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Relations Between Children's Social Status and Self-Perceptions of Both Academic and Social Competence

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**Relations Between Children's Social Status and Self-Perceptions of Both
Academic and Social Competence**

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Betty Powdrill, who would have been so happy to say, “We have a doctor in the family.”

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**Relations Between Children's Social Status and Self-Perceptions of Both
Academic and Social Competence**

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This study examined the relation between first grade children's social status and their perceptions of competence in academic and social domains. Researchers have delineated five broad status categories--average, popular, rejected, neglected, and controversial (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Peer rejection has been linked with a variety of negative social and educational outcomes, including aggression (Dodge et al., 2003), low achievement (Wentzel & Asher, 1995), and school attrition (Vosk, Forehand, Parker, & Richard, 1982). Peer neglect has been studied less frequently, and findings have yielded contradictory results. Some studies indicate that neglected children may be at-risk for social and educational problems (Kupersmidt & Patterson, 1991), while other studies suggest that neglected children may be high achieving students (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Little research has examined peer rejection and peer neglect as they relate to children's thoughts about school, primarily because many researchers find that young children are unduly optimistic about their abilities (Stipek & Tannat, 1984). This study addressed two central research questions: 1) Do status groups differ in their perceptions of both academic and social competence?; and 2) Are children's perceptions related to their teacher's assessments of their academic and social competence?

Participants were 101 first grade students who were interviewed individually at their schools. They answered surveys about general academic and social competence, as well as domain specific surveys about their perceived reading competence and social responsibility. Children's classroom teachers also completed written surveys addressing children's general academic and social competence. Analyses indicated that the status groups did not differ in their self-perceptions for the general measures. Results for the domain specific academic measure revealed that rejected children rated themselves less positively than popular and neglected children for reading competence and reading difficulty. Rejected children also rated themselves less positively than popular children for compliance behaviors. It was also found that Neglected children were indistinguishable from the popular status for all academic and social measures. Pearson correlation methods revealed that teacher assessments of student's social and academic competence were not related to children's self-perceptions. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Children's entry into school signals an important transition for them in the educational process. Early school instruction establishes not only a basis for children to enhance intellectual learning; it also provides a training ground for social knowledge (Bar-Tal, 1978; Harrist & Bradley, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The learning of traditional subjects such as math and reading is intertwined with an often implicit social curriculum that emphasizes lessons in following rules and directions, respecting authority, and making friends (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987; Wentzel, 1991b).

How well children navigate this new terrain can determine not only initial success at school, but also have a major impact on their subsequent social and academic functioning. Researchers (e.g., Entwisle, 1993; Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996) have even referred to the initial transition to school as a "critical period." If children fail to fit in with others during these first few years, consequences can be severe and long-lasting. As educator Vivian Paley (1992) noted:

By kindergarten,...a structure begins to be revealed and will soon be carved in stone. Certain children will have the right to limit experiences of their classmates. Henceforth a ruling class will notify others of their acceptability, and the outsiders learn to anticipate the sting of rejection. Long after hitting and name calling have been outlawed by the teachers, a more damaging phenomenon is allowed to take root, spreading like a weed from grade to grade (p. 3).

Indeed, research documents the ramifications of peer acceptance. Children who obtain acceptance from classmates tend to have higher grades and achievement (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994; Wentzel & Asher, 1995; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), better school adjustment (Ladd, 1990), fewer behavioral problems (Denham, McKinley, Couchour, & Holt, 1990; Dodge, 1983), and less self-reported loneliness (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Cassidy & Asher, 1992) than rejected children. Furthermore, prolonged rejection tends to be associated with a variety of negative outcomes, including social dissatisfaction (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984), conduct disorders (Coie, Lockman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Miller-Johnson et al., 1999), and dropping out of school (Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Lambert, 1972; Vosk, Forehand, Parker, & Richard, 1982).

Although these negative outcomes have been documented, many of them are only noticed or taken seriously when children have reached upper-elementary grades, or even high school. Often, attempts to help children at this point are too late to do much good. Being accustomed to rejection, children are less able to change established social patterns (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983). Also, even when children learn to use new social skills, they often face a peer group that is unwilling to accept the changes due to the prior reputation rejected children have held (Asher & Dodge, 1986).

Thus, given the knowledge of the far-reaching consequences of peer rejection, it would make sense to learn more about its early correlates. For

example, researchers know that children who are rejected early in the schooling process tend to have poor grades many years later in school. However, little research has systematically linked children's early rejection with concurrent academic behaviors and perceptions (Coie & Krehbiel, 1984; Ladd, 1990). When researchers look for correlates of early rejection, they tend to examine other variables such as friendship (Howes & Wu, 1990), aggression (Dodge, 1980), and emotions (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Few studies exist that relate young children's early social experiences to their academic experiences, even though these variables are shown to be linked in the later years of the schooling process.

In addition, peer acceptance is not merely the absence of rejection. To be accepted by peers, children must be noticed by them. Researchers have noted that some children fade into relative obscurity among their classmates. These children are not disliked; they just do not attract their classmate's attention. Researchers label these children as "neglected." Occupying positions on the periphery of social activity, neglected children do not appear to have the same opportunities that accepted children do. However, the experiences of neglected children have themselves largely been neglected in educational research (Morris, Messer, & Gross, 1995; Peery, 1979). In addition, the studies that do exist offer conflicting results. Some researchers have found that neglected children face the same adjustment and intellectual problems as rejected children (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993), while other researchers have reported that neglected children appear to be socially and intellectually well-adjusted (Boivin & Begin, 1989; Erdley & Asher, 1996).

Given the paucity of reports about neglected children, and the conflicting conclusions from the studies that have been done, research is needed that will help clarify the findings. Obviously, neglected children engage in a much lower level of social involvement than their peers. It is important to assess what effects, if any, this decreased involvement has for their social and cognitive well-being. A systematic study of the neglected child in the early grades would thus be a logical step toward building a knowledge base. If peer neglect puts children at risk for academic and social problems, perhaps early school experiences can help provide insight into the subsequent development of those problems. Appropriate interventions could then be implemented before negative effects have impinged upon the schooling process.

If relations exist between early peer acceptance and children's cognitions, educators and researchers could use this information to help them identify children who are at risk for developing academic and social problems in school. As educators are able to more quickly identify at-risk children, they will be able to intervene when children are more malleable and amenable to changes.

Research Study

The present study was based on an integration of the literature examining peer acceptance with the literature examining academic and social cognitions. The focus was on children experiencing the early grades of school. With these variables in mind, the following research questions were studied:

- 1) Do social status groups differ in their academic perceptions?

- 2) Do social status groups differ in their social perceptions?
- 3) Do relations exist between teacher's academic assessments of children and children's academic perceptions?
- 4) Do relations exist between teacher's social assessments of children and children's social perceptions?

To address these research questions, I designed and carried out an empirical study with first grade children. Participants responded orally to four surveys; two of the surveys measured their academic perceptions, and two surveys measured their social perceptions. To determine social status, participants responded to sociometric questions. In addition, classroom teachers completed written surveys in which they rated their pupils' academic and social competence. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential methods.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the study in more detail. Chapter 2 contains a review of the research regarding children's school transition, self-perceptions, and social status. Chapter 3 will focus on the methods I used to carry out my study, and Chapter 4 will detail the results I obtained. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings of my study as they relate to the research literature. I will also discuss the limitations of my study and implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

With the transition to school, children leave the confines of their homes to enter a larger and more complex arena. Even if children have previously been in a preschool setting, they are seldom prepared for the array of changes that await them. Schools are organized both socially and intellectually in ways that children may not have experienced, with many unfamiliar rules and norms.

In contrast to home life, an unrelated adult—the teacher—is in control over an entire classroom of children (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Teachers have particular expectations and rules for classroom conduct that may differ dramatically from rules children experience at home (Entwisle, 1998). Children also learn that teachers evaluate their performance in comparison to other classmates. They will earn grades and be assigned to various ability groupings that they may not understand. This method of evaluation diverges from the individualistic nature of evaluation that children generally receive from parents (Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, & Stluka, 1994). Unlike parental figures, teachers rarely have much individual time to spend with each child; their attention and resources must be divided among as many as thirty students. Children who do not automatically understand particular rules and expectations will likely have little opportunity to ask a teacher for clarification.

Transitioning children also face many challenges with peers. Being surrounded by a roomful of peers can be daunting for some children, especially if they have little experience in group interactions such as preschool or play groups (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996). Yet, they are expected to work together, play together, and be evaluated in front of each other, often with little guidance on how to do so. Children's relationships with peers become further complicated when they are assigned to various ability groups and made aware of teacher preferences for certain class members (Ruble, Eisenberg, & Higgins, 1994; Stipek & Daniels, 1988).

As has been stated previously, this transitional time constitutes a "critical period" for children's school progress: the degree of success a child exhibits during this period is a vital determiner of success or failure throughout the rest of the school experience. Children who have difficulty negotiating these transitional tasks risk a school career of potential rejection and failure. Being able to identify and help these children may be critical components in preventing future problems in both adapting to and thriving in school.

School Adjustment: Identifying Cognitive and Social Factors

The powerful implications of children's early school experiences are prompting a number of researchers to explore the cognitive and social factors that

are linked with successful school adjustment (Alexander et al., 1993; Attwell, Orpet, & Meyers, 1967; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992). Researchers now know that early cognitive and social performance can be a strong indicator of a developing pattern of behavior. Furthermore, effects of early school experiences are cumulative: the relatively small differences observed in achievement and behavior during the early years become magnified as children progress (Alexander et al., 1993; Entwisle, 1998; Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). For example, children scoring twenty points below their peers on standardized tests in first grade can fall as much as sixty points below their peers by fifth grade (Entwisle, 1998). Likewise, children's small behavioral problems observed in first grade can predict serious adjustment problems as much as nine years later (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988).

