and when focal youths' self-focus was assessed with friends' reports, focal youths' self-focus was not associated with focal youths' depression and anxiety symptoms. However, Study 2 provided different results. In this study, focal youths' observed self-focus was related to increased levels of both depression and anxiety when self-focus was assessed using the global self-focus indicator. Additionally, focal youths' observed self-focus was related to increased levels of anxiety when self-focus was assessed with the self-focus proportion scores.

In this case, two of the three assessments of youths' own self-focus (i.e., self-reports of youths' own self-focus and friend-reports of youths' own self-focus) indicated no relations with depression and anxiety, and only one assessment of youths' own self-focus (i.e., observation of youths' own self-focus) indicated a significant, positive association with depression and anxiety. Further, the associations between focal youths' own self-focus and depression and anxiety found when utilizing observational methodology were counter to the original hypothesis. However, given that the observational assessments were objective in nature and that the positive relations between focal youths' self-focus and emotional problems were relatively consistent across observational indicators (i.e., self-focus proportion scores and global self-focus scores)

and different indicators of emotional problems (i.e., depression and anxiety symptoms), the possibility that youths' own self-focus is related to youths' depression and anxiety symptoms is something to consider seriously.

Because the findings with respect to the relation between focal youths' self-focus and emotional adjustment were counter to hypotheses, it is worth reconsidering the original hypothesis regarding this association. Based on the existing friendship literature, it was reasonable to expect that own self-focus would not be related to emotional adjustment problems. Youth who self-focus spend the majority of problem talk conversations focused on themselves and/or solving their problems. Therefore, during conversations about problems, they should receive the benefits of normative self-disclosure like social control, self-clarification, and self-expression.

However, additional literatures may be helpful in understanding why it may be that self-focused youth report increased levels of emotional problems. For example, research on emotional maladjustment indicates that people with emotional adjustment problems tend to focus on themselves and/or their problems more than individuals without emotional difficulties. For instance, depressed individuals have been shown to both ruminate and co-ruminate about their problems and/or own depressed affect (Hart & Thompson, 1997; Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993; Rose, 2002). Further, research indicates that depressed young adults are more likely to deliver unsolicited self-disclosure statements when conversing with a partner than non-depressed young adults (Jacobson & Anderson, 1982). From this perspective, it is less surprising that youth who were observed to self-focus in conversations about problems with friends were also found to report elevated depressive and anxiety symptoms.

### *Future Directions*

Given the mixed results across studies and forms of assessment, replication of the current findings is important. Replication is necessary both for the results of the survey assessment and for the results of the observational assessment. It would be especially compelling if the results of each type of assessment were replicated within a single study that incorporated both the self- and friend-reports of self-focus and also the observational assessment of self-focus. Moreover, the current results would engender more confidence if they were replicated with a larger sample. In addition, because the current samples were primarily European American, it is unknown whether these findings will generalize to other ethnic/racial groups. Incorporating youth from a wide range of backgrounds also would be useful.

If the current survey and observational results were replicated, the findings would speak to the importance of incorporating multiple methods in research. For example, if in the current study, only survey data had been used, one might conclude that youths' own self-focus was unrelated to emotional adjustment problems. However, the inclusion of observational methods raised the possibility that youths' own self-focus may, in fact, be an important correlate of depression and anxiety symptoms.

Additionally, future research should incorporate a longitudinal design. For example, though hypotheses proposed that friendship and emotional adjustment are outcomes of having a friend who is self-focused, it is equally plausible that youths' own friendship and emotional adjustment contribute to their perceptions of their friends' self-focus. If, in fact, a longitudinal study indicated that friendship and/or emotional adjustment problems preceded youth concluding that their friends were self-focused,

these findings may fit better with the findings of Study 2. That is, it seems possible that youth who have emotional adjustment problems both self-focus during conversations with friends (consistent with the Study 2 findings) and also misperceive their friends to be self-focusing during these conversations (consistent with Study 1 findings).

Further, a longitudinal design would allow for examination of friendship difficulties over the longer term. Longitudinal studies would be able to address the question of whether youth are self-focusing in isolated instances or if this conversation style is more of a trait. In the current research, across all assessments of self-focus, self-focused youth did not have friendships that were low in quality as reported either by themselves or by their friend. Although this is positive for these youth in the short-term, it may be that their friends become increasingly dissatisfied with the friendship over time should youths' dominating conversational style persist. This could lead to future relationship problems in the form of lower friendship quality or even to their friend terminating the friendship.

### *Conclusions and Contributions*

Despite the mixed results of these two studies, the present research contributes to our understanding of self-disclosure processes in youths' friendships. This work represents initial investigation of a previously unstudied variant of normative self-disclosure, conversational self-focus. While normative self-disclosure has been linked with positive friendship and emotional outcomes for youth, these studies generally did not indicate that disclosure involving self-focus was linked with positive adjustment outcomes. In fact, although the nature of the findings differed across studies, when associations with self-focus were found they typically indicated that self-focus was linked



with poorer adjustment outcomes. Given that the current findings differ in this important way from previous research on self-disclosure, it seems that this research has successfully identified a variant of normative self-disclosure that does not afford youth the same socioemotional benefits as self-disclosure typically does.

Results from these two studies suggest that conversational self-focus is likely associated with socioemotional maladjustment. However, it is important to highlight that it is not yet entirely clear *whose* self-focus (own or friend's) is most detrimental to youths' adjustment. Thus it is difficult to specify the applied contributions of this work. For example, evidence supporting the hypothesis that friends' self-focus is associated with youths' adjustment difficulties is relatively weak. Nevertheless, perhaps it is too soon to conclude that there are no negative effects for youth with a friend who is self-focused. At the very least, the evidence suggests that we should be concerned about youth who *perceive* their friend to be self-focused and that these youth may be targets for intervention. For example, interventions aimed at helping youth accurately interpret the behavior of others may assist these youth in evaluating whether their friends' behavior is truly inappropriate. If, in fact, these youth come to perceive that their friend is not behaving in an inappropriate manner, this would likely result in positive benefits to the friendship, which may, in turn, spill over into positive effects for more global aspects of their emotional adjustment.

In contrast, there is stronger support for the idea that youths' own self-focus is linked with emotional adjustment problems. In particular, it may be important to consider this particular disclosure process as a correlate of socioemotional adjustment problems. Paying particular attention to this interpersonal process in research as well as practice

may enable the creation of interventions which target youths' conversational style. Specifically, perhaps assisting youth with internalizing problems to refrain from dominating conversations with their friends may protect them from experiencing reductions in their friendship qualities over time. Having high-quality peer relationships, in turn, has the potential to afford self-focused youth protection from future emotional adjustment problems.

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Table 1

*Representative analyses comparing friended youth who were included in the study and friendless youth*

	Friended (included)			Friendless (not included)			<i>t</i> value
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	
Own SF	98	1.41	.53	49	1.42	.76	.12
Friend SF	98	1.38	.55	49	1.63	.86	2.14*
Positive FQ	98	3.43	.90	49	3.01	1.05	2.49*
Negative FQ	98	1.72	.59	49	1.66	.68	.52
Anxiety/Depression	98	.44	.32	54	.47	.38	.51

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 2

*Representative analyses comparing friended youth who were included in the study and friended youth who were not included in the study*

	Friended (included)			Friended (not included)			
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value
Own SF	98	1.41	.53	53	1.24	.56	.21
Friend SF	98	1.38	.55	53	1.52	.73	1.34
Positive FQ	98	3.43	.90	51	3.19	.88	1.56
Negative FQ	98	1.72	.59	51	1.84	.69	1.14
Anxiety/Depression	98	.44	.32	58	.48	.40	.66

*Notes.* SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 3

*Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics for all variables for youth included in primary analyses*

	<i>N</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	Range	Possible Range
Own SF	98	.87	1.41	.53	1.00-4.00	1.00-5.00
Friend SF	98	.90	1.38	.55	1.00-3.25	1.00-5.00
Positive FQ	98	.97	3.43	.90	1.37-4.96	1.00-5.00
Negative FQ	98	.86	1.72	.59	1.00-3.50	1.00-5.00
Anxiety/Depr.	98	.78	.44	.32	.00-1.50	.00-2.00

*Notes.* SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 4

*Means and standard deviations for all variables for boys and girls*

	Boys			Girls			<i>t</i> value
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	
Own SF	48	1.47	.50	50	1.35	.55	1.11
Friend SF	48	1.36	.50	50	1.40	.59	.35
Positive FQ	48	3.06	.89	50	3.78	.77	3.66***
Negative FQ	48	1.76	.60	50	1.68	.58	.53
Anxiety/Depression	48	.42	.34	50	.46	.31	.70

*Notes.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ . *t* value is from a multilevel analysis in which gender and grade were used to predict each variable. SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 5

*Means and standard deviations for all variables for each grade*

Variable	Grade 5			Grade 8			Grade 11			<i>t</i> value
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Own SF	28	1.44	.75	30	1.35	.36	40	1.44	.45	.10
Friend SF	28	1.37	.61	30	1.39	.50	40	1.38	.55	.06
Positive FQ	28	3.13	.91	30	3.38	.97	40	3.67	.80	2.17*
Negative FQ	28	1.90	.71	30	1.72	.58	40	1.59	.47	2.07*
Anxiety/Depr.	28	.51	.34	30	.45	.38	40	.39	.25	1.45

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . *t* value is from a multilevel analysis in which gender and grade were used to predict each variable. SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 6

*Summary of multilevel model analyses examining relations between self-reported self-focus and self-reported adjustment*

Focal youth report of focal youth adjustment						
	Positive FQ		Negative FQ		Anxiety/Depression	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value
Focal youth report of own SF	.03	.12	.12	.81	-.07	.84
Focal youth report of friend SF	.04	.20	.35	2.35*	.20	2.34*

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.



Table 7

*Summary of multilevel model analyses examining relations between friend-reported self-focus and self-reported adjustment*

Focal youth report of focal youth adjustment						
	Positive FQ		Negative FQ		Anxiety/Depression	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value
Friend report of focal youth SF	.12	.56	-.04	.23	.01	.11
Friend report of friend SF	-.14	.64	-.22	1.34	.03	.40

*Notes.* SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 8

*Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics for all observed variables*

	<i>N</i>	$\kappa$	<i>M</i>	SD	Range	Possible Range
SF proportion score	60	--	.64	.26	.00-1.00	.00-1.00
Global SF score	60	.71	1.92	1.00	1.00-4.00	1.00-5.00

*Note.* SF = self-focus.

Table 9

*Psychometric properties and descriptive statistics for all self-report variables*

	<i>N</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	SD	Range	Possible range
Positive FQ	60	.89	3.04	.61	1.67-4.00	.00-4.00
Negative FQ	60	.83	.49	.67	.00-2.67	.00-4.00
Anxiety	60	.91	1.96	.54	1.00-3.54	1.00-5.00
Depression	60	.82	.29	.21	.04-.96	.00-2.00

*Note.* FQ = friendship quality.

Table 10

*Means and standard deviations for all observed variables for boys and girls*

	Boys			Girls			<i>t</i> value
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	
SF proportion score	30	.58	.27	30	.70	.25	1.76
Global SF score	30	1.90	.92	30	1.93	1.08	.13

*Notes.* *t* value is from a multilevel analysis in which gender was used to predict each variable. SF = self-focus.

Table 11

*Means and standard deviations for all self-report variables for boys and girls*

	Boys			Girls			<i>t</i> value
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	
Positive FQ	30	2.80	.60	30	3.29	.52	2.94**
Negative FQ	30	.59	.72	30	.39	.61	.91
Anxiety	30	1.84	.40	30	2.09	.64	1.87
Depression	30	.27	.19	30	.31	.22	.58

*Notes.* \*\* $p < .01$ . *t* value is from a multilevel analysis in which gender was used to predict each variable. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 12

*Summary of multilevel model analyses examining relations between observed self-focus and self-reported adjustment using self-focus proportion scores*

Focal youth report of focal youth adjustment								
	Positive FQ		Negative FQ		Anxiety		Depression	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value
Focal youth's SF proportion score	.75	2.59*	.30	.92	.56	2.15*	.16	1.56
Friend's SF proportion score	.11	.38	.50	1.51	-.20	.78	-.15	1.47

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Table 13

*Summary of multilevel model analyses examining relations between observed self-focus and self-reported adjustment using global self-focus scores*

Focal youth report of focal youth adjustment								
	Positive FQ		Negative FQ		Anxiety		Depression	
	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value	$\beta$	<i>t</i> value
Focal youth's global SF	-.07	.87	.01	.06	.15	2.09*	.08	3.30**
Friend's global SF	-.12	1.42	-.02	.22	.07	.99	.03	1.20

*Notes.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . SF = self-focus. FQ = friendship quality.

Appendix A

**Our Problems**

**WHAT I DO WHEN WE TALK:**

**1. When [Friend 1] tells me about a problem, I often interrupt to tell her about my own problem.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] tells me about a problem, I often interrupt to tell her about my own problem.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**2. When [Friend 1] is talking to me about a problem, I jump in and talk about my own problems before she is finished.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] is talking to me about a problem, I jump in and talk about my own problems before she is finished.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**3. When [Friend 1] and I discuss our problems, I try to make mine the main focus.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] and I discuss our problems, I try to make mine the main focus.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**4. Even if [Friend 1] comes to me with a problem first, I bring up my own problems anyway.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**Even if [Friend 2] comes to me with a problem first, I bring up my own problems anyway.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true



**5. When we're talking about [Friend 1]'s problems, I spend more time talking about my own experiences than asking questions or giving advice.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When we're talking about [Friend 2]'s problems, I spend more time talking about my own experiences than asking questions or giving advice.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**6. When [Friend 1] and I are talking about our problems, my problems get the most attention.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] and I are talking about our problems, my problems get the most attention.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

\*\*\*\*\*

**WHAT MY FRIENDS DO WHEN WE TALK:**

**1. When I tell [Friend 1] about a problem, she often interrupts to tell me her own problem.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When I tell [Friend 2] about a problem, she often interrupts to tell me her own problem.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**2. When I talk to [Friend 1] about a problem, she jumps in and talks about her own problems before I am finished.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When I talk to [Friend 2] about a problem, she jumps in and talks about her own problems before I am finished.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**3. When [Friend 1] and I discuss our problems, she tries to make hers the main focus.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] and I discuss our problems, she tries to make hers the main focus.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**4. Even if I come to [Friend 1] with a problem first, she brings up her own problems anyway.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**Even if I come to [Friend 2] with a problem first, she brings up her own problems anyway.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**5. When we're talking about my problems, [Friend 1] spends more time talking about her own experiences than asking questions or giving advice.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When we're talking about my problems, [Friend 2] spends more time talking about her own experiences than asking questions or giving advice.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**6. When [Friend 1] and I are talking about our problems, her problems get the most attention.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

**When [Friend 2] and I are talking about our problems, her problems get the most attention.**

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
not at all true    a little true    somewhat true    pretty true    really true

## Appendix B

### Multilevel Model Equations

Note: SF= self-focus

#### *Study 1*

##### Gender and grade differences

$$\text{Level 1: (OwnSF)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (FriendSF)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Anxiety/Depression)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

##### Relations between self-reported self-focus and friendship quality

$$\text{Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{SelfReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{SelfReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{SelfReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{SelfReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

### Relations between self-reported self-focus and internalizing symptoms

$$\text{Level 1: (Anxiety/Depression)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + \beta_1_j(\text{SelfReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_2_j(\text{SelfReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_1_j = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_2_j = \gamma_{20}$$

### Relations between friend-reported self-focus and friendship quality

$$\text{Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + \beta_1_j(\text{FriendReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_2_j(\text{FriendReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_1_j = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_2_j = \gamma_{20}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + \beta_1_j(\text{FriendReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_2_j(\text{FriendReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_1_j = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_2_j = \gamma_{20}$$

### Relations between friend-reported self-focus and internalizing symptoms

$$\text{Level 1: (Anxiety/Depression)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + \beta_1_j(\text{FriendReportedOwnSF})_{ij} + \beta_2_j(\text{FriendReportedFriendSF})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Grade}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Gender} * \text{Grade}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_1_j = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_2_j = \gamma_{20}$$

## *Study 2*

### Gender differences

$$\text{Level 1: (SFglobal)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (SFproportion)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_0_j + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$

Level 1: (Depression)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$

Level 1: (Anxiety)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$

Relations between global self-focus score and friendship quality

Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFglobal})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFglobal})_{ij} + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$   
 $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$   
 $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$

Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFglobal})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFglobal})_{ij} + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$   
 $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$   
 $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$

Relations between global self-focus score and internalizing symptoms

Level 1: (Depression)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFglobal})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFglobal})_{ij} + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$   
 $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$   
 $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$

Level 1: (Anxiety)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFglobal})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFglobal})_{ij} + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$   
 $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$   
 $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$

Relations between self-focus proportion score and friendship quality

Level 1: (Positive friendship quality)<sub>ij</sub> =  $\beta_0_j + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFproportion})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFproportion})_{ij} + e_{ij}$   
 Level 2:  $\beta_0_j = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$   
 $\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$   
 $\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$

$$\text{Level 1: (Negative friendship quality)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFproportion})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFproportion})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

Relations between self-focus proportion score and internalizing symptoms

$$\text{Level 1: (Depression)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFproportion})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFproportion})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

$$\text{Level 1: (Anxiety)}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{OwnSFproportion})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{FriendSFproportion})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Gender}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$