

## ABSTRACT

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THE BEST FRIENDSHIPS OF  
SHY/WITHDRAWN MIDDLE  
SCHOOLERS

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Social withdrawal during childhood and adolescence tends to be associated with many outcome such as peer difficulties, and internalizing problems (see Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker 2009). Given the buffering effects of friendship, researchers have also suggested that friendship may help mitigate the negative outcomes socially withdrawn individuals experience throughout their life (e.g. Bukowski, Laursen, & Hoza, 2010) Research pertaining to social withdrawal and friendship quality tends to be rich in nature; however, more research is needed examining socially withdrawn children's friendship quality and quantity during the middle school years and beyond. Given that friendships tend to have an impact on one's social development, and peers become increasingly important during adolescence (see Brown & Larson, 2009 for a review), it is important to study friendship quality and quantity beyond the elementary school years. The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality and quantity of friendships among socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Specifically the following study was use to examine whether differences in friendship quality and quantity exist between socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, to investigate how socially withdrawn children's mutual best friendships function during middle school years compared to those of typical children, to

discover possible gender differences in friendship quality that may occur for socially withdrawn young adolescents, to expand the literature on social withdrawal and its possible association with friendship quantity and quality during early adolescence.

The mutual best friendships of shy/withdrawn and control children were examined for prevalence, stability and friendship quality. Through peer nominations of shy/withdrawn and aggressive behaviors that were reported on the *Extended Class Play* (Rubin et al., 2006), the *Shy/Withdrawn* and *Control* groups for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample were identified from a sample of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The *Shy/Withdrawn* group consisted of 72 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 152 6<sup>th</sup> graders and the *Control* group consisted of 85 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 158 6<sup>th</sup> graders. After identifying the groups, the best friend dyads visited the lab and completed several questionnaires such as the *The Network of Relationships Inventory* (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Consistent with Rubin and colleagues' (2006) study, findings revealed that shy/withdrawn children were just as likely as control children to have mutual best friendships in both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, 6<sup>th</sup> graders, compared to 8<sup>th</sup> graders, were more likely to report having a mutual best friend. In terms of the characteristics of the target groups' best friendships, using the aggression, shy/withdrawn, and peer rejection/victimization ECP factors, no significant group differences were found among the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample. Only in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample, shy/withdrawn best friends were significantly more likely to be shy/withdrawn and experience peer rejection and victimization. However, no significant group differences between shy/withdrawn and control young adolescents were found in terms of friendship quality on the NRI. Only significant age differences were found in the NRI in which 8<sup>th</sup>

graders as a whole, compared to the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, were more likely to rate their friendship quality higher. Furthermore, no significant gender differences in terms of best friendships were found in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Future research involving longitudinal samples on how socially withdrawn adolescents form best friendships is encouraged in order to identify the possible trends and factors associated with forming best friendships and their friendship quality from childhood to adolescence. It may be possible that because early adolescence is a developmental period when peer relationships play a more important role in one's life, young adolescents, regardless of whether or not they are withdrawn, actively form friendships with others in order to fulfill the need to fit in and form relationships with others. Furthermore, for future studies, researchers should investigate the best friendships of socially withdrawn children and young adolescents based on their motivations for withdrawal since socially withdrawn behavior is not exclusive to only shyness and possible differences in friendship prevalence and stability may exist between these different motivations of social withdrawal.

**THE BEST FRIENDSHIPS OF SHY/WITHDRAWN MIDDLE SCHOOLERS**

**By**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a student at the University of Maryland for six years now, it seems my academic journey is coming to an end (or a hiatus to simply put). If I knew six years ago I would still be at the University of Maryland pursuing a Masters degree in Human Development, I probably would find it hard to believe since I had such a narrow view on what my goals and aspirations would be for my undergraduate year. Since the psychology field always emphasized getting research experience for graduate school, I was determined to get research experience from any lab. The first lab I ever was a research assistant in was during my freshman year and I actually ended up getting “let go” due to my immaturity and ignorance of what it meant to be a research assistant (and also the fact I didn’t even declare psychology yet). So a semester or two later during the Spring of my Sophomore year I decided to try again and I came across Dr. Kenneth Rubin’s lab and I applied, and then the rest was history. I have been working in Dr. Rubin’s lab for almost five years now and doing so gave me so many opportunities I never imagined experiencing and I grew to enjoy learning more about social development and human development in general. The fact that I am receiving my Masters degree is beyond exciting and I am very thankful for those who helped me get to this point in my life.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, mentor, and lab director, Dr. Kenneth Rubin for always being an inspiration for me. I always admired his expertise, intelligence, benevolence, and strength so for him to see potential in me. Furthermore, his research interests in social withdrawal was something I grew very fond and interested in

since I lived that experience of being a socially withdrawn child throughout most of my childhood. Every time I think about the Turtle intervention the lab is currently working on, I always say to myself “If I was 3-4 years old again, I would totally be a participant in this intervention”. His research on social withdrawal and his developmental model on how social withdrawal develops over time, truly helped me understand my own childhood and interactions with others in a much more objective way. As a result, my interest in human development was sparked and I became more interested in studying social withdrawal and social development in general. Furthermore, him giving me the opportunity to be his masters student was definitely a huge watershed moment of my life. Near the end of the Fall semester senior year, I was having a “graduating from college” crisis and I was consumed with severe depression because I strongly believed I ruined my chance of ever getting into a Ph.D program and if I couldn’t get into a Ph.D program there was really no point in trying to get into a Master program since I figured I would not get accepted. So when he encouraged me to apply to the Master’s program for Human Development, I was a bit skeptical and cynical about it because I still had some doubts that I would even be accepted. So when he told me I got accepted I was filled with excitement but also doubt because I genuinely thought I was not going to get accepted. However, Dr. Rubin’s reassurance and belief in my potential as a graduate student really helped me gain the confidence to pursue my Master degree. Without him, I really would not know where I would really be at this point of my life and I honestly wouldn’t rather have it any other way. I am also very thankful for Dr. Rubin giving me the tools, resources, guidance and feedback needed to complete my Master thesis since without him, I would probably still be in limbo trying to figure out what I wanted my thesis to be about. I am very blessed and grateful to have Dr. Rubin in my life and I will forever be thankful for all the opportunities he gave me to be able to improve myself. I

also like to thank everyone working in Dr. Rubin's lab. Since I was a research assistant for Dr. Rubin for several years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to meet and learn from many graduate and undergraduate research assistants. I also want to thank every graduate student I met in Dr. Rubin's lab, Jennifer Wang, Maureen Wimsatt, Sarah Heverly-Fitt., Matthew Barstead and Kelly Smith, for helping me in many different ways from learning how to code, writing an undergraduate thesis, and navigating graduate school in general. Without them, I wouldn't be as knowledgeable in the field and have the experience I needed to be successful in this graduate program.

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semester Senior year and personally taking me to therapy to receive help for it. If I have to be honest, me receiving the opportunity to do this Master program would of not happened if she did not intervene a few weeks prior to Dr. Rubin telling me about it. My depression was extremely severe that I was almost at the point of no return and I was ready to throw everything away. Her being there for me really helped me get over it and be able to graduate from both undergrad and now grad school and I will be forever grateful for having her in my life and I am truly honored to have her a part of my committee.

Furthermore, I would like to Dr. Melanie Killen for being a part of my committee and also for always being a positive influence during my graduate year. I will forever be grateful for opportunity to have her for three of the classes I had to take for my graduate program because her all of classes were always a treat for me to be in that I was never absent for any of them. Her commitment to social justice through research is inspiring to me and I always enjoyed her bubbly personality that would light up the classroom. She also helped me in many ways during my graduate year. When I was trying to figure out how to prepare arranging my thesis defense, she always gave me advice and checked in with me about it when she had the time to. I also appreciated how she always structured her class in terms of paper assignments because it prevented me from putting myself at risk from procrastination and stress from trying to find a paper topic to write about the week it's due since she would always talk about it and tell us to give a topic and paragraph a month or two ahead of time before the paper is due. I am also very thankful for her encouragement and praise towards my writing since I do have moments where I

doubt whether my writing and work in general is at the graduate level and if it's good enough. I am forever grateful for being able to have the opportunity to have Dr. Killen as a professor three times and to have her as a member of my committee.

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## The Best Friendships of Shy/Withdrawn Middle Schoolers

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the years, social withdrawal has been a prominent topic of research in the field of social development. Social withdrawal tends to be defined as the act of intentionally isolating oneself from a relevant social group (e.g., classmates at school; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker 2009). During childhood, through peer interaction, children develop skills to communicate with, and learn through their peers; consequently, peers become increasingly important in children's lives with increasing age (see Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015, for a review). Given how influential peer interactions and relationships are during childhood and adolescence, it is unsurprising that they can also play a detrimental role in a child's development through acts of peer rejection, victimization, and exclusion (Rubin et al., 2015). The extant literature suggests that socially withdrawn children are among those who consistently experience peer rejection, victimization, and exclusion (Rubin, Bowker, & Gazelle, 2010).

*The significance of friendship.* Friendship can be defined as a reciprocal, voluntary, relationship that is mutually acknowledged between two individuals (see Rubin et al., 2015) Friendship can be considered one of the most fundamental social relationships, other than the parent-child relationship, that an individual can have in her/his life. Therefore, having a friend can be considered a vital component of development because it comes with many positive functions.

Given the positive effects friendship, one could speculate that socially withdrawn individuals might benefit greatly from having a friend; friends provide a source of interaction and social support. However, research pertaining to the relations between

friendship and social withdrawal tends to be relatively limited. Given the importance of peers during adolescence, and the changes in one's social environment as adolescents begin to transition from elementary school to middle school, research on friendships for socially withdrawn adolescence is encouraged in order to discover possible factors that may protect withdrawn children from negative outcomes or exacerbate those outcomes. In the study described herein, I investigated the extent to which socially withdrawn middle schoolers have a mutual friendship, the stability of their best friendships, and the quality of those friendships. In order to discover possible developmental differences, both 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were included in the sample.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### I. Social Withdrawal

According to Asendorpf (1990), when faced with social situations, depending on their motivation, individuals will either engage in the social situation (approach) or eschew social exchanges (avoidance). Asendorpf's (1990) discussion of approach and avoidance motivations has greatly contributed to our understanding of individuals' intentions underlying their social withdrawal. Approach is defined as the extent to which individuals are willing to engage in social interaction. Avoidance is the extent to which individuals seek to avoid engaging in social interaction. Motivations for social withdrawal are identified through the extent to which individuals have high or low approach/avoidance. Individuals who are considered shy tend to have high approach and high avoidance motivations.

According to Asendorpf (1990), due to their constant fear of engaging in social interactions, shy individuals face difficulty in fulfilling their desire to engage in social interactions. Individuals who prefer solitude (often referred to as unsociability, social disinterest or preference-for-solitude [PFS]), tend to have low approach and avoidance motivations. Furthermore, individuals who have low approach and high avoidance motivations tend to be considered socially avoidant, in which they choose to disengage themselves from social situations and actively try to avoid them.

Several research studies have empirically and cross-culturally supported Asendorpf's theoretical notion that individuals' motivations for social withdrawal can be

observed and examined by others. For instance, using sociometric ratings and teacher assessments, Hart, Yang, Nelson, Robinson, and Olsen (2000) examined the extent to which Chinese, Russian, and American teachers can distinguish the subtypes of social withdrawal and peer adjustment among 642 4 to 6-year-old children. They found that American, Russian, and Chinese teachers were able to distinguish the different types of social withdrawal, with the exception that Chinese teachers were slightly less accurate in their distinction. Kim, Rapee, Oh, and Moon (2008) found that Korean and Australian adults, by reflecting on their experiences as adolescents, were able to distinguish between shyness and preference for solitude when reporting their own motivations for social withdrawal. Furthermore, using a multitrait-multimethod approach, Spangler and Gazelle (2009) compared different reporters' (self, parents, peers, teachers, and observers) abilities to distinguish between anxious solitude (shyness), unsociability, and peer exclusion during middle childhood and found that peers were the most effective informants for distinguishing between these constructs. Studies such as those described above support Asendorpf's theory that social withdrawal is a broad construct that is characterized through approach-avoidance motivations, which can be identified and distinguished by other individuals and across cultures.

Regardless of the motivation for behaving in a solitary fashion, it is nevertheless the case that social interaction is vital for development; through interacting with peers, individuals are able to gain the tools needed in order to successfully develop cognitively, social-cognitively, and socially (Piaget, 1965; Rubin et al., 2009). Socially withdrawn children's inability to willingly interact with peers may deprive them of the skills needed

to be socially competent. As a result, socially withdrawn children tend to be more likely to experience negative peer interactions, and in turn, internally attribute their failures in peer interaction and negatively perceive their own social competence (Rubin, Root, & Bowker 2010).

Furthermore, socially withdrawn children tend to experience peer difficulties and internalizing problems which can negatively affect them over time. For example, many researchers have shown that anxiously withdrawn children and young adolescents are more likely to be rejected, victimized, and excluded by their age-mates than are their non-withdrawn age-mates (e.g., Oh, Rubin, Bowker, Booth-LaForce, Rose-Krasnor, & Laursen, 2008; Hoglund, Lalonde, & Leadbeater, 2008; Coplan, Ooi, & Rose-Krasnor, 2015). Rubin, Root, and Bowker (2010) proposed that experiencing peer difficulties can produce a transactional negative feedback loop. Anxiously withdrawn (extremely shy) children are first rejected by their peers, then they begin to view themselves poorly, which leads them to have a negative perception of their own social-competence and relationships. The end result of this loop leads to individuals becoming increasingly anxious around peers, thus leading to more peer difficulties and internalizing problems. Research suggests that peer rejection, in and of itself, tends to predict internalizing problems. For instance, using teacher and mother reports of internalizing and externalizing behaviors on a longitudinal sample from kindergarten to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Kraatz-Keiley, Bates, Dodge & Pettit (2000) found that peer rejection predicted teachers' reports of initial internalizing symptoms during kindergarten, while also predicting consistency among mothers' reports of internalizing problems over time.

## II. Friendship

Friendship can be defined as a reciprocal, voluntary, relationship that is acknowledged between both individuals (see Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015).

Friendships can provide support and security, enhance self-esteem, validation, assistance, and promote interpersonal growth (see Rubin et al., 2015 for a review). Friendships can provide an individual such benefits as: an increase in self-worth, intimate disclosure, affection, companionship, instrumental aid, transmission of knowledge, validation, a sense of reliance, and a growth of interpersonal sensitivity (Rubin et al., 2015).

Friendship also plays an important role during adolescence as dyads begin to have a more robust dynamic compared to peer groups, for they can become closer, more intimate, more disclosing, and more supportive relationships over time (see Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006 for a review).

Research on friendship suggests that friendship quality can positively influence individuals' sense of self and how they behave and perceive the social world and facilitate growth in being able to interact with others (see Berndt, 2002 for a brief review). Furthermore, friendship and friendship quality can influence moral development. Schonert-Reichl (1999) examined the associations of peer acceptance, friendship quality, and social behavior with moral reasoning. Using peer nominations, questionnaires and other sociometric measures with a sample of 108 10-13 year-old students, Schonert-Reichl (1999) found that participants who reported having more close friends tended to have higher levels of moral reasoning. Furthermore, the relation between peer victimization and internalizing and externalizing behaviors was mitigated for children

who reported having a best friend (Hodges et al. 1999).

### **III. Social Withdrawal and Friendship**

Given the buffering effects of friendship, researchers have also suggested that friendship may relate to certain outcomes for socially withdrawn children. Using a longitudinal sample of 231 preadolescents, Bukowski, Laursen, and Hoza (2010) investigated aspects of social withdrawal that predicted depressive affect and whether friendship played a moderating role in the relations between withdrawal and negative outcomes. They found that friendship decreased the relation between peer exclusion and depressed affect among socially withdrawn children. Specifically, socially withdrawn children who had a friend, compared to those who did not have a friend, did not have an increase in depressive affect (Bukowski, Laursen, & Hoza, 2010). Laursen and colleagues (2007) investigated the possible factors underlying the relation between social isolation and adjustment problems in a longitudinal sample of 166 Finnish 7-9 year old children. They found that compared to children who reported having a friend, a positive association between social isolation and internalizing and externalizing problems was reported among friendless children, thus suggesting that friendship plays a buffering role for socially withdrawn children (Laursen, Bukowski, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007).

Although friendships among socially withdrawn children can be beneficial to their development, research has also suggested possible negative effects of friendship. For example, socially withdrawn children with a socially withdrawn mutual best friend tend to become increasingly withdrawn over time. Oh et al. (2008) investigated the possible trends in social withdrawal development over the course of 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a

community sample of 394 participants. Researchers found that for the group that increased withdrawal over time, negative friendship quality, friendlessness and exclusion predicted higher levels of social withdrawal; for the decreasing group, lower levels of peer exclusion predicted a decrease in social withdrawal. Oh et al. (2008) also suggested that having a socially withdrawn friend may have also increased social withdrawal for the increasing group. Zalk et al. (2011) examined whether social anxiety influenced friendship selection and socialization among 834 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and found that socially anxious participants were more likely to select friends who were similar to them in social anxiety. Furthermore, similar to Oh et al.'s (2008) study, Zalk et al. (2011) suggested that socially anxious friends reinforce their social anxiety which may lead to them becoming increasingly socially anxious over time.

Although socially withdrawn children are able to form friendships with others, they tend to have poorer relationship quality compared to non-withdrawn children. With a sample of 824 5<sup>th</sup> graders, Fredstrom and colleagues (2011) examined whether socially withdrawn children differed from non-withdrawn children in terms of friendship understanding and found that socially withdrawn children tended to have lower levels of understanding intimacy and closeness in friendships. Even though socially withdrawn children may have lower levels of understanding friendship in the context of intimacy and closeness, research suggests that socially withdrawn children perceive their friendships differently than their relationships with non-friends. For instance, with a sample of 827 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, Burgess, Wojslawowicz, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor and Booth-LaForce (2006) found that when faced with negative social interactions with others, socially withdrawn children were less likely to report angry emotional reactions

towards their friends, compared to strangers. Socially withdrawn children were also less likely to make negative internal attributions when a certain social scenario (e.g. “Imagine that you are sitting at the lunch table at school eating lunch. You look up and see another kid coming over to your table with a carton of milk. You turn around to eat your lunch, and the next thing that happens is that the kid spills milk all over your back. The milk gets your shirt all wet.”) involves a friend, compared to an unfamiliar peer (Burgess et al. 2006). These results suggest that research on social withdrawal and friendship seems to have mixed findings in determining whether friendship can help or hinder socially withdrawn children.

*The Best Friendships of Shy/Withdrawn Children: Prevalence, Stability, and Relationship Quality*

One notable study pertaining to friendship and social withdrawal was that of Rubin and colleagues (2006). In a longitudinal study of the best friendships of socially withdrawn children. Rubin et al. examined the prevalence, stability, best friend’s characteristics, and friendship quality among the best friendships of socially withdrawn and non-withdrawn 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The sample consisted of 827 5<sup>th</sup> graders (406 boys; 421 girls) who were assessed in schools and in the laboratory. The sample was administered the Extended Class Play (ECP) during the Fall semester (Time 1), then asked to come in for a laboratory visit after 2 months (Time 2), and were administered the ECP again seven months later (Time 3). The ECP allowed collection of friendship nominations to identify mutual friendship dyads and collection of peer nominations of social-behavioral characteristics; the latter allowed the identification of anxiously withdrawn and

control/typical groups. Laboratory data collection involved collecting questionnaire data pertaining to friendship quality.

Questionnaires were first administered in classrooms in which the participants were given a friendship nomination questionnaire in which they wrote the name of their “very best friend.” The Extended Class Play (ECP) is a peer nomination technique that allows each child to pretend to be a director of a class play. The participants are asked to nominate their classmates for particular roles (e.g. “This is someone who often helps others and is a person you can trust”, “This is someone who is really shy. She/He talks quietly and rarely starts conversations”, and “This is someone who loses her/his temper easily and gets into fights”). Participants’ teachers were also given the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS; Hightower et al., 1986) to assess socioemotional and behavioral functioning in the classroom based on three problem subscales: 1) Learning Problems, 2) Acting-Out, and 3) Shy-Anxious, and three competency subscales: 1) Task Orientation, 2) Assertive Social Skills, and 3) Frustration Tolerance. Teachers would rate on a scale of 1=Not a problem/Not at all to 5=Very serious problem/Very well. The researchers focused on all subscales in their study except for the Learning Problems and Task Orientation subscale.

At Time 1, researchers used the ECP to identify the children who scored in the top 33% for shyness/withdrawal and scored in the bottom 50% for aggression as the “Shy/Withdrawn” group; the “Control” group comprised those children who scored in the bottom 50% for both shyness/withdrawal and aggression. After identifying the groups, the total sample was reduced from 827 5<sup>th</sup> graders to 332 5<sup>th</sup> graders split between the two groups. The Shy/Withdrawn group consisted of 169 children (75 boys; 94 girls) and the Control group consisted of 163 children (93

boys; 70 girls). After identifying the groups, all participants were invited to the lab, with their best friend, within two months of the initial classroom assessment. After identifying the mutual friendships, there were 47 dyads that included a focal shy/withdrawn child and his/her best friend (22 boys, 25 girls); there were 48 control dyads (22 boys, 26 girls). Each member of each dyad completed the Friendship Quality Questionnaire-Revised (FQQ; Parker & Asher, 1993) which measured participants' self-perceived quality of friendship with their best friend based on the following six subscales: a) companionship/recreation, b) validation/caring, c) help/guidance, d) intimate disclosure, e) conflict and betrayal, and f) conflict resolution.

Rubin and colleagues (2006) found the following: 1) Compared to the control group, socially withdrawn children, a) were rated by their peers as more significantly withdrawn and more victimized and excluded, and b) were reported by their teachers to demonstrate significantly more shy and anxious behaviors, with girls being rated as having more shy and anxious behavior as boys. 2) At Time 1, 65% of Shy/Withdrawn children (37 boys, 69 girls) and 70% of Control children (57 boys, 55 girls) reported having a mutual best friend with no significant differences in the likelihood in control and socially withdrawn children having a mutual best friend. 3) At Time 2, 63% of Shy/Withdrawn children (41 boys, 65 girls) and 72% of Control children (63 boys, 55 girls) had a mutual best friend with no significant group differences. 4) Compared to Shy/Withdrawn children without a mutual best friend, Shy/Withdrawn children with a mutual best friend were rated by their peers as more popular and sociable. 5) Compared to the best friends of the Control children, the best friends of Shy/Withdrawn children were significantly more shy and withdrawn, and victimized and excluded by their peers. 6) Significant dyadic correlations were found for

victimization/exclusion, prosocial behaviors, and popularity/sociability among Shy/Withdrawn children and their best friends, while Control children were similar to their best friend in terms of victimization/exclusion. 7) The relations between prosocial behavior scores for withdrawn children and their best friends were positively correlated. 8) The relations between popularity/sociability and victimization/exclusion scores for withdrawn boys and their best friends were positive and significant. 9) Shy/Withdrawn boys and their best friends were more similar to each than control children and their best friends on peer ratings of prosocial behaviors. 10) According to teacher ratings: a) Shy/Withdrawn children were similar to their best friends across all TCRS variables, b) Control children were significantly similar to their best friend in terms of frustration tolerance and social assertive skills, c) Shy/Withdrawn boys had significant associations with their best friends on shyness/anxiety and social assertive skills while Shy/Withdrawn girls were significantly similar to their best friends in terms of acting-out and frustration tolerance, and d) Control boys were significantly similar to their best friends in terms of social assertive skills while Control girls were significantly similar to their best friends in terms of frustration tolerance. 11) In terms of friendship stability, 69% of Shy/Withdrawn children and 70% of Control children shared the same best friendship across the school year. 12) Shy/Withdrawn children rated their best friendships lower than the Control children in terms of help and guidance, intimate exchange, conflict resolution, and overall friendship quality score. 13) Girls reported higher friendship quality than boys on validation/caring, intimate disclosure, conflict & betrayal, and overall friendship quality score. 14) Compared to the best friends of the Control children, the best friends of Shy/Withdrawn children reported their best friendships to be less fun and less likely to involve help/guidance and lower in overall friendship quality.

Rubin et al.'s (2006) study on the best friendships of socially withdrawn children, is one of several studies to provide insight on how social withdrawal can play a role in friendship quality, behavior, and outcomes. Similarly to some of the aforementioned studies, socially withdrawn children can benefit from having a friend for it can improve one's social competence and prevent later peer difficulties. For instance, one of the findings in the Rubin et al study was that Shy/Withdrawn children with a mutual best friend were perceived as more socially competent and popular than Shy/Withdrawn children without a best friend. The presence of a friend may help prevent Shy/Withdrawn children from experiencing future adjustment problems and peer difficulties because they are able to socially interact with their best friend. However, Rubin et al.'s (2006) findings also found possible negative effects of having a similarly withdrawn best friend. For instance, the researchers found that both Shy/Withdrawn children *and* their best friends were reported by peers as being significantly more shy/withdrawn, excluded, and victimized compared to their Control counterparts. Since both Shy/Withdrawn children and their best friends reported lower friendship quality, it may be possible that the buffering effect of the best friendship may attenuate overtime if the quality is not sustainable.

One possible explanation for lower levels of friendship quality is that Shy/Withdrawn children may have different expectations of their friendships with others. For instance, Schneider and Tessier (2007) interviewed 38 Withdrawn and 38 Control 10-12 year olds about how socially withdrawn adolescents think about best friendships and their expectations of their best friend. They found that compared to the control group, who reported intimacy as important in their friendships, socially withdrawn adolescents reported that having a best friendship as a source for help and to focus on their own needs was most important. Given Schneider and Tessier's (2007)

findings, it may be possible that the Shy/Withdrawn children in the Rubin et al. (2006) study have similar expectations towards their best friend and if those expectations are not met, they may perceive their friendship more negatively.

### *Social Withdrawal and Friendship in Adolescence*

Research pertaining to social withdrawal and friendship quality tends to be rich in nature; however, more research is needed examining socially withdrawn children's friendship quality and quantity during the middle school years and beyond. Given that friendships tend to have an impact on one's social development, and peers become increasingly important during adolescence (see Brown & Larson, 2009 for a review), it is important to study friendship quality and quantity beyond the elementary school years. During adolescence, peer relations become increasingly important (Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015); therefore, socially withdrawn youth may be at greater risk than elementary schoolers for experiencing peer difficulties. Friendship quality may play a larger role in attenuating the association with peer difficulties and internalizing problems for socially withdrawn adolescents. For instance, using a longitudinal sample of 4881 participants split into two groups, Guroglu, Lieshout, Haselager, and Scholte (2007) examined and compared the friendships between preadolescents (11 years) and adolescents (14 years) and their psychosocial adjustment. According to their findings, adolescents without friends more likely than adolescents with friends to be more depressed, engage in delinquency, and be negatively perceived by their peers and rejected from the peer group (Guroglu et al. 2007). Furthermore, in Miller and Coll's (2007) review pertaining to social development in the context of social withdrawal, research on socially withdrawn children has suggested that friendships can help socially withdrawn children gain self-confidence, promote

social engagement, and prevent emotional distress.

In addition, studying the prevalence, stability and friendship quality for socially withdrawn middle school-age young adolescents will help further our knowledge about how friendships develop when youth progress to a *novel* social environment. According to the stage-environment perspective, different school-related processes change throughout a child's development as they transition from elementary school to middle school and to high school. These experiences with school transitions may lead to changes in both academic and social motivations and behavior (see Eccles, & Roeser, 2009 for a review). Early adolescence can be perceived as a transition period between childhood and adolescence as individuals go through various physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes. Thus, the middle school transition provides the foundation for children to learn to adapt to new academic environments and may prepare them for subsequent school transitions into high school and beyond (Veronneau & Dishion, 2010; Hanewald 2013). Furthermore, young adolescents who are transitioning into middle school have reported that their friends and peers are their most frequent resources to help them adjust to this transition (Akos, 2002). Friendships and friendship quality in early adolescence may differ from those of younger children as a result of these transitional changes. For instance, Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) found that when 6<sup>th</sup> graders transition to middle school, they report a decrease in social affiliation at the beginning of the school year but then rebounded during the Spring of their first year in middle school. Furthermore, early adolescence comes with new challenges as peers become increasingly important during this period as youth try to fit in with the peer group.

The effects of the friendships and friendship quality of socially withdrawn young

adolescents may change due to increasing demands for conformity in the peer group. Using self-reports, sociometric ratings, and peer nominations, Kingery and Erdley (2007) examined the roles of peer acceptance, friendship quantity, and friendship quality on adjustment for 5<sup>th</sup> graders who were transitioning to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Researchers collected data from the Spring of the participants' 5<sup>th</sup> grade year (Time 1) and the Fall of their 6<sup>th</sup> grade year (Time 2), after six weeks of entering middle school, and assessed adjustment through self-reports of loneliness and involvement in school. Kingery and Erdley (2007) found the following: 1) 36% of the participants had nominated the same friend from Time 1 to Time 2 whereas 47% of the participants did not. 2) 53% of the participants reported having at least one of the same best friends, 3) 20% of the participants reported having the same mutual best friendships across time and 8% reporting having the same 2 mutual best friendships. 4) Children who did not have a mutual friend reported lower levels of peer acceptance, and school involvement, while also reporting higher scores for loneliness at both Time 1 and Time 2. 5) Peer acceptance and adjustment (loneliness and school involvement) were strongly correlated with each other at both Times 1 and 2. 5) The number of mutual friends significantly decreased across the transition. 6) Girls reported higher levels of friendship quality than boys at Time 2. Given Kingery and Erdley's (2007) findings, it may be possible that socially withdrawn adolescents, who do not have a mutual best friend, may have a more difficult time adjusting to middle school. Since socially withdrawn children are more likely to experience peer difficulties, and peers and friends seem to play an important role for adjusting to middle school, it would seem important to investigate whether the effects of friendship quantity and friendship quality change during this period as well.

#### **IV. Present Study and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality and quantity of friendships among socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders using the sample and measures used in the original Rubin et al. (2006) study. Specifically, the goal of this study was 1) to determine whether differences in friendship quality and quantity exist between socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders; 2) to investigate how socially withdrawn young adolescents' friendships function during middle school years compared to those of typical young adolescents; 3) to discover possible gender differences in friendship quality that may occur for socially withdrawn young adolescents; and 4) to expand the literature on friendship quantity and quality and social withdrawal to the period of early adolescence.

*Hypotheses:* Since peer relationships become increasingly important during early adolescence, peer expectations and norms will play a major role in how socially withdrawn young adolescents' form friendships. It was expected that socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders prevalence and quality of friendship would differ from control 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Socially withdrawn behavior is generally considered undesirable among peers; therefore, socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders may have a more difficult time forming friendships with others compared to when they were younger. It has been reported that socially withdrawn children tend to form friendships with other socially withdrawn children (e.g., Rubin et al. 2006; Haselager et al. 1998); thus, it was hypothesized that socially withdrawn youth would be more likely to form friendships with other withdrawn youth than would typical young adolescents.

It was expected that, compared to control 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders would report their friendships as lower in relationship quality. As noted in the original Rubin et al. (2006) study, socially withdrawn children reported that the quality of their friendships was lower than those of control children. It was also hypothesized that friendship quality and quantity during middle school would differ for socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Since 6<sup>th</sup> grade tends to be a transition period from elementary school to middle school, socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders may have more difficulty adjusting and forming friendships at the start of middle school, given that they have to adapt to their new social environment (see Eccles, & Roeser, 2009 for a review). Given that 8<sup>th</sup> grade tends to be the end of middle school, young adolescents may feel more socially established and comfortable through the experiences gained by the final year of middle school. Therefore, it seemed important to investigate whether the trend in friendship quality and quantity for socially withdrawn youth differed in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Finally, it was expected that gender differences would be associated with friendship quality and quantity for socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Socially withdrawn boys tend to be perceived more negatively compared to girls (see Doey, Coplan, & Kingsbury, 2013 for a review). With the pressure of gender and peer norms in the context of early adolescence, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade socially withdrawn boys were hypothesized to have fewer friendships and lower friendship quality compared to 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade socially withdrawn girls.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The sample consisted of a total of 467 (222 Boys, 245 Girls) middle schoolers who participated in the NIMH-supported *Friendship Project* (K.H. Rubin, PI) during the middle school years (see Figure 1). The sample included 310 6<sup>th</sup> graders (146 Boys;  $M = 11.42$ ,  $SD = .53$ ) and 157 8<sup>th</sup> graders (76 Boys;  $M = 13.52$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). In terms of ethnic background, the sample consisted of 58% European American, 18% Asian American, 10% Latino American, 10% African American, and 4% Native American/Other young adolescents. After identifying the *Shy/Withdrawn* and *Control* groups for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample, the *Shy/Withdrawn* group comprised 72 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 152 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The *Control* group comprised 85 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 158 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Sample size in some analyses was reduced since some participants were dropped due to missing data.

### Measures

**Identifying Best Friendships.** Friendship nominations (Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin, 1994) were used to identify best friend dyads. Participants were asked to write the names of their “very best friend” and their “second best friend”, of the same gender, at their school. Young adolescents were considered “best friends” if nominations as first and second best friend were mutual.

**Friendship Quality.** *The Network of Relationships Inventory* (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was used to assess participants’ relationship quality with their best friends. The NRI is a 33-item questionnaire used to measure close relationships with family members,

friends, and romantic partners. The NRI consists of 11 subscales: instrumental aid, companionship, conflict, annoyances, satisfaction, intimacy, nurturance, affection, admiration, relative power, and reliable alliance. For this study, we used 9 subscales of the NRI: instrumental aid, companionship, satisfaction, intimacy, nurturance, affection, admiration, and reliable alliance. These subscales have been aggregated to assess Positive Friendship Quality (e.g., Furman, 1996; Gavin & Furman, 1996; and Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchev, 2002).

**Identifying Shy/Withdrawn and Control Groups.** *The Extended Class Play* (ECP; Rubin et al. 2006) shyness/withdrawn and aggression subscales were used to identify the shy/withdrawn and control groups. The ECP is a friendship nomination questionnaire in which participants are asked to nominate peers based on various character and behavioral descriptions (e.g., "is a good leader", "gets into fights", or "likes to play alone"). The ECP is an extended version of the Revised Class Play (RCP; see Masten, Morison, & Pellegrini, 1985). The Shyness/Withdrawal subscale includes 4 items (e.g., "Doesn't talk much or quietly", "Hardly starts conversation", and "Nervous about discussions") and the Aggression subscale includes 7 items (e.g., "Interrupts others", "Loses temper easily", "Gets into fights" and "Spreads rumors"). Participants were assigned to the Shy/Withdrawn group if their scores placed in the top 33% on the Shyness/Withdrawal subscale and in the bottom 50% on the Aggression subscale (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006). Participants were assigned to the control group if their scores placed in the bottom 50% on both the Shyness/Withdrawal and Aggression subscales.

## **Procedures**

Research assistants administered two questionnaires in group format in classrooms or larger schoolrooms. The youth were informed that their answers were confidential and were

instructed not to discuss their answers with classmates. Each session lasted for approximately one hour. The first questionnaire involved friendship nominations and the second questionnaire was the Extended Class Play. For the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample, participants, who reported having a mutual best friend, were asked to visit the on-campus laboratory with their best friend to complete various assessments and tasks. During the lab visits with their best friend, the participants completed the ECP and the NRI. For the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample, participants completed the NRI, and ECP questionnaires through lab visits and via mail. The ECP and friendship nomination questionnaire were administered and collected in both Fall and Spring semesters for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample. The ECP and friendship nomination questionnaire data was only collected from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample in the Fall.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### *Preliminary analyses: Characteristics of Target Groups*

A series of 2 (Group: Shy/Withdrawn, Control)  $\times$  2 (Gender) ANOVAs were computed to examine the characteristics of the target shy/withdrawn and control groups within the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample. Specifically, these analyses were used to determine whether the target groups indeed differed statistically from each other on the Extended Class Play (ECP) factors of shyness/withdrawal, peer rejection/victimization, and aggression. (see Table 1 for 6<sup>th</sup> grade means and standard deviations and Table 4 for 8<sup>th</sup> grade means and standard deviations). As expected, shy/withdrawn young adolescents were rated by their peers as significantly more withdrawn than were control young adolescents for both 6<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 228) = 264.32, p < .001$  and 8<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 157) = 100.58, p < .001$ . Socially withdrawn and control young adolescents did not differ significantly in their levels of aggression in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 228) = 3.71, ns.$  and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 157) = 0.96, ns.$  Shy/withdrawn young adolescents were reported by their peers to be significantly more victimized and excluded than were the control young adolescents for both 6<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 228) = 61.98, p < .001$  and 8<sup>th</sup> grade  $F(1, 157) = 29.30, p < .001$  samples. Gender differences were found only for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample. 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls were reported as being more shy/withdrawn compared to 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys  $F(1, 228) = 8.00, p < .01$ ; 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys, compared to 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls, were reported as being more aggressive  $F(1, 228) = 7.70, p < .01$ .

### *Friend Quantity and Stability in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade*

We examined the quantity and stability of best friendships among the 6<sup>th</sup> grade target group sample (see Figure 2). Of the 228 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 81% ( $n = 185$ ; 86 Boys and 99 Girls) reported having a best friend at Time 1 and 76% ( $n = 161$ ; 72 Boys and 89 Girls) reported having

a best friend at Time 2. At Time 2, 17 participants were dropped due to missing data. Out of 109 shy/withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders (54 Boys and 55 Girls), 85.5% (n = 94) reported having a best friend at Time 1 and 81% (n = 81) reported having a best friend at Time 2. Out of 118 control 6<sup>th</sup> graders (55 Boys and 63 Girls), 77% (n = 91) reported having a best friend at Time 1 and 72% (n = 80) reported having a best friend at Time 2. In terms of 6<sup>th</sup> graders best friendship stability in Time 2, 51.8% (n = 118) 6<sup>th</sup> graders reported having the same mutual best friend in Time 1 and Time 2. Specifically, 55% of shy/withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders (n = 60) and 48.7% of control 6<sup>th</sup> graders (n = 58) reported having the same mutual best friend in Time 1 and Time 2. When examining within groups, out of the 80 shy/withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders, 74% reported having the same mutual best friend in both Time 1 and Time 2. Out of the 80 control 6<sup>th</sup> graders with mutual best friends, 72.5% reported having the same mutual best friend in both Time 1 and Time 2. Chi-square analyses revealed no significant groups differences in friendship quantity and stability between shy/withdrawn and control 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Therefore, shy/withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and control 6<sup>th</sup> graders are both equally likely to form and maintain friendships.

#### *Friend Quantity in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade*

The quantity of best friendships among the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample was also examined (see Figure 3). Of the 157 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 64% (n=101; 48 Boys and 53 Girls) reported having a best friend. Among the 72 shy 8<sup>th</sup> graders (36 Boys and 36 Girls), 71% (n= 51) reported having a best friend; among the 85 control 8<sup>th</sup> graders (40 Boys and 45 Girls), 59% (n=50) reported having a best friend. Chi-square analyses revealed no significant groups differences in friendship quantity between shy/withdrawn and control 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Therefore, shy/withdrawn 8<sup>th</sup> graders are equally able to form friendships similar to control 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

A follow-up Chi-Square test was conducted to assess whether 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade best friendships significantly differed from one another. Chi-square results indicated a significant difference between 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in terms of friendship quantity  $\chi^2(2, N = 395) = 15.68, p < .001$ . Therefore, 6<sup>th</sup> graders, compared to 8<sup>th</sup> graders were significantly more likely to have a mutual best friend.

#### *Characteristics of Best Friends of Target Young Adolescents in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade*

The characteristics of best friendships among the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample were also examined. Similar to the target group, these analyses were used to determine whether the best friends of the target groups indeed differed statistically from each other on the Extended Class Play (ECP) factors of shyness/withdrawal, peer rejection/victimization, and aggression. (see Table 2 for 6<sup>th</sup> grade means and standard deviations and Table 5 for 8<sup>th</sup> grade means and standard deviations). Surprisingly, the best friend results yielded no significant group differences for shyness/withdrawal, and rejection/victimization in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample. No significant differences in aggression scores were found for either best friendships in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Results of these “best friend” analyses indicated a significant main effect for the group variable (Best friends of Shy/Withdrawn, Best friends of Control) for shyness/withdrawal,  $F(1, 94) = 6.77, p < .02$  and rejection/victimization,  $F(1, 94) = 3.98, p < .05$  in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. When compared with the best friends of control young adolescents, *the best friends* of shy/withdrawn young adolescents were significantly more shy and withdrawn as well as more victimized and rejected by their peers in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There were no significant interactions found in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample.

To further examine similarities between that target groups and their best friends for 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed on the ECP factors separately within group and separately by gender (see Table 3 for 6<sup>th</sup> graders and Table 6 for 8<sup>th</sup> graders). Correlation analyses revealed that there were no significant dyadic correlations for both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade samples within group and when separated by gender. Therefore, both 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade target groups and their best friends tend to not be significantly similar to each other on any of the five ECP factors.

#### *Friendship Quality in 6<sup>th</sup> Grade and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade*

We examined whether young adolescents' perceptions of friendship quality were related to group status in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. A series of 2 (Group: Shy/Withdrawn, Control)  $\times$  2 (Gender)  $\times$  2 (Grade) ANOVAs was conducted to examine the differences between the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade target groups and between the groups of best friends (best friend of withdrawn, best friend of control). (see Table 7 for means and standard deviations and Table 8 for effect size). The young adolescents completed the NRI with specific reference to the quality of the relationship they had with the friend who visited the laboratory with them. A significant group main effect was not found for the NRI constructs among 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

Among the target group sample, significant grade main effects were found for companionship,  $F(1, 467) = 10.13, p < .01$ ; nurturance,  $F(1, 467) = 4.47, p < .04$ ; intimacy,  $F(1, 467) = 5.18, p < .04$ ; affection,  $F(1, 467) = 8.17, p < .005$ ; and social support,  $F(1, 467) = 4.34, p < .04$ . 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported higher levels of friendship quality than did 6<sup>th</sup> graders on the following variables: companionship:  $M = 4.20, SD = 0.72$  and  $M = 3.97, SD = 0.68$ ; nurturance:  $M = 3.86, SD = 0.75$  and  $M = 3.69, SD = 0.88$ ; intimacy:  $M = 3.93, SD = 0.95$  and  $M = 3.70, SD = 0.99$ ;

affection:  $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.67$  and  $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ; and social support,  $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.57$  and  $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ . There were no significant Group  $\times$  Gender  $\times$  Grade interactions.

Analyses of the friendship quality among the best friends of socially withdrawn and control young adolescents revealed no significant group, grade, and gender differences for the NRI constructs.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this study, the best friendships of socially withdrawn young adolescents were examined. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to examine whether group, gender, or age differences existed among socially withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in terms of friendship quantity, stability, and quality. Contrary to our expectations, socially withdrawn young adolescents were just as likely as control young adolescents to have a mutual best friend in both 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. This finding is consistent with Rubin and colleagues (2006) study involving 5<sup>th</sup> graders in which both socially withdrawn and control 5<sup>th</sup> graders were equally able to have mutual best friends. Several studies have also supported this notion that socially withdrawn young adolescents are able to form friendships (Fredstrom et al., 2012; Bowker, Rubin, Burgess, Booth-LaForce, & Rose-Krasnor, 2006). This finding also provides evidence against Rubin et al.'s (2006) speculation that as socially withdrawn young adolescents get older, they will have a more difficult time forming best friendships. One possible explanation could be that because early adolescence is a developmental period when peer relationships play a more important role in one's life, young adolescents, regardless of whether or not they are withdrawn, actively form friendships with others in order to fulfill the need to fit in and form relationships with others. Longitudinal studies on how socially withdrawn adolescents form best friendships is encouraged in order to identify the possible trends and factors associated with forming best friendships from childhood to adolescence. The results also revealed that interestingly, the best friends of shy/withdrawn and control young adolescents significantly differed from each other, but only in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Specifically, for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade sample, similar to the shy/withdrawn target group, shy/withdrawn best friends were reported as being more socially withdrawn and

rejected and victimized by their peers. However, although 6<sup>th</sup> grade shy/withdrawn students were reported as more withdrawn and more likely to experience peer rejection and victimization, these group differences were not found among their best friends, when compared to the control group's best friends. Therefore, this evidence suggests that the best friends of shy/withdrawn 6<sup>th</sup> graders are not likely to be reported as more shy/withdrawn and rejected and victimized similarly to their shy/withdrawn friends.

A possible explanation for these results may involve the transition from elementary school to middle school. Since 6<sup>th</sup> grade is the transition to middle school, young adolescents may just try to befriend individuals to compensate for the friends that they may have lost contact with after leaving elementary school and therefore certain factors, such as homophily, may no longer play a huge role in friend selection and initiation during this period (see Poulin & Chan, 2010 for a review). Since 8<sup>th</sup> grade is the end of middle school, young adolescents may have formed more meaningful friendships by this time, with their friends being more similar to them. During early adolescence, peer relations become more structured and young adolescents begin to form social groups, or cliques that consist of voluntary, friendship-based groups that consist of individuals who are similar to each other by certain characteristics (see Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015 for a review). As peer groups are formed, group membership becomes more salient, therefore, homogeneity and homophily may be desired in which individuals within a certain peer group will have the same characteristics (see Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2007). Therefore, it may be possible that shy/withdrawn 8<sup>th</sup> graders form peer groups or cliques based on their experiences with being shy/withdrawn and being excluded from other peer groups. Longitudinal research on peer groups and social withdrawal is encouraged in order to investigate how socially withdrawn young adolescents form their own peer groups throughout middle school

and whether these groups change over time.

Furthermore, contrary to our expectations, there were no significant group differences in friendship quality for both target groups and their best friends. Indeed, shy/withdrawn and control young adolescents, and their best friends, both reported their best friendships as relatively similar in quality. These findings are inconsistent with Rubin et al.'s (2006) finding in which socially withdrawn 5<sup>th</sup> graders and their best friends tended to report their best friendships as lower in relationship quality. It may be possible that the transition to middle school may play a role in these results. Since young adolescents, who are transitioning into middle school, tend to be aware of the transitional changes they will be experiencing, both shy/withdrawn and non-withdrawn young adolescents may experience the same difficulty in adjusting to middle school and may rely on their friends to help them adjust to this transition (Akos, 2002).

Although no group differences in friendship quality were found, our findings indicated significant age differences in friendship quality. 8<sup>th</sup> graders, compared to 6<sup>th</sup> graders, reported their best friendships as being stronger in companionship, intimacy, nurturance, affection, and social support. As previously mentioned, middle schoolers tend to rely on their friends to help them adjust to this transition from elementary school, since peers play a much more important role during adolescence, 8<sup>th</sup> graders may feel a stronger friendship quality compared to 6<sup>th</sup> graders, because of the time they spent forming these friendships throughout their time in middle school. Furthermore, since companionship, intimacy, nurturance, affection, and social support can be considered certain characteristics that become increasingly emphasized during adolescence (see Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2007), it may be possible that 8<sup>th</sup> graders engage in these types of friendship interactions more than 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Given that this was a cross-sectional

study, a longitudinal study is encouraged to observe the trends in which friendship quality plays a more important role from childhood to adolescence.

Finally, in contrast to our hypothesis, we did not find any significant gender differences in friendship quality and quantity among socially withdrawn and control 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This finding seems consistent with Rubin et al.'s (2006) findings in which there were no significant gender differences in friendship quality and quantity in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Researchers have also reported non-significant gender differences in friendship quality and quantity (see Poulin & Chan, 2010 for a brief review).

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Friendship identifications were limited to same-sex, same-age, same-school participating young adolescents. Therefore, certain types of friendships that may be more important were not included such as cross-age friendships, cross-sex friendships and friendships that are developed outside of the general school context (e.g. activities, church, family, etc.). Expanding the types of friendships may help provide evidence on other important sources of social and emotional support for young adolescents who experience difficulties with peer relationships. Furthermore, the study was a cross sectional study examining the differences in 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and we were only able to assess friendship stability for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade sample. Longitudinal designs are encouraged to provide evidence on whether developmental changes in friendship quantity and friendship quality occur from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade for socially withdrawn young adolescents.

For future studies, researchers should investigate the best friendships of socially withdrawn children and young adolescents based on their motivations for withdrawal. In this study, shy/withdrawn were identified; unsociable and avoidant youth were not studied herein.

Since motivations for withdrawal are based on approach and avoidance, the extent to which differently motivated socially withdrawn individuals initiate and engage in friendships may differ. Therefore, it might be possible that differences in friendship quantity, stability, and quality may exist between the different motivations of social withdrawal.

Table 1.  
ECP Mean Scores of 6<sup>th</sup> grade Shy Group and Control Group

ECP	Total (n = 228)				Boys (n = 109)				Girls (n = 119)				Effect Size <sup>a</sup>
	Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<b>Aggression</b>	-0.42	0.43	-0.50	0.07	-0.34 <sup>c</sup>	0.60	-0.47 <sup>c</sup>	0.07	-0.51 <sup>c</sup>	0.09	-0.52 <sup>c</sup>	0.07	
<b>Withdrawal</b>	1.55 <sup>b</sup>	1.26	-0.51 <sup>b</sup>	0.60	1.29 <sup>c</sup>	0.96	-0.62 <sup>c</sup>	0.29	1.81 <sup>c</sup>	1.45	-0.42 <sup>c</sup>	0.76	0.54
<b>Rejection</b>	0.17 <sup>b</sup>	0.71	-0.39 <sup>b</sup>	0.26	0.18	0.72	-0.34	0.23	0.15	0.71	-0.44	0.28	0.22

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant group differences.

<sup>b</sup> Significant group differences  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significant gender differences  $p < .05$ .

Table 2.  
ECP Mean Scores of 6<sup>th</sup> grade Best Friends Shy and Control Group

ECP	Total (n = 175)				Boys (n = 80)				Girls (n = 95)				Effect Size <sup>a</sup>
	Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<b>Aggression</b>	-0.20	0.41	-0.08	0.77	-0.17	0.42	-0.14	0.50	-0.23	0.40	-0.03	0.95	
<b>Withdrawal</b>	0.29	1.26	0.10	0.88	0.17	0.91	0.10	0.66	0.38	1.50	0.10	1.04	
<b>Rejection</b>	-0.04	0.70	-0.10	0.48	-0.15	0.52	-0.01	0.51	0.06	0.81	-0.18	0.45	

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant group differences.

<sup>b</sup> Significant group differences  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significant gender differences;  $p < .05$ .

Table 3. *Correlations Between ECP Scores of Target 6<sup>th</sup> graders and Scores of Their Best Friends, Separately by Gender*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Best Friend Dyads</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Withdrawn Group (n = 172; 79 Boys)			
Aggression	-0.17	0.09	-0.26
Withdrawal	-0.11	0.00	-0.26
Rejection/Vic	-0.10	0.06	-0.21
Prosocial	-0.71	0.06	-0.27
Popularity/Sociability	-0.02	-0.08	0.02
Control Group (n = 188; 87 Boys)			
Aggression	0.02	-0.04	0.05
Withdrawal	-0.07	-0.08	-0.05
Rejection/Vic	0.10	0.17	0.14
Prosocial	-0.05	-0.25	0.19
Popularity/Sociability	0.16	-0.05	0.27

Table 4.  
ECP Mean Scores of 8<sup>th</sup> grade Shy Group and Control Group

ECP	Total (n = 157)				Boys (n = 82)				Girls (n = 75)				Effect Size <sup>a</sup>
	Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Aggression	-0.43	0.10	-0.43	0.09	-0.43	0.10	-0.43	0.12	-0.44	0.10	-0.44	0.06	
Withdrawal	1.65 <sup>b</sup>	1.48	-0.40 <sup>b</sup>	1.09	1.63	1.43	-0.57	0.12	1.68	1.55	-0.25	1.48	0.39
Rejection	0.23 <sup>b</sup>	0.82	-0.34 <sup>b</sup>	0.48	0.20	0.80	-0.37	0.14	0.26	0.84	-0.31	0.65	0.16

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant group differences.

<sup>b</sup> Significant group differences  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significant gender differences;  $p < .05$ .

Table 5.  
ECP Mean Scores of 8<sup>th</sup> grade Best Friends of Shy Group and Control Group

ECP	Total (n = 94)				Boys (n = 39)				Girls (n = 55)				Effect Size <sup>a</sup>
	Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		Shywd		Control		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Aggression	-0.18	0.45	-0.04	1.11	-0.26	0.37	-0.10	0.63	-0.12	0.49	0.15	1.35	
Withdrawal	0.32 <sup>b</sup>	1.04	-0.09 <sup>b</sup>	0.48	0.42	0.78	-0.15	0.51	0.25	1.20	-0.06	0.47	0.07
Rejection	0.14 <sup>b</sup>	0.83	-0.13 <sup>b</sup>	0.53	0.21	0.90	-0.18	0.55	0.10	0.79	-0.09	0.52	0.04

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant group differences.

<sup>b</sup> Significant group differences  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significant gender differences;  $p < .05$ .

Table 6.

*Correlations Between ECP Scores of Target 8<sup>th</sup> graders and Scores of Their Best Friends, Separately by Gender*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Best Friend Dyads</b>		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Withdrawn Group (n = 94; 41 Boys)			
Aggression	-0.02	-0.03	-0.07
Withdrawal	-0.24	-0.17	-0.20
Rejection/Vic	-0.04	-0.24	-0.14
Prosocial	0.18	-0.03	0.05
Popularity/Sociability	-0.11	-0.39	-0.16
Control Group (n = 100; 46 Boys)			
Aggression	-0.13	0.06	-0.03
Withdrawal	0.26	0.04	-0.30
Rejection/Vic	-0.01	0.08	0.41
Prosocial	-0.21	0.13	-0.11
Popularity/Sociability	-0.25	0.13	-0.29

\*\* p < .01

\*p < .05

Table 7.  
*Mean Scores of Friendship Quality in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade*

	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade (N=157)				6 <sup>th</sup> Grade (N=310)			
	Boys (N=76)		Girls (N=81)		Boys (N=146)		Girls (N=164)	
	Shywd	Control	ShyWd	Control	Shywd	Control	ShyWd	Control
<b>NRICOMP</b>	4.24(0.56) <sup>d</sup>	4.23(0.77) <sup>d</sup>	4.14(0.80) <sup>d</sup>	4.19(0.56) <sup>d</sup>	4.00(0.63) <sup>d</sup>	3.95(0.70) <sup>d</sup>	3.93(0.72) <sup>d</sup>	4.02(0.66) <sup>d</sup>
<b>NRINSTRAID</b>	3.18(0.65)	3.41(0.78)	3.41(0.75)	3.36(0.63)	3.38(0.81)	3.39(0.83)	3.38(0.80)	3.32(0.78)
<b>NRISATIS</b>	4.49(0.53)	4.48(0.55)	4.30(0.78)	4.49(0.47)	4.43(0.65)	4.57(0.63)	4.37(0.76)	4.50(0.67)
<b>NRINTI</b>	3.84(1.03) <sup>d</sup>	3.79(1.05) <sup>d</sup>	3.70(1.01) <sup>d</sup>	3.93(0.84) <sup>d</sup>	3.60(1.08) <sup>d</sup>	3.78(0.94) <sup>d</sup>	3.71(1.04) <sup>d</sup>	3.69(0.98) <sup>d</sup>
<b>NRINURT</b>	3.85(0.67) <sup>d</sup>	3.73(0.86) <sup>d</sup>	3.83(0.78) <sup>d</sup>	3.91(0.76) <sup>d</sup>	3.69(0.88) <sup>d</sup>	3.62(0.86) <sup>d</sup>	3.64(0.89) <sup>d</sup>	3.71(0.83) <sup>d</sup>
<b>NRIAFF</b>	4.34(0.54) <sup>d</sup>	4.35(0.66) <sup>d</sup>	4.33(0.68) <sup>d</sup>	4.43(0.58) <sup>d</sup>	4.10(0.76) <sup>d</sup>	4.19(0.73) <sup>d</sup>	4.08(0.80) <sup>d</sup>	4.17(0.74) <sup>d</sup>
<b>NRIADM</b>	4.06(0.70)	4.07(0.68)	4.14(0.78)	4.11(0.61)	4.04(0.76)	4.12(0.66)	3.98(0.80)	4.09(0.73)
<b>NRIREL</b>	4.40(0.68)	4.30(0.61)	4.28(0.76)	4.34(0.64)	4.22(0.72)	4.36(0.71)	4.09(0.87)	4.26(0.78)
<b>NRISOCSUP</b>	3.99(0.49) <sup>d</sup>	3.98(0.60) <sup>d</sup>	4.00(0.60) <sup>d</sup>	4.04(0.47) <sup>d</sup>	3.86(0.61) <sup>d</sup>	3.92(0.61) <sup>d</sup>	3.83(0.63) <sup>d</sup>	3.90(0.60) <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant group differences.

<sup>b</sup> Significant group differences  $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> Significant gender differences;  $p < .05$ .

<sup>d</sup> Significant age/grade differences

Table 8.  
*Effect Size of Mean Scores of Friendship Quality in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade*

	<b>Effect Size <sup>a</sup></b>
<b>NRI Companionship</b>	.02
<b>NRI Instrumental Aid</b>	-
<b>NRI Satisfaction</b>	-
<b>NRI Intimacy</b>	.01
<b>NRI Nurturance</b>	.01
<b>NRI Affection</b>	.02
<b>NRI Admiration</b>	-
<b>NRI Reliable</b>	-
<b>NRI Social Support</b>	.01

<sup>a</sup> Effect sizes for significant grade differences.

Figure 1. Total Sample Separated by Grade and Group

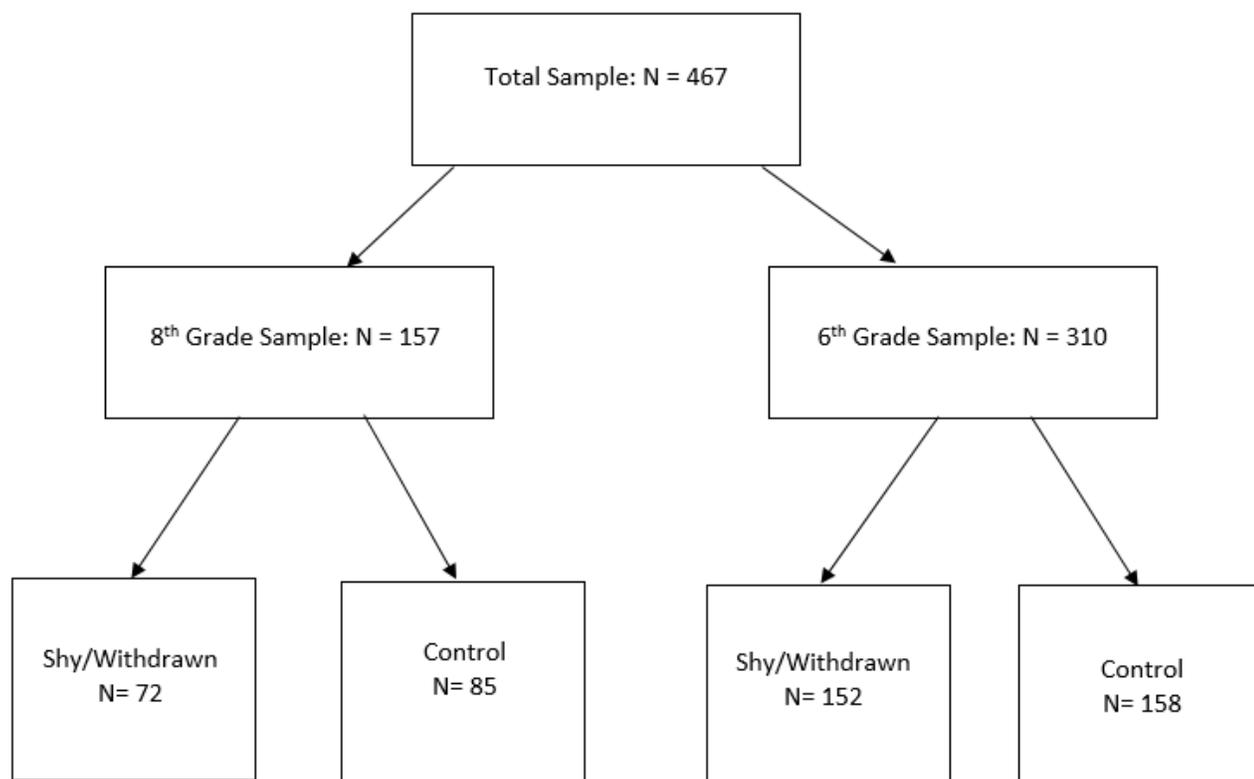


Figure 2. Friendship Quantity and Stability 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Target Groups.

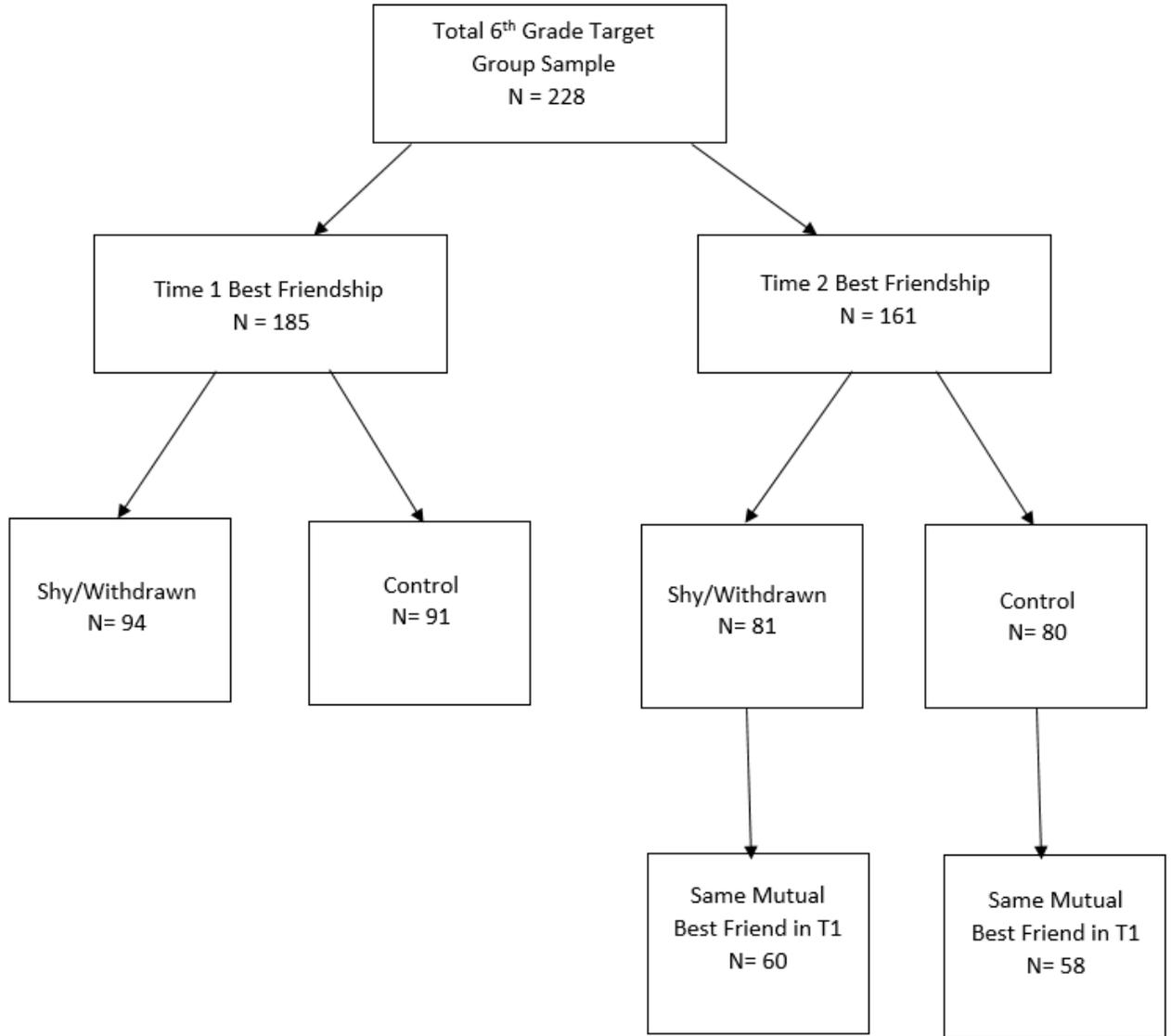
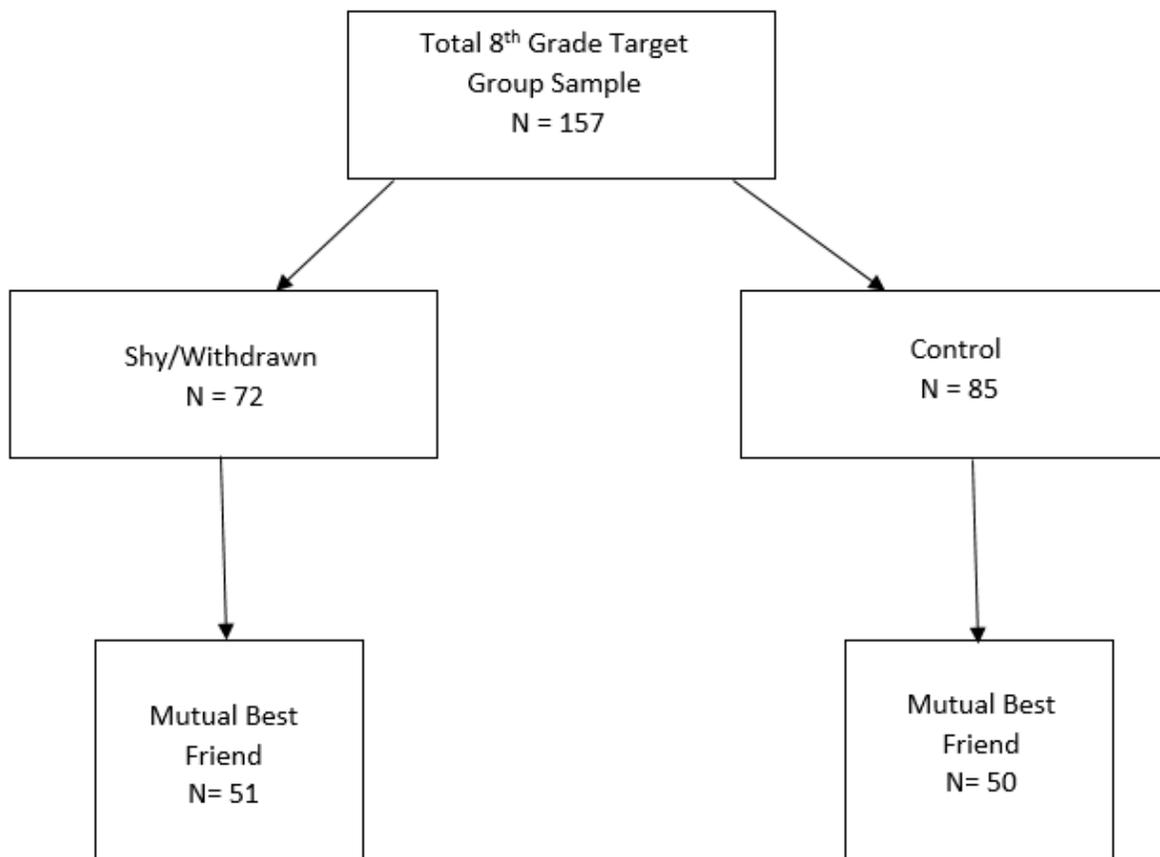


Figure 3. Friendship Quantity 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Target Groups



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