Cognitive aspects of schooling have long been used to identify differences among children. The early school years are a particular source of interest to investigators because children's cognitive changes occur rapidly at this point in development. From the ages of about five to eight, children develop a multitude of intellectual improvements, including better memory capacity (Guttentag, 1984), greater information processing speed (Dempster, 1981; Newport, 1991), and an increasing capacity to think concretely about the external world (McShane, 1991; Piaget, 1926). Thus far, researchers have linked two key cognitive

activities with children's successful school adjustment: 1) mastering more difficult cognitive tasks such as reading and mathematics, and 2) responding to higher performance standards (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). Testing children's performance differences in these and other cognitive tasks is one way that researchers have differentiated successful from unsuccessful students.

Children's social development at this stage also undergoes several important changes that aid them during the transitional process. Being at school all day often helps to foster children's capacity to function independently and make basic decisions. They begin to develop social role-taking ability--the ability to put themselves in another's place and anticipate what that person is likely to think, feel, or do (Shantz, 1975). Not surprisingly, the social tasks most predictive of a successful school transition fit naturally with these developing abilities: 1) getting along with teachers, and 2) gaining acceptance into peer groups (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). Children who have the perspective taking ability to fit into the student role are most likely to be successful. Studies indicate that children who establish relatively close relationships with their teachers are more likely to adapt to classroom rules and routines (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Studies also indicate that fitting in with classmates is associated with higher grades (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Howes, 1988).

While the transition to school has been studied extensively using academic and social performance, researchers are just beginning to examine children's self-evaluative thoughts associated with the transition (Brendgen, Little, & Krauppman, 2000; Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Rogosch & Newcomb, 1989). The study of children's self-evaluations provides researchers with another tool to gauge children's satisfaction with their school experience. Children's feelings of competence, confusion, or loneliness are not necessarily assessed on performance measures, but their feelings can certainly have an impact on their classroom performance.

Evidence in the literature supports the idea that children's self-perceptions of competence are powerful determiners of their school success in both academic and social realms (Bandura, Bararanelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1996; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Studies show that children with higher perceptions of ability perform better and show greater persistence in social and academic tasks than those with lower ability perceptions (Benenson & Dweck, 1986; Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Lepore, Kiely, Bempechat, & London, 1989). In addition, researchers find that children's perceived academic competence is a significant predictor of their grades above and beyond standardized measures of ability (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Miserandino, 1996).

In particular, researchers have found extensive evidence indicating the important role children's reading perceptions play in their school achievement (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997; Kurtz-Costes & Schneider, 1994). Researchers are finding that by the age of ten, children are able to organize their reading self-perceptions into as many as eleven different dimensions (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Simpson, Licht, Wagner, & Stader, 1996). Moreover, children's reading self-perceptions at this age relate to their reading achievement and self-reports of reading activity. Therefore, both teachers and researchers have placed special emphasis on fostering children's positive feelings toward the reading process (Lepola, Salomen, & Vauras, 2000; O'Flahavan et al., 1992).

If ten-year old children can reliably differentiate their reading perceptions into a plethora of dimensions, it would make sense to find out how early during the reading process these perceptions develop. In a series of studies addressing this issue, Chapman and Tunmer (1995 ; 1997) found that relations between children's reading self-perceptions and reading performance could be observed when children were between six and seven years old. They also found that children at this age were able to simultaneously hold ability and task difficulty perceptions. For instance, children reported that they were skilled at reading, although they experienced some difficulties with it. Based on these findings, Chapman and Tunmer concluded that the relation between reading self-

perceptions and achievement develops much earlier than most researchers have assumed. Still, Chapman and Tunmer are some of the only researchers who have actively explored reading self-perceptions during the earliest years of the schooling process. Given the provocative findings, it would make sense to build on this line of inquiry.

Yet, relatively few researchers have studied cognitive and social self-perceptions of children transitioning to school (Asher et al., 1984; Boivin & Begin, 1989; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). The relative lack of studies in this area can mostly be attributed to developmental concerns about young children's ability to handle evaluative tasks, and to relatively weak instruments for measuring self-perceptions (Paris & Newman, 1990; Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989). Many investigators state that young children do not have the cognitive ability to make evaluative distinctions about their skills. However, the self-evaluations of children appear to be important in identifying those who are at risk for a host of difficulties such as peer rejection and peer neglect. While children's performance on cognitive and social tasks is useful, it does not give the same information that a child's self-evaluative statements can contribute. Given the far-reaching effects of children's experience in the early grades, their self-perceptions appear to be an important topic to study.

Measuring Children's Self-Perceptions

The literature surrounding the measurement of children's self-perceptions has been fraught with various conceptual and measurement difficulties.

Researchers have been reticent to elicit self-evaluative information from young, school age children because of concerns that children cannot handle the cognitive complexity of the task. This claim is supported by two major findings. First, researchers have stated that children seem to be unable to break down their self-evaluations to appraisals of specific tasks or domains (Marsh, Barnes, Cairns, & Tidman, 1984; Stipek & Daniels, 1988). In most studies, children tend to report global, undifferentiated self-perceptions (e.g., I am a good student) rather than domain specific self-perceptions (e.g., I am good at spelling). Second, investigators report that children tend to overestimate their abilities, despite any evidence they receive to the contrary. This phenomenon is called "childhood optimism" (Frey & Ruble, 1987; Stipek & Mac Iver, 1989). These major concerns have caused skepticism among some researchers about the usefulness of assessing self-evaluation during the early school years.

While both concerns have merit, it is also important to examine other factors that could be contributing to the findings. For example, researchers have stated that younger children tend to view ability as a changeable, global entity (Nicholls & Miller, 1983); whereas, older children tend to differentiate their

ability into more discrete categories (Marsh et al., 1984; Stipek & Daniels, 1988). For example, when asked to assess their academic ability, young children are more likely to say that they are good students if they do well in one domain (e.g., I'm good at math, so I'm a good student), while older children are more likely to provide individual assessments (e.g., I am good at math, but I have trouble with spelling).

Researchers have also found that young children obtain ability cues from information that does not necessarily indicate ability (Nicholls & Miller, 1983). When asked to explain how they can tell if their schoolwork is good, kindergartners have offered explanations such as, "I filled up the whole page," "I stay in my seat" or "I keep my desk neat" (Elder & Paris, 1994). It is important to note that teachers in the lower elementary grades often encourage children to equate work habits and various social skills with academic ability; teachers commonly reward these work habits on the same level as academic achievements (Paris & Newman, 1990). It is of little surprise that children consider these factors in their self-evaluations when they are explicitly taught that following rules makes them smart students.

Moreover, children usually appear to have global self-evaluations because the questions asked are global. Researchers often administer measures requiring a global response from children, such as "I am a good student," rather than a more

specific response (Entwisle, Alexander, Pallas, & Cadigan, 1987; Marsh 1986; Marsh, 1988). When measures have been used requiring a more specific response, children have been able to comply (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Birch & Ladd, 1997). However, because few measures exist requiring children to make more specific self-evaluations, it is not really known to what extent children tend toward global evaluations.

The second major reason for lack of self-evaluation studies with young children is the “childhood optimism” phenomenon. It is common for older children and adults to report varying levels of perceived competence depending on the task in which they engage, yet young learners report high perceived competence for almost any task regardless of prior failures or successes with it (Beneson & Dweck, 1986; Ruble & Flett, 1988; Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). Younger children perceive effort they make as an improvement on ability even when they receive feedback that they have failed (Stipek & Tannat, 1984). Although childhood optimism is viewed as a detriment in assessing self-evaluations, perhaps it serves a useful purpose. Most researchers note that children’s optimism begins to fade around the age of nine, when they receive more negative feedback in the form of grades, standardized test scores, and increased participation in competitive activities (Ruble & Flett, 1988; Stipek & Daniels, 1988). Yet, young children placed in an environment where competition

and ranking of abilities is encouraged exhibit the same declining perceptions of competence as older students (Butler, 1990; Ruble et al., 1994). It could be that childhood optimism is influenced as much by classroom features as by cognitive capacity. Also, because childhood optimism appears to be such a strong phenomenon, perhaps it is a strong indicator to researchers that problems exist when children relay negative self-evaluations.

Finally, it must be noted here that some problems investigators experience are a result of the measurement formats that they employ. Many surveys administered to young children are worded in declarative formats that require children to agree or disagree with the statement (e.g., “I make lots of mistakes in reading”). However, such wording has been difficult for children to process as a question because of the declarative format (Akiyama & Guillory, 1983). Children develop the ability to answer question formats (e.g., “Do you make lots of mistakes in reading?”) before they develop the ability to verify questions asked in a declarative format. In a series of studies assessing this phenomenon, Chapman and Tunmer (1995) found that changing the wording of items from a declarative format to a question format dramatically altered children’s responses to them. When declarative formats were used, children gave inconsistent responses to positive and negative versions of the same question (e.g., “I am interested in reading,” and “I hate reading” provoked responses of “true” to both statements).

Conversely, changing the format to an interrogative one elicited more consistent responses from children (e.g., “Are you interested in reading?” and “Do you hate reading?” received different answers). It appears that children at this age level seem to understand a question format better than the traditional format used in most surveys.

Obviously, the measurement of children’s self-evaluations is not as easy as it is for older children or adults. Researchers must pay special attention to issues such as cognitive complexity, response bias, and language when constructing age-appropriate measures. However, measured age-appropriately, children’s self-perceptions can be a valuable glimpse into their experiences transitioning to school. Knowledge of children’s self-perceptions can be especially helpful to researchers seeking to identify children who experience problems with the transitional process. In the following sections, I will explore the specific problem of peer acceptance, and how peer acceptance relates to children’s self-perceptions.

Peer Group Acceptance

The literature is robust with evidence of the roles peers perform both in socialization and cognitive development. As early as the 1920’s, Piaget asserted that peer interaction is an important factor to help children acquire skills in negotiation, perspective taking, and cooperation. More recently, cooperative

learning theorists have noted the powerful roles peers take on as tutors and mentors in the classroom (Brachfeld-Child & Schiavo, 1990; Slavin, 1980; Webb, 1982), while social development theorists have studied peers as sources of emotional intimacy (Brendgen et al., 2000), support (Sullivan, 1953), and encouragement, among others (Ladd et al., 1996).

However, in this literature, it is important to differentiate between the constructs of friends and peers. Although many theorists use these terms interchangeably, these constructs differ both in scope and features. A friendship is small in scope because it is defined at the level of the dyad (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996). This dyad is voluntary, bilateral, and mutually regulated. That is, both children choose to be in the friendship, they mutually nominate each other as friends, and both children have the power to break the friendship at any time. Some behavioral indicators of friendship include: frequent interaction (Hinde, Titmus, Easton, & Tamplin, 1985), positive affect during interactions (Howes, 1983), and mutual adjustment of behavior to mesh with a partner's (Howes, 1983; Ross & Lollis, 1989). Having friends does not necessarily equate to being accepted by the larger peer group. In fact, Parker and Asher (1987 & 1993) found that many low-accepted children have friends while some high accepted children have no friends.

In contrast to friendship, the construct of peer acceptance is much broader in scope and features. It is important to note that peer acceptance is a unilateral construct emanating from the group and directed toward a particular child. Generally defined, peer acceptance refers to the degree to which a child is liked

by members of the *group*, usually classmates (Berndt, 1984; Furman & Burmester, 1985). Peer acceptance is a measure of the *collective* tendency of the group to include or exclude a particular child; any one child's opinion of another focal child is not of particular interest. Furthermore, the peer group's acceptance of a child can be documented without any input from the focal child. Children who are accepted are regarded positively by most members of that group. Poorly accepted children, on the other hand, are disliked by a majority of their peers and are excluded from activities by them.

The constructs of friendship and peer acceptance offer important but differing lenses through which to view children, but there is evidence indicating that peer acceptance may be more relevant when assessing the transition to school. Sullivan (1953) is one of the early proponents of this view. In his theory of social development, Sullivan proposed that children's interpersonal needs arise at various stages, and certain social relationships are best suited for meeting these needs at each stage. Sullivan also stated that the competencies a child needs to be successful in meeting these needs develop within the context of each stage. According to this view, the need for peer acceptance appears much earlier and is much stronger than the initial need for friendship. Sullivan asserted that when a child begins school, the need for peer acceptance is essential for fostering healthy attitudes toward competition, conformity, and achievement. Sullivan believed that friendship needs were important, but that they did not fully emerge until preadolescence when children began to seek a more collaborative relationship.

He also asserted that friendships in later school years can sometimes buffer the effects of early peer rejection.

Later research findings support Sullivan's premise, although researchers have found that children's need for friendship appears to occur earlier in the developmental process. For example, Ladd and his colleagues compared the relative influences of friendship and peer acceptance when they conducted a series of studies about children's readiness for school. They found peer acceptance to be a consistently better predictor than friendship of children's academic progress and readiness (Ladd, 1983; Ladd, 1989; Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987). Similarly, Vandell and Hembree (1994) reported that peer acceptance is a better predictor than friendship for third grade children's social functioning and academic achievement. Bukowski and Hoza (1989) found that for fourth grade children, peer acceptance had a stronger relation to self-perceived abilities than friendship. Still, all of these researchers acknowledged the role that friendships play during the early years of children's schooling.

Obviously, the studies of both friendship and peer acceptance offer a wealth of information about children's functioning. However, given that the focus in this study is on the young child transitioning to school, peer acceptance appears to be a more salient topic to examine initially.

Measuring Peer Acceptance: Sociometric Techniques

Defining peer acceptance is a relatively easy task, but its actual measurement has been an evolving process. In fact, the measurement of peer

acceptance has undergone several changes in the past few decades. Initially, peer acceptance was measured only as an index of children's popularity in the classroom (Bower, 1960; Smith, 1950). Now, children's peer acceptance, or social status, has been expanded to include five categories. One facet of social status measurement that has remained stable is the source of the information: the children themselves. When social status data are obtained, researchers almost always look to the children to determine social status rather than an adult figure, such as a parent or a teacher. Such methods require particular sensitivity to the children being interviewed, including awareness of the children's cognitive levels and potential sensitivity to the nature of the questions asked.

In early measurement efforts, children were interviewed individually and asked to name or nominate the peers whom they liked the most. Children receiving the highest number of nominations were classified as popular (Bonney, 1964). Initially, researchers refrained from asking children to name who they disliked because of concern that negative statements could cause dislike between children to become more salient in their interactions (Gronlund, 1959).

However, just determining who the popular children were did not give researchers a full picture of classroom dynamics. Eventually, researchers expanded their interview questions to ask children both who they liked and who they disliked (Asher & Hymel, 1981). Children who received a high number of negative nominations (disliked) and a low number of positive nominations (liked) were classified as "rejected," by their peers (Oden & Asher, 1977). Rejected children are by far the most-studied group in social status research.

The classifications of popular and rejected provided a way to study the extremes of peer preference, but the two categories still failed to capture the range of acceptance levels in the classroom. For example, researchers noted that some children appeared to be simultaneously liked and disliked, receiving high numbers of both positive and negative nominations, but neither the popular or rejected category fit their experiences. In contrast, researchers noted that other children were neither liked nor disliked, receiving few nominations of any type. Neither could their experience be explained with the two-status classification. No categories existed for those two situations, although they occurred with relative frequency. Researchers saw that they needed to expand their social status classification scheme even further.

Peery (1979) addressed these concerns with the development of a two-dimensional classification scheme for social status. Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) refined this scheme; it forms the basis for current sociometric methods (Bukowski, Sippola, Hoza, & Newcomb, 2000). Peery stated that knowing the social preferences of children is not enough information to assess status among peers. He pointed out that status is also influenced by how visible children are to those around them. Particular children will be nominated more or less frequently based on how much or little they are noticed. Peery referred to a child's visibility to peers as "social impact."

Researchers now obtain social status classification information using indices of social preference combined with indices of social impact (Coie et al., 1982; Terry, 2000). To measure social preference, researchers subtract the

number of negative (liked least, or “LL”) nominations from the number of positive (liked most or “LM”) nominations. Thus, social preference equals LM-LL. Social impact is calculated as the sum of the child’s positive and negative nominations (LM + LL).

This method of measurement has yielded five distinct social status groups: popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average. Figure 1 schematizes the breakdown of these groups (please see Appendix A). Note that the x-axis represents the positive nominations a child receives (LM), and the y-axis represents a child’s negative nominations (LL). Both rejected and neglected status will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, so the immediate discussion of these groups will be limited here.

Popular children are distinguished by a combination of high social impact and high social preference scores. Popular children have generally been viewed as well-liked by most of their peers, and they tend to exhibit a corresponding confidence in their social abilities (Boivin & Begin, 1989; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). They are usually viewed as leaders in the classroom (Coie & Dodge, 1983). Recently, however, researchers have begun to delineate popularity as a heterogeneous construct (Rodkin, Pearl, Farmer, & Van Acker, 2000; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 1999). While some children are considered popular for various prosocial reasons, other children are popular because of their defiance of school rules and anti-social behavior (Gorman, Kim, & Schimmelbusch, 2002). Also, researchers have noted that popularity could also be a reputation rather than a sentiment; children often distinguish between the children who are widely viewed

as popular, versus those whom they actually like (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Regardless of how popular children achieve their designation, their status appears to be stable from grade to grade (Brendgen, Vitaro, Bukowski, Doyle, & Markeiwiez, 2001; Ollendick, Greene, Francis, & Baum, 1991), and they are quick to re-establish their popularity in a new setting (Black & Hazen, 1990). Popular children do not appear to be at any significant risk for academic or social problems (Asher & Parker, 1989; Buhs & Ladd, 2001).

Rejected children are characterized by high social impact and low social preference. In other words, rejected children are highly visible to their peers and are actively disliked. Rejected status, as mentioned previously, is associated with a variety of problems that usually escalate during the child's school career. In the early grades, rejection is linked with avoiding school, acting out, and starting fights (Asher & Parker, 1989; Dodge et al., 2003; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). In the later grades, rejection is associated with severe problems of truancy, hostility, and dropping out of school (Broidy et al., 2003). Approximately twenty-five percent of rejected children drop out of high school as opposed to eight percent of popular children (Asher & Parker, 1989).

Neglected children receive both low social impact scores and low social preference scores. They are the children most likely to be ignored or forgotten by their peers. Compared with other groups, neglected children tend to be labeled as shy (Coie et al., 1982), and they engage in more solitary activity than other status groups (Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990; Dodge, 1983). Neglected children do

not appear to be at risk for behavior problems; they seem to be concerned with getting along with peers and avoiding conflict (Erdley & Asher, 1996).

The “controversial” status is the most recent to be classified (Coie et al., 1982). Controversial children obtain high social impact scores in combination with high numbers of positive and negative nominations. Children of this status type seem to engender a “love/hate” relationship with peers. Some classmates adore them, while others dislike them, and still others simultaneously adore and dislike them. Controversial children exhibit behaviors that represent correlates found among both popular and rejected children (Newcomb & Bukowski, 1983). They exhibit high levels of aggression, usually higher than rejected children, but they also show high levels of sociability to offset their aggression (Coie & Krehbiel, 1984; Dodge, 1983). Researchers are unclear at this point whether controversial children represent a risk group for later school problems (Boivin & Begin, 1989; Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

The average status is the final and most common status group. Average children are characterized by a lack of extreme scores on either social preference or social impact. Most children, according to this classification method, are of average status.

It must be noted that sociometric methods have met with resistance from several sources, namely internal review boards, teachers, and parents. In a review study of sociometric procedures, Iverson, Barton, and Iverson (1997) noted three major concerns that dealt with risk of harm to children as well as ethical issues. First, there has been some concern that encouraging children to name the peers

they dislike can cause low-status children to suffer even more negative treatment. Second is the concern that unpopular children may experience increased loneliness from this procedure because they are being encouraged to dwell on their problems with peers. Finally, asking children to name who they don't like is contrary to normal rules for classroom behavior, and might cause stress among participants.

These ethical concerns have been addressed in various studies analyzing potential risk to children (Bell-Dolan, Foster, & Christopher, 1992; Hayvren & Hymel, 1984). Findings indicate that most children encounter minimal risk by participating in sociometric procedures, and in fact may experience certain benefits. For example, Iverson, Barton, and Iverson (1997) conducted a sociometric procedure with third to sixth grade students in which they solicited both positive and negative nominations from them. At a later date, they interviewed participants to assess how comfortable children felt answering the sociometric questions and to determine if any children noticed changes in their peer's behavior toward them. Iverson and colleagues found that popular children reported receiving more compliments from their peers. No children, regardless of status, reported an increase in being teased or treated negatively. Also, all children except for one reported feeling "good," or "really good" about discussing peer preferences with researchers. Many children said that they enjoyed the sociometric interview because it gave them an opportunity to express their feelings, and almost all of the children stated that they would like to participate in sociometric interviews again.

Other studies of sociometric risk (Bell-Dolan, Foster, & Sikora, 1989; Hayvren & Hymel, 1984) have yielded similar results. Hayvren and Hymel reported that preschool children made more positive overtures to preferred peers after sociometric questioning, but they found no increases in negative behavior toward unpopular peers. In a study of fifth graders, Bell-Dolan and her colleagues found that unpopular children decreased their negative interactions following the sociometric experience. None of the status groups reported increases in negative moods or loneliness.

Thus, it appears that the sociometric methods offer minimal risk to participants, and might even pose some benefits. However, more studies examining sociometric procedures are definitely warranted.

In the following section, I narrow the topic of sociometrics to focus on the academic and social experiences of children who are rejected by their peers.

Rejected Status Children

Although researchers typically utilize five categories to classify social status, the majority of sociometric studies are centered on rejected children (Newcomb et al., 1993; Smith, 1950). Rejected status children are often viewed as the squeaky wheels because their problems and behavior have proved more visibly troublesome in the classroom than the behavior of other status groups (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Rejected children have been variously described by peers and teachers as aggressive (DeRosier et al., 1994; Snyder, Horsch, & Childs, 1997), hostile (French & Waas, 1985), disruptive

(Coie & Dodge, 1983), inattentive (Newcomb et al., 1993), and likely to start fights (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). When asked, most peers say they actively avoid playing or working with rejected children in class (Ladd, Price, & Hart, 1990).

Rejected status has been shown to develop and stabilize in the peer group when children are very young (O'Neil et al., 1997; Vitaro et al., 1992). In studies with preschool children, researchers have found that rejected status remains stable over a two-year span (Denham et al., 1990; Ramsey, 1995). In studies of early elementary school children, researchers have identified major differences between chronically and transiently rejected children (Vitaro et al., 1990; Vitaro et al., 1992). They find that children who experience two years of peer rejection exhibit significantly fewer prosocial tendencies than those children who are rejected one year or less (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

After the initial transition to school, the rejected status children continue to evidence a great deal of stability. By third grade, rejected children tend to have well-developed negative reputations among their peers (Rogosch & Newcomb, 1989). In five- and seven-year longitudinal studies, researchers have found that not only do rejected children remain rejected, but they become even more unpopular with peers over time (Brendgen et al., 2001; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). Moreover, rejected children appear to take their status with them to new settings (Luftig, 2001). When Coie and Dodge (1983) placed rejected boys in play groups with unfamiliar peers, they found that the boys quickly regained the rejected status in their new groups.

It is important to note that children may be initially rejected for a variety of reasons. While some children are rejected due to negative social behaviors such as hostility or aggression, many other children are initially rejected due to factors such as physical appearance or socioeconomic level (Dodge, 1983; Li, 1985). Interestingly, it is not only peers who respond to these variables: teachers reported that they ranked children's unattractiveness second only to social skills deficits as a reason that children are rejected (Maag, Vasa, Kramer, & Torrey, 1991).

Although rejected children are most frequently described as aggressive and hostile, it is obvious that some heterogeneity exists regarding the characteristics of this status. Some researchers separate rejected children into two distinct behavioral profiles: aggressive-rejected and submissive-rejected (French, 1988; French, 1990; Rabiner, 1993). The first group tends to display the aggression and hostility common to the rejected child portrait, while the other group tends to be withdrawn, over controlled and emotionally brittle.

Yet, despite the reason(s) that children become rejected, researchers find that length of rejection is more salient; as rejection is prolonged and maintained, children are more likely to develop corresponding problems with academic achievement and social skills (Coie et al., 1982; Li, 1985; Vitaro et al., 1992). As various researchers have demonstrated, children can begin to experience such problems after one year of rejection (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Vitaro et al., 1992). Ameliorating peer rejection before it becomes chronic is crucial.

In the following two sections, I examine more specifically the academic and social correlates associated with the rejection process as well as research efforts being made to combat these problems.

Academic Correlates of Rejected Status

From the time they enter school, many rejected children have levels of academic achievement far below their non-rejected peers. This lack of achievement has been manifested through a variety of sources, including standardized achievement measures (Coie et al., 1982; Hatzichristou & Hopf, 1996), classroom grade reports (Wentzel, 1991b), teacher surveys (O'Neil et al., 1997; Wasik, Wasik, & Frank, 1993), and clinical evaluations (Flicek, 1992; French, 1990). Researchers have found that even during the kindergarten year, rejected children can exhibit lower levels of readiness for mastering academic tasks. (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Ladd, 1990). Still, this early-stage discrepancy between rejected children and their classmates is not very large compared with their later achievements levels.

Longitudinal studies indicate that the relatively small gap on achievement test scores observed in early grades widens dramatically by middle school. (Austin & Draper, 1984; Coie et al., 1982; Frenzt, Gresham, & Elliot, 1991; Hatzichristou & Hopf, 1996). Likewise, rejected children's classroom performance shows a similar pattern. Rejected children tend to earn lower grades and report more difficulty understanding school subjects than their classmates (Li, 1985; Vandell & Hembree, 1994). Furthermore, teachers often report that

rejected children are cognitively unprepared, inattentive, and unfocused on their schoolwork (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Newcomb et al., 1993). By middle school, rejected children have significantly lower grade point averages (Wentzel, 1991b; Wentzel & Asher, 1995) and are considered at risk for dropping out of school (Asher & Parker, 1989; Hymel et al., 1996; Vosk et al., 1982).

Researchers have also studied rejected children's achievement utilizing their self-perceptions (Boivin & Begin, 1989; Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). In studies of rejected children ages nine to eleven, several researchers have found that rejected children report significantly lower academic self-perceptions than their peers (Boivin & Begin, 1989; Hortacsu & Uner, 1994; Kupersmidt & Patterson, 1991; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). Hortacsu and Uner (1994) find that rejected children have lower grade point averages than their peers, as well as a corresponding perception that they have little control over their academic performance. Similarly, Boivin and Begin (1989) observe that rejected children appeared to significantly underestimate their academic abilities in relation to their actual classroom and standardized test performance. In other findings, Kupersmidt and Patterson (1991) report that rejected children's negative academic self-perceptions correlate with their withdrawn behavior two years later. Studies of rejected children in middle and high school evidence similar findings. Rejected children in the higher grades tend to report both negative perceptions about their academic abilities combined with low expectations for future academic success or improvement (Harter, 1996; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). At the high school level, negative academic self-

perceptions become strongly associated with dropping out of school (Hymel et al., 1996; Vosk et al., 1982).

However, to date, little research has been done examining the academic self-perceptions of rejected children who are just beginning school (Ladd, 1988; Ladd et al., 1990). Among the findings in the few studies done, researchers have found evidence that peer rejection reduces children's sense of academic competence (Ladd, 1988). Beyond these studies, researchers have generally speculated that rejection may influence children to withdraw from academic situations, but these hypotheses have not been empirically tested. Obviously, more studies need to be performed to test these hypotheses and to help clarify associations between rejection and academic self-perceptions.

Social Correlates of Rejected Status

Similar to their academic experiences, rejected children tend to experience social difficulties early in their school career. Beginning with preschool and early elementary school, rejected children have trouble entering peer groups (Black & Hazen, 1990). In contrast to their more liked peers, rejected children tend to have difficulty anticipating consequences of their actions, often responding to group members in a non-contingent manner (Bloomquist, August, Cohen, Doyle, & Everhart, 1997). Because they cannot follow the give and take of the group's communication, rejected children often respond by trying to bully their way into the group, or they wait for an invitation to join the group that often does not come (Buzzelli, 1992; Pullatz, 1983).

Rejected children's social problems tend to worsen as they move from grade to grade. Rejected status in kindergarten is predictive of children acting out in second grade (Li, 1985). Children also start to become more aggressive and disruptive (Broidy et al., 2003; Dodge et al., 2003). They tend to not have a stable group of friends for support: instead, rejected children are typically bounced from one classmate to another. Often, the only playmates rejected children find are other rejected children and children who are much younger than they are (Ladd, 1983; Ladd et al., 1990). This scenario proves particularly problematic because it sets in motion a vicious cycle. If rejected children cannot find socially competent playmates, then they will be less likely to learn the social skills that they need to be successful, and the larger peer group will continue to reject them.

As investigators have sought to understand the relation between peer rejection and academic and social adjustment, they have identified some promising avenues of exploration (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Wentzel, 1999a). While no causal link has been established between peer rejection and adjustment variables, investigators have begun to propose pathways of influence (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Coie et al., 1990). One potential source of influence is children's level of classroom participation. As Finn (1985) notes, academic and social success depends in part on children's willingness to take initiative by participating independently. Another part of classroom participation is social responsibility, defined as children's willingness to cooperatively participate and follow the social rules and expectations within the classroom

(Wentzel, 1991b). However, most rejected children report feeling alienated from class activities because they have fewer opportunities for interaction with peers (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996; Wentzel, 1999a). Researchers have found that by middle school, most rejected children say that they do not care about following class rules or working with their peers (Wentzel, 1993a; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Furthermore, researchers have noted that rejected children's poor class participation often extends to their relationships with their teachers. When surveyed, teachers have reported that rejected children tend to exhibit either excessively dependent behavior such as clinginess and difficulty working alone (Birch & Ladd, 1997), or excessively withdrawn and uncooperative behavior (Taylor, 1989).

Recently, Buhs and Ladd (2001) extended the research on class participation to children transitioning to school. They created a model incorporating class participation as a mediator between peer rejection and academic and social adjustment during the kindergarten year. According to their model, the process of being rejected influences children to decrease their levels of classroom participation, and that decreased participation, in turn, contributes to declining achievement and social adjustment. Their longitudinal study of kindergartners supports this assertion; children who are rejected early in the school year show a decrease in class participation and a subsequent decline in both achievement and social adjustment factors. It should be noted here that class participation was assessed using teacher ratings and child observation techniques; the authors of the study didn't ask rejected children about their perceptions of

their school experience. It seems probable that the perceptions rejected children hold could add further insight about their school experiences and adjustment.

As more specific models of peer rejection are developed and tested, perhaps researchers can begin to develop interventions aimed at minimizing peer rejection before it becomes chronic. Because children are exhibiting drops in both achievement and attitude at the kindergarten level, early identification and treatment seems imperative.

Neglected Status Children

While the studies of rejected children have flourished, the study of neglected children has largely been ignored. Neglected status children seem to fade into the background in the classroom, and they have also been largely neglected in the literature (Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Coie & Dodge, 1983). When researchers have focused on neglected children, they have generally used them as a comparison group for studying rejected children rather than as an entity unto themselves (Coie et al., 1990; Frentz et al., 1991). For instance, Asher and his colleagues (Asher & Wheeler, 1985; Cassidy & Asher, 1992) report that in comparison to rejected children, neglected children: 1) rarely display aggression or disruptive behavior, 2) are better able to make a fresh start in new groups, 3) report less loneliness, and 4) are less likely to experience serious adjustment problems in school. However, little research has been done examining why neglected children appear to suffer few negative consequences despite their low acceptance from their peer group (Coie et al., 1990; Dodge, 1983).

Some research exists indicating that neglected children do suffer from some school adjustment difficulties, but the number of studies is small. Kupersmidt and her colleagues (1990 & 1991) find that neglected children are more likely to report feelings of depression than other status groups. Likewise, French and Waas (1985) report that neglected children evidenced higher rates of obsessive-compulsive disorder than the other status groups. It is important to note that the authors of this study determined obsessive-compulsive disorder solely through the use of parent ratings on a child behavior checklist. While parents are certainly knowledgeable about their children's behaviors, their ratings do not necessarily translate into a clinical diagnosis. Therefore, the finding of obsessive-compulsive disorder should be treated with some skepticism, as it is not a clinical report. Still, follow-ups and intensive study of potential problems such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder are virtually nonexistent. Because neglected children don't distract teachers or disrupt the classroom, their concerns have been generally relegated to the back burner.

Many researchers have concluded that neglected status children are not significantly different from children of average status (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). For example, Coie and Dodge (1983) and Newcomb and Bukowski (1984) find that over a five year period, neglected children who change status are most likely to become average. Similarly, Brendgen and her colleagues (2001) conducted a study in which they chose two different methods to classify children's social status. Using the first method, they classified children into only three categories: popular, average, and unpopular. Then, they reclassified

children using the traditional five category format. When the authors compared results from the two categorization schemes, they discovered that the majority of children classified as neglected under the traditional scheme were also classified as average with the three category approach.

Although researchers have tended to dismiss the study of neglected children, or lump them with other status groups, enough information has surfaced to generate questions about how neglected children function in the classroom (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Specifically, researchers haven't adequately addressed why neglected children appear to be reasonably well-adjusted while maintaining a low level of involvement with their peers. In the following sections, I will explore that question with a review of neglected children's academic and social experiences in school.

Academic Correlates of Neglected Status

The few studies of neglected children's academic achievement and perceptions have generally indicated positive findings. In a study of kindergarten adjustment, Ladd (1990) finds that neglected children had better academic performance than the other status groups, although their performance didn't differ significantly from their popular status peers. Similarly, in their study of first and second grade children, Vandell and Hembree (1994) report that neglected children earned high scores on achievement tests. However, they also reported that neglected status children tend to hold more negative academic self-concepts than the other status groups.

The most extensive treatment of neglected children has been by Wentzel and her colleagues in conjunction with their examination of social motivation and academic achievement (Wentzel, 1991a; Wentzel, 1993a; Wentzel, 1999b; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Wentzel suggests that neglected children in middle school have developed competencies not found in average or popular children. Compared with other status groups, Wentzel has found that neglected children report greater interest and commitment to their schoolwork, higher academic motivation, greater concern with evaluation, and an overall greater satisfaction with school. Neglected status children also tend to earn higher grades than the other groups. Teachers view neglected children as more independent learners and as “good students” who they prefer at a higher rate than the other status groups.

Interestingly, Wentzel notes that neglected children are not perceived by their peers to be particularly good students. Thus, it doesn't appear that children achieve their neglected status as a consequence of their academic accomplishments. Wentzel (1999b) hypothesizes that children might be neglected because they also report higher than average levels of compliance to teachers (not a valued trait in the middle school peer group), and because teachers report liking them more than others. Alternatively, Wentzel suggests that neglected children might be more interested in academic or other solitary interests without being particularly interested in social interactions. Being liked by teachers is more important for the adoption of school-related goals than is a high level of acceptance by peers. Thus, Wentzel concludes that neglected children appear to

exhibit a particular sophistication in being able to establish social connections that help them to achieve particular goals.

These studies indicate that neglected children are not merely another form of average status children, but a unique group of achievers. The findings of Wentzel in particular point to the need for more studies of neglected children, especially at early ages. Wentzel has suggested that neglected status children achieve success in part because they place more emphasis on pleasing teachers. It would be particularly interesting to see if this pattern holds for neglected children in early grades, given that pleasing the teacher tends to be important to most children beginning school (Birch & Ladd, 1996). In addition, more studies of neglected children's academic self-perceptions are definitely needed. It is unclear why young neglected children have reported more negative self-concepts, yet older neglected children have reported positive self-perceptions (Vandell & Hembree, 1994). Obviously, many questions need to be further addressed. Still, it appears that the academic lives of neglected children are generally positive. Next, I will examine their social experiences.

Social Correlates of Neglected Status

From the first years of school, researchers note that neglected children engage in fewer social interactions than their peers. As early as first grade, neglected children are noted for talking less and spending more time in solitary play than other children (Coie et al., 1990; Dodge, 1983). Why? Because neglected children are alone so much, it is often assumed that they are being

excluded by the peer group (Coie et al., 1990). Yet, evidence exists that perhaps it is the neglected children themselves who do the isolating. When questioned, peers often report that they like neglected children, but that neglected children do not try to spend a lot of time with them (Newcomb et al., 1993). In fact, neglected children report higher levels of social avoidance than the other status groups (Erdley & Asher, 1996). In other words, it could be that neglected children are not noticed because they choose not to be noticed. If it is the neglected children themselves who are doing the isolating, rather than the peer group, then perhaps being neglected is at least in part a choice.

Because neglected children have fewer interactions, it has often been assumed that these children are shyer than their peers (Coie et al., 1982; Dodge, 1983). Yet, this assumption has not been supported in the literature. Rubin and his colleagues (1989) found that neglected children in the fourth grade couldn't be distinguished from their peers based on shyness. In a longitudinal study of children from fifth grade to high school, Hatzichristou and Hopf (1996) similarly concluded that the label of "shy" has persisted mainly because neglected children are quiet and not very visible to peers.

Even if neglected children do choose to be neglected by their peers, how do they function socially? Given their limited interactions, it might be assumed that neglected children would experience social difficulties. Furthermore, because their social skills are not on display as often as their peers, neglected children's skills might be more difficult to assess. However, the limited studies done indicate that they are able to successfully interact when required. For

example, Morris, Messer, and Gross (1995) created an intervention to help neglected children increase their social interactions. They created dyads of neglected and popular children with the intent to have the popular children model appropriate social skills during various school-related activities. The researchers reported being surprised at how quickly neglected children acquired the skills. Not only did they increase their social interactions: researchers observed that the neglected children became almost socially indistinguishable from their popular counterparts when they interacted. The authors concluded that having peers act as tutors may have facilitated the learning process, but they admitted that they were baffled by the ease with which neglected children became more sociable.

Wentzel and Asher (1995) have suggested that neglected children are socially and academically successful in part because they pursue more social responsibility goals than their peers. According to Wentzel (1993b), there are two key components of social responsibility: prosocial behavior and compliant behavior. Children engage in prosocial behavior when they actively help others, such as peers and teachers (e.g., offering to clean the chalkboards after class), and they engage in compliance behavior by fulfilling requests that others make of them (e.g., obeying classroom rules). Thus, Wentzel argues that socially responsible children are active agents in the classroom, constantly looking for ways to contribute and participate.

Neglected children seem to evidence characteristics of social responsibility. By fourth grade, neglected children place more emphasis than other statuses on getting along with others, and in working out conflicts

peacefully (Erdley & Asher, 1996). Neglected children also tend to make more complex social attributions than their peers, often assuming great personal responsibility for positive and negative outcomes alike (Crick & Ladd, 1993). Furthermore, peers view neglected children as cooperative (Coie et al., 1982). Finally, teachers have characterized neglected children as more helpful to others, more considerate of their classmate's needs, more likely to follow rules, and less likely to start classroom fights than the other status groups (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). It is interesting to note that as they pursue these goals, neglected children rarely draw attention to themselves. It appears that many of their social interactions take place through their efforts to please their teachers. Thus, it might be more difficult for researchers to know about neglected children's actions without directly asking about them. Tani and Schneider (1997) observed that unless researchers use self-report measures, they are likely to miss the often subtle actions and interactions of neglected children.

The findings presented here seem to paint a positive picture of neglected children's social adjustment during the elementary and middle school years, although little is known about neglected children just beginning school.

Rationale for Research Study

As discussed in my literature review, children's academic and social adjustment appears to be a crucial part of their successful transition to school. Evidence suggests that children's perceptions of their school-related abilities—both academic and social—are influenced by their social status. Yet, few studies

exist that address these variables during children's early school years. Therefore, my study was in part an effort to help address that gap in the literature.

When designing my study, I was also guided by three general concerns. First, I wanted to address peer rejection and peer neglect as equally as possible. Most studies in the social status literature focus exclusively or primarily on rejected children. Therefore, I tried to focus on areas in the social status literature that highlighted the experiences of both status groups.

Second, I wanted to choose survey instruments that were easy for young children to comprehend. In my review of the literature, I noted that young children have more difficulty understanding survey questions that are asked in a declarative (statement) format (Akiyama & Guillory, 1983). Therefore, I chose to use only instruments constructed in an interrogative format.

Finally, I included measures that addressed both general and more specific self-perceptions. Most previous studies have focused on very general perceptions (e.g., I am good at numbers). While general questions are helpful, I wanted to know more detail about young children's self-perceptions. I chose to include a measure that examines more specific perceptions in a particular domain. I chose reading because it is a salient task for children in the first grade. Research indicates that poor reading skills have been linked with peer rejection and declining academic self-perceptions (Glick, 1972; McMichael, 1980).

Therefore, guided by these considerations, I addressed the following major research questions in my study:

Research Question 1

Do social status groups differ in their academic perceptions?

Hypotheses 1a. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of perceived cognitive competence.

Hypothesis 1b. It was predicted that neglected status children would not differ from popular children for a measure of perceived cognitive competence.

Hypothesis 1c. It was predicted that teachers would rate rejected status children significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of teacher assessed cognitive competence.

Hypothesis 1d. It was predicted that teacher's ratings of neglected status children would not differ from their ratings of popular children for a measure of cognitive competence.

Hypothesis 1e. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on all components of a reading measure (composite self-concept, perceived competence, perceived difficulty, and attitude).

Hypothesis 1f. It was predicted that neglected status children would not differ from popular children for the reading measure.

Rationale. The current literature regarding social status documents pronounced academic difficulties and correspondingly low academic self-perceptions among rejected children during the later years of elementary school (DeRosier et al., 1994). Although few studies exist about younger school-age children's academic self-perceptions, academic difficulties do tend to be associated with rejection (Coie & Krehbiel, 1984). Furthermore, researchers have

suggested that the early experience of rejection may negatively color children's perceptions of their entire school experience (Ladd, 1990). Therefore, even though children may not initially experience academic difficulties, it is probable that the experiences associated with rejection influence them to perceive their school abilities more negatively.

On the other hand, the relation between neglected status and self-perceptions is less clear. While research seems to indicate that neglected children are not at any great risk for academic difficulties, it is generally unclear how members of this status group perceive their abilities, especially at young ages (Coie et al., 1990). Many researchers have concluded that neglected status children are most similar to peers of average status. However, a few researchers have noted that neglected children in middle school tend to hold high academic self-perceptions and also tend to be among the highest academic achievers in the class (Wentzel, 1999a; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). There is also evidence that as early as kindergarten, neglected children exhibit high levels of academic performance, similar to the level of popular status children (Ladd, 1990). Thus, it seems logical that neglected status children would be similar to popular status children in their academic self-perceptions.

Statistical Analysis. These hypotheses were tested with the full data set using planned simple contrasts and *t*-tests for independent groups. The critical value for significance of the tests was set at $p < .05$.

Research Question 2

Do social status groups differ in their social perceptions?

Hypothesis 2a. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of perceived social acceptance.

Hypothesis 2b. It was predicted that teachers would rate rejected status children significantly lower than other status groups on a measure of social acceptance.

Hypothesis 2c. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of social responsibility (prosocial behavior, compliance behavior, and composite measure).

Hypothesis 2d. It was predicted that neglected status children and popular children would not differ from each other on a measure of social responsibility.

Rationale. Because rejected children frequently experience ostracism and exclusion from activities with peers, it seems logical that they would not perceive themselves to be highly accepted (Vitaro et al., 1992). It also appears likely that teachers would be aware of the social relationships among children and would thus rate the rejected children as less socially accepted than their peers.

Relatively little is known about children's social responsibility behaviors in the early years of school; therefore this hypothesis is exploratory in nature.

Evidence suggests that rejected children in middle school display significantly lower levels of social responsibility perceptions (Wentzel, 1991a; Wentzel & Asher, 1995) than the other statuses, while both popular and neglected children exhibit very high levels of socially responsible behaviors and perceptions.

Statistical Analysis. These hypotheses were tested with the full data set using simple planned contrasts and *t*-tests for independent groups. The critical value for significance of the tests was set at $p < .05$.

Research Question 3

Do relations exist between teacher's academic assessments of children and children's academic perceptions?

Hypothesis 3a. It was predicted that teacher assessments of cognitive competence would positively correlate with children's scores of perceived cognitive competence.

Hypothesis 3b. It was predicted that teacher assessments of cognitive competence would have a significant positive correlation with children's perceived reading competence, reading attitude, perceived reading difficulty, and composite self-concept.

Rationale. Evidence suggests that a teacher's cognitive assessments should correlate with students' perceptions (Harter, 1984). After all, teachers give students frequent feedback about their academic abilities. Especially during the early years of school when children are just beginning to learn about their abilities, teacher feedback would appear to be an important source of information for student's perceptions.

Statistical analysis: These hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The critical value for testing the significance of the correlations was set at $p < .05$.

Research Question 4:

Do relations exist between a teacher's social assessment of children and children's social perceptions?

Hypothesis 4a. It was predicted that teacher assessments of children's social acceptance would correlate significantly with children's perceived social acceptance.

Hypothesis 4b. It was predicted that teacher assessments of children's social acceptance would correlate significantly with children's perceived social responsibility.

Rationale. As part of classroom management, teachers tend to give feedback to children about their social abilities the same as they give academic feedback (Weinstein et al., 1987). Also, because social relationships are such a salient part of classroom dynamics, it seems logical that teachers would be aware of how well or poorly children were accepted by their peers (Newcomb et al., 1993). However, the measure employed in my study requires teachers to make social assessments of children based mostly on social behaviors that would occur outside the classroom, such as during recess or physical education class. Teachers may not have occasion to observe these behaviors.

Because social responsibility involves behaving in socially appropriate ways toward both teachers and classmates, it would also appear likely that children who engaged in high levels of socially responsible behavior would be more accepted by peers (Wentzel, 1993b). Thus, it is probable that a teacher's assessment of social acceptance would relate to children's perceived social responsibility.

Statistical analysis: These hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The critical value for testing the significance of the correlations was set at $p < .05$.

CHAPTER 3

Method

The goal of my research was to examine how children's social status relates to their academic and social self-perceptions. To gather information about associations among these variables, data were gathered from three sources: 1) interviews with first grade children, 2) interviews with children's classroom peers, and 3) written surveys completed by classroom teachers. Using this multi-method approach provided a rich database and served as a way of validating responses from each data source. A detailed list of variables used in the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Definition of variables

Variable Name	Definition
Social status	A five-category classification based on children's levels of social preference and social impact in the classroom (categories include average, popular, rejected, neglected, and controversial)
Social preference	An index of how much a child is preferred by classmates (tabulated in z-score form)
Social impact	An index of how visible a child is to classmates (tabulated in z-score form)

Academic perceptions

Perceived cognitive competence	A six-item scale assessing children's perceived competence for general academic tasks. (ranges from 1=not good at all to 4=really good)
Teacher assessed cognitive competence	A six-item scale asking teachers to evaluate whether children are skilled at particular cognitive tasks (ranges from 1=not true of this child to 4=really true of this child)
Reading self-concept	An index of children's self concept in reading based on their perceptions of themselves in three areas: reading competence, reading difficulty, and reading attitude
Perceived reading competence	A ten-item scale measuring feelings of proficiency and skill in reading (ranges from 1=never to 5= always)
Perceived reading difficulty	A ten-item scale measuring beliefs about how difficult reading is perceived to be (ranges from 1=never to 5= always)
Reading attitude	A ten-item scale measuring feelings experienced about reading (ranges from 1=never to 5= always)

Social self-perceptions

Perceived social acceptance	A six-item scale measuring children's perceptions of social acceptance by peers (ranges from 1=not good at all to 4=really good)
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Teacher assessed social acceptance	A six-item scale asking teachers to evaluate whether children are skilled at particular social tasks (ranges from 1=not true of this child to 4=really true of this child)
Social responsibility	An index combining children's perceptions about how often they engage in prosocial behavior and compliance behavior in the classroom.
Prosocial behavior	A six-item scale measuring how often children believe that they perform helping behavior for the teacher and classmates (ranges from 1=never to 5=always)
Compliant behavior	A six-item scale measuring how often children believe that they comply with requests of teachers and classmates (ranges from 1=never to 5=always)

Participants

Participants for this study were 101 (fifty-two girls and forty-nine boys) first grade students attending two ethnically diverse elementary schools located in the southwest. The average age of participants was 7.8 years. The ethnic breakdown was as follows: 55% (56) were Latino, 34% (34) were Anglo, and 11% (11) were African-American.

Data were collected during the Spring 1999 semester at the participants' elementary schools. Five different classrooms of children participated in the

study. Between 20 to 25 children attended each classroom. Students participated on a voluntary basis after parental consent for their participation was obtained. Overall, 85% of parents consented to let their children participate. Of those children receiving parental consent, a full 100% did participate in the study. (Please see Appendix B and Appendix C respectively for the parental consent form and the children's assent form).

In addition to interviews with children, data were collected from classroom teachers. The teachers completed confidential written surveys about their student's academic and social competencies. Each teacher was paid \$20 for the time spent answering the surveys.

Procedures

The researcher interviewed participants individually in a quiet place at their school. Before the researcher began each interview, she read an assent form (see Appendix C) to the children that explained the interview procedure.

Participants were told that the interview was not a test, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. They were also assured that their responses would be confidential. Participants were encouraged to ask questions regarding anything they did not understand about the procedure. Finally, the interviewer told participants that if they felt uncomfortable at any point during the interview, they could take a break, or they could quit. After the assent form was read and explained, children were asked if they understood it. To assess comprehension further, the interviewer also asked each participant to describe the

purpose of the assent form. After children's comprehension of it was established, children signed the form.

The interview was administered in four distinct segments: sociometrics, social responsibility, reading self-concept, and perceived academic and social competence. In order to combat potential fatigue, children engaged in a short, unrelated diversion task after each segment. The entire process took approximately twenty minutes per child. Two children finished the interview in fifteen minutes, and one child took thirty minutes to complete it.

Before beginning each measure, the researcher thoroughly explained the format to the children. For example, sample questions were asked beforehand to establish that each participant understood the directions and felt comfortable using the rating scales. To demonstrate rating scales for the surveys, posters depicting familiar shapes were displayed for the children's use. Children were shown how the shapes corresponded to particular responses, and children practiced using the scales. To guard against potential response bias, the researcher asked sample questions to elicit affirmative responses on some questions and negative responses to other questions. For example, in preparation for answering questions about their reading self-concept, children were asked general questions about their likes and dislikes (e.g., Do you like to climb trees?, and Do you like to paint pictures?). Children did not answer actual survey questions until they provided negative responses to some questions and affirmative responses to others.

The first survey administered was the sociometric interview. Participants were shown a list of the children in their class and asked to think about them.

Children were then asked to nominate the three children who they liked the most, and the three children they liked the least (Bower, 1960; Coie et al., 1982). In some cases, children thought of more than three responses for each question. When this incident occurred, the interviewer asked the children to narrow their selection to the top three children who they liked or disliked. In a few other instances, children only named one or two classmates for the categories. When these situations occurred, the researcher probed by asking, "Are there some children you like a little more than other children in your class?" Usually, this probing helped children to generate more responses. Only one instance occurred in which a child could only generate two responses after probing questions were asked. In this case, the third response was left blank.

Following the sociometric interview, the children engaged in a short diversion task in which they arranged stickers on art paper. They added more stickers to their paper after completing each subsequent measure. The diversion task was used both to combat potential fatigue and to prevent children from dwelling on the questions asked in the various surveys.

Next, the researcher orally administered Wentzel's Social Responsibility Scale (see Appendix G, Wentzel, 1991c). Children responded to this survey using a pictorial version of a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Children could respond by vocalizing or pointing to the pictures, or with a combination of the two. The interviewer always repeated their answers for verification.

The Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman & Tunmer, 1993) was then administered orally. Children used a different pictorial rating scale that

corresponded to the structure of the survey to aid them in answering. Once again, children had the option of answering verbally or by pointing to the pictures.

Finally, the last measures administered were the Perceived Cognitive Competence and Perceived Peer Acceptance subscales from Harter's *Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children* (Harter & Pike, 1981). While the questions asked were identical for boys and girls, gender appropriate testing booklets were used so that participants compared themselves with pictures of the same gender. Children were told that they were going to play a game called, "Which girl/boy is most like me." The interviewer showed participants pictures of two children and provided a corresponding description. The pictures depicted contrasting situations in which one child was shown having positive experiences while the other child was shown having negative experiences. For example, in one situation, the first child was described as being, "pretty good at adding numbers," while the second child was described as being, "not very good at adding numbers." The order of these questions was counterbalanced so that sometimes the description of the positive experience was described first, and sometimes the negative experience was described first. Children were asked to indicate which child they were most like by pointing to the appropriate picture. The interviewer then asked the children to refine their response further using a pictorial Likert scale.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher reminded children that their responses would remain confidential. The researcher also asked each child to promise not to tell classmates what was discussed during the interview (Coie et

al., 1982; Harrist et al., 1997). The researcher explained that she wanted all of the children to have the opportunity to answer the questions and play the games. Children were told that they could talk to their parents or teacher about the interview questions, but not the other children. They were thanked for their participation and escorted back to their class.

It should be noted here that many of the children voluntarily told the researcher that the interview was fun for them. Several children asked if they could participate in it again. No children reported any negative feelings about the interview to the researcher. The interviewer also talked informally with teachers to find out if participants reported any concerns after taking part in the interview. Teachers uniformly reported that no children expressed concerns, and none were observed discussing the interview with peers.

In addition to the interviews with children, data about the children were also obtained from the classroom teachers. Teachers responded to written survey items from the *Teacher Version of the Harter Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children* (See Appendix E, Harter & Pike, 1981). They answered questions about children's cognitive competence and social acceptance.

Measures

Sociometric Status

Sociometric status was determined for children in each of the five classrooms using standard peer nomination procedures developed by Coie et al., (1982). Scores were computed and standardized within each classroom. "Liked Most" (LM) and "Liked Least" (LL) scores were calculated for each participant; scores were tabulated as the sum of positive nominations (LM) and the sum of negative nominations (LL) respectively. Next, the LM and LL scores were transformed into standardized z -scores.

The standardized z scores were used to tabulate social preference (SP) and social impact (SI) scores for each child. To tabulate a child's SP score, each child's LL score was subtracted from the LM score. The SI score was calculated by adding each participant's LM and LL scores. Using this classification procedure yielded five social status categories: 42 (42.6%) children were categorized as average status, 15 (13.9%) children were categorized as popular status, 19 (18.8%) children were categorized as rejected status, 13 (12.9%) children were neglected status, and 12 (11.9%) children were classified as controversial status.

Popular children were categorized as those having an SP score >1.0 , a LM >0 , and a LL score <0 . Rejected children had an SP score <-1.0 ; a LL score >0 , and a LM score <0 . Neglected children had an SI score <-1.0 ; a LM score <0 ; and a LL score <0 . Controversial children had an SI score >0 ; a LM score >0 ; and a LL >0 .

This research sample was unusual in its composition because a traditional minority group, Latinos, comprised a majority (55%) of the participants. It is important to note that the composition of the group did reflect the ethnic makeup of the schools from which the sample was taken. Still, there was some concern about whether ethnic groups would be disproportionately represented among the five social statuses (Howes & Wu, 1990; Kistner et al., 1993). Therefore, chi square analyses were tabulated to determine if any ethnic group was over or underrepresented among social status categories.

To perform these analyses, the actual number of participants classified in a particular status category was compared with the number of participants that would be expected for that category. This analysis was performed for each of the three ethnic groups. Because the sample was comprised of 55% Latino, 34% Anglo, and 11% African-American participants, it was expected that each status group would be comprised of a similar percentage makeup. Results for the analyses are displayed for the ethnic groups in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency of social status groups by ethnicity

	LATINO		ANGLO		AFRICAN-AMERICAN	
	OBS. N	EXP. N	OBS. N	EXP. N	OBS. N	EXP. N
Avg Status	22	24.1	15	14.5	5	4.7
Pop. Status	13	18.2	1	4.7	1	1.5
Rej. Status	10	10.6	7	6.4	2	2.1
Negl. Status	6	7.2	5	4.4	2	1.4
Contr. Status	5	6.7	6	4.0	1	1.3

Notes: $\chi^2=.70$ df=4 n.s.(Latino group)
 $\chi^2=4.02$ df=4 n.s.(Anglo group)
 $\chi^2=.97$ df=4 n.s. (African-American group)

The non-significant results of the chi square analyses indicated that ethnic groups were represented among the statuses in roughly the same percentages as they were in the overall sample. Therefore, even though ethnicity is an important variable to consider, it does not appear that any ethnicities were over or underrepresented among the status categories.

Academic self-perceptions

The *Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children* (PSPCA; Harter & Pike, 1981) was used to assess perceived general cognitive competence (CC). This subscale contains six items (e.g., How good are you at numbers?) scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with a 1 indicating "not good at all" and a 4 indicating, "really good." Perceived cognitive competence is measured with items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21. Because this survey requires participants to compare themselves with children in pictures, gender appropriate testing booklets were used to help children more easily make the comparisons. Please see Appendix D for a sample of the questions asked for both the girl and boy versions of this instrument.

This subsale was developed as part of a larger survey instrument designed to measure young school age children's perceptions in four areas: cognitive competence, physical competence, maternal acceptance and social acceptance (Harter, 1982). In the present study, only the cognitive competence and social acceptance subscales were used.

Harter reported good psychometric properties for the CC. In a series of experiments, Harter reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for this subscale ranging from .75 to .83, and an internal reliability of .76 (Harter, 1982).

Support for the convergent validity of the subscale was indicated in interviews with children (Harter & Pike, 1984). Children were questioned as to why they perceived they were competent or not competent at cognitive activities asked about in the survey. Results indicate that 96% of the children surveyed were able to give specific reasons for their competence perceptions such as, "I get the hardest words on a test," "I practice a lot on my flash cards," or alternately, their incompetence perceptions: "I can't spell words on tests."

Harter and Pike (1984) also found evidence of discriminant validity for the CC. In a two-year longitudinal study, Harter found that children who failed a year in school had scored significantly lower on the cognitive competence subscale that had been administered two years prior (Harter & Pike, 1984).

Other researchers have reported associations between the Harter instrument and various academic variables. Gullo and Ambrose (1987) found that children who scored higher on the CC tended to earn higher grades. Bierer (1981) reported that children with higher perceived cognitive competence showed a significant preference for more complex cognitive tasks. Finally, Anderson and Adams (1985) found that the CC significantly predicted kindergarten children's academic readiness for school.

Teacher assessed cognitive competence

The teacher version of the cognitive competence subscale of the PSPCA (Harter & Pike, 1981) was used for teachers to assess children's cognitive competence. Teachers responded to a written version of the same six questions as the children (e.g., This child can read alone), using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true of this child) to 4 (really true of this child). The cognitive competence questions were numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Please see Appendix E for a sample of items used in this survey.

Boivin and Begin (1989) reported an internal consistency of .92 for the Teacher version. In addition, Harter and Pike (1984) reported a modest .37 correlation between teacher ratings and child ratings for this scale. Furthermore, when Harter and Pike (1984) examined the perceived competence scores of children whom teachers rated highest and lowest, differences in the perceived cognitive competence of these two subgroups were highly significant. Therefore, it appears that for children who fell at the extreme ends of the CC, there was more similarity between teacher and child ratings than for those children who scored within the middle ranges of the distribution.

Reading Self-Concept Scale

The Reading Self-Concept Scale (RSCS; Chapman & Tunmer, 1993) is a 30-item measure that taps into specific components of elementary age children's reading self-concept. The RSCS measures three areas: perceived reading competence, perceived reading difficulty, and reading attitude. Competence perceptions refer to feelings of proficiency and skill in reading and reading-

related activities (e.g., "Do you learn things quickly in reading?") and are measured by items 1, 4, 7, 9, 12, 15, 21, 24, 27, and 29. Difficulty perceptions are defined as reading and reading-related activities, events and behaviors considered difficult or aversive (e.g., "Do you make lots of mistakes in reading?") and are measured by items 3, 6, 11, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, and 28. Reading attitude refers to feelings or affective states children experience when reading (e.g., "Is it fun for you to read books?") and is measured by items 2, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, and 30. Please see Appendix F for a sample of the questions used on this instrument.

Children answered each question using a 5-point rating scale, which included choices of 'No, never', 'No, not usually'; 'Undecided or unsure'; 'Yes, usually'; and 'Yes, always'. The 'undecided or unsure' response indicated that the child understood the item but was unable to select a definite response. Undecided responses were assigned a neutral numeric weighting. High scores corresponded to a more positive reading self-concept for all subscales except reading difficulty; the negative items on this scale were reverse scored.

Items were worded in a question format (e.g., Are you a good reader?) rather than in the usual declarative format (e.g., I am a good reader). The interrogative wording was adapted to reduce the linguistic complexity that young children face when required to verify declarative statements (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995).

Chapman and Tunmer (1995) reported Cronbach's alphas; competence ranged from .63 to .82, difficulty ranged from .70 to .80, and attitude ranged from .79 to .81. Internal reliability for the full scale ranged from .84 to .85.

The various subscales have also evidenced criterion related validity. Each subscale positively correlates with children's third grade reading performance (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997). In addition, the authors (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995) found that for kindergarten children, the difficulty subscale was positively correlated with specific reading skills such as letter identification, word identification, pseudoword naming, and spelling (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995). Criterion-related validity has also been indicated for the full scale; Chapman and Tunmer (1997) found that for first and second grade children, there were significant positive correlations between their reading self-concept and reading performance (Chapman & Tunmer, 1997; Chapman & Tunmer, 2003).

Perceived social acceptance

The *Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children* (PSPCA; Harter & Pike, 1981) was also used to assess perceived social acceptance. The format and scoring of the perceived social acceptance scale (PSA) is the same as the perceived cognitive competence scale (CC) except that the questions assess children's perceptions of their social relationships (e.g., I have lots of friends to play with on the playground). Perceived social acceptance is assessed with items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22. Please see Appendix D for a sample of questions used on the PSA.

Psychometric properties of the PSA have been good; the authors reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .78 to .83, and an internal reliability of .79 (Harter & Pike, 1984).

Discriminant validity for this subscale has been evidenced in a study comparing children who were new students to their school with children who had been at the school for at least a year. The children who were new at school scored significantly lower on the PSA than those children who were already established (Harter & Pike, 1984). Other researchers have found that children's perceived social acceptance is significantly correlated with their actual level of peer acceptance (Paguio & Hollett, 1991).

Teacher assessed social acceptance

The teacher version of the PSA (Harter & Pike, 1981) was used for teachers to assess children's perceived social acceptance. Teachers responded to a written version of the same six questions as the children (e.g., This child gets asked to play by others), using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true of this child) to 4 (really true of this child). The format and scoring of the perceived social acceptance scale (PSA) is the same as the perceived cognitive competence scale (CC) except that the questions assess children's perceptions of their social relationships. Teacher assessed social acceptance is measured by items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. Please see Appendix E for a sample of questions asked on this subscale.

Harter (1982) reported an internal consistency of .93 for the teacher version of the PSA, and a correlation of .06 between teacher and children's ratings. Both Harter and other researchers (Boivin and Begin, 1989) have found that one probable explanation for the low correlation is due to evidence that social acceptance strongly overlaps with physical appearance on the teacher's scale.

Still, the lack of relation between teacher and students' ratings is puzzling. It could be that teachers and students are drawing on a different set of experiences to appraise the social domain. Most of the questions asked require the teacher and student to reflect on social behavior that occurs primarily outside the classroom (e.g., Do you have a lot of friends to play with on the playground?). Teachers are often not with their students during recess, physical education classes, and other times when these behaviors in question would be likely to occur. Therefore, it is possible that teachers might have a limited exposure to children's social behavior as it is assessed on this survey. While the low correlations between teacher and student measures are troubling, the PSPCSA is one of the only surveys available that addresses social competence. Obviously, future research should address this methodological need.

Social Responsibility

Children's social responsibility behaviors were determined using Wentzel's Social Responsibility Scale (Wentzel, 1991c). The Social Responsibility Scale contains 12 items divided into two dimensions: prosocial goal behavior and compliance goal behavior. Prosocial goal behavior (items one through six) is assessed by asking how often children engage in various helping behaviors (e.g., How often do you try to share what you've learned with classmates?). Compliance goal behavior (items seven through twelve) examines how often children comply with requests from teachers and classmates (e.g., How often do you try to do what your teacher asks you to do?). Responses were scored on a 5-point response scale, ranging from "never," to "always." High scores indicate

more frequent social responsibility goal behavior. A copy of this scale is located in Appendix G.

Internal consistency for the prosocial goals and compliance goals subscales has been good; Wentzel (1991a & 1993b) has reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .74 to .77 for the compliance goals subscale, and she has reported Cronbach's alphas of .79 to .84 for the prosocial subscale. In addition, Wentzel (1993b) found a correlation between the two subscales of .62. For this reason, Wentzel recommends that analyses should be based on a composite of the two subscales.

In a series of studies, Wentzel (1991a, 1993b, & 1998) has found that children's pursuit of social responsibility goals is positively correlated with their pursuit of both performance and mastery goals. Wentzel (1998) also found a correlation between children's social responsibility goals and teacher ratings; teachers reported a preference for children who scored high on social responsibility goal pursuit. Teachers also reported that children who scored high on social responsibility demonstrated more appropriate classroom behavior than their peers. Finally, Wentzel (1991a) found that children's social responsibility goals appear to mediate the link between their level of peer acceptance and their academic achievement; children scoring higher in social responsibility tend to be more accepted than those children who score low on this measure.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Research Question 1

Do social status groups differ in their academic perceptions?

All hypotheses regarding rejected children were addressed using simple planned contrasts and where appropriate, post-hoc Tukey analyses. All hypotheses regarding neglected children were addressed using *t*-test procedures.

Hypotheses 1a. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of perceived cognitive competence.

The hypothesis regarding rejected status children was tested using General Linear Model (GLM) procedures. A simple planned contrast was performed so that each of the other four status categories could be compared with the rejected group. Contrary to predictions, rejected status children did not differ from the other status groups on perceived cognitive competence ($F(4) = 1.726, p < .15$). Means and standard deviations for academic perceptions are displayed for all status groups in Table 3.

Hypothesis 1b. It was predicted that neglected status children would not differ from popular children for the cognitive competence measure.

The hypothesis regarding neglected status children was tested using *t*-test procedures. Using this method allowed for direct comparison between the neglected and popular status groups. Consistent with predictions, popular and

neglected children did not differ from each other in their ratings of perceived cognitive competence ($t(25) = -.269, p < .79$).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for academic perceptions by status group

	Avg. (n=42)		Pop. (n=15)		Rej. (n=19)		Neg. (n=13)		Contr. (n=12)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Children's perceived cognitive competence	3.5	.37	3.8	.26	3.4	.68	3.7	.32	3.5	.30
Teacher assessed cognitive competence	2.7	.95	3.5	.71	2.7	.8	3.1	.91	2.6	.93
Children's overall reading self-concept	4.4	.29	4.6	.19	4.3	.38	4.5	.36	4.4	.31
Children's perceived reading competence	4.2	.59	4.8	.11	4.1	.81	4.6	.2	4.3	.60
Children's perceived reading difficulty	4.6	.24	4.6	.18	4.3	.17	4.6	.28	4.4	.23
Children's reading attitude	4.6	.41	4.6	.51	4.5	.39	4.4	.69	4.6	.45

Hypothesis 1c. It was predicted that teachers would rate rejected status children significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of teacher assessed cognitive competence.

This hypothesis was supported. A simple planned contrast revealed that teachers rated rejected children significantly lower than their peers on a general

measure of cognitive competence ($F(4) = 2.74, p < .03$). However, post hoc Tukey comparisons showed no further significant differences between rejected children and the other individual groups when examined one by one.

Hypothesis 1d. It was predicted that teacher's ratings of neglected status children would not differ from their ratings of popular children for this measure.

The hypothesis regarding neglected children was tested using *t*-test procedures. As predicted, neglected children did not differ from their popular counterparts for this measure ($t(25) = 1.28, p < .23$).

Hypothesis 1e. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on all components of a reading measure (composite self-concept, perceived competence, perceived difficulty, and attitude).

This hypothesis was supported for all components of the reading measure except for reading attitude, where no group differences were found. Simple planned contrasts showed that rejected children rated themselves less positively than their peers for composite reading self-concept ($F(4)=3.32, p < .01$). Post hoc Tukey tests further revealed group differences between rejected and popular children for this variable.

Rejected children also differed from their peers on a measure of perceived reading competence ($F(4) = 4.97, p < .001$); post-hoc Tukey tests showed that rejected children differed specifically from both popular and neglected children.

Finally, rejected children rated themselves less positively than the comparison group on a measure of perceived reading difficulty ($F(4) = 5.43$, $p < .001$). Post hoc Tukey analyses indicated that rejected children differed from average, popular, and neglected children.

Hypothesis 1f. It was predicted that neglected status children would not differ from popular children on any aspect of the reading measure.

Consistent with predictions, neglected and popular children were indistinguishable from each other for measures of composite reading self-concept, ($t(25) = -1.072$, $p < .29$), perceived reading competence ($t(25) = -1.889$, $p < .07$), perceived reading difficulty ($t(25) = -.233$, $p < .81$), and reading attitude ($t(25) = .89$, $p < .38$).

Thus, the results for Research Question 1 indicated mixed support for the predictions regarding rejected children. Rejected children evidenced no difference from their peers on the general measure of perceived cognitive competence. However, the teacher-assessed cognitive competence measure did indicate an overall group difference. For the reading measure, rejected children rated themselves less positively than their peers for every component except for reading attitude. It could be that the questions for the attitude scale address feelings (e.g., I like to read at school), more than an evaluation of one's reading ability. Therefore, it would not be surprising that a student's self-evaluation of reading skills could differ from enjoyment of reading.

Overall, the findings are in line with the pattern of research indicating that rejected children tend to encounter more academic difficulties than their peers (Dodge et al., 2003). However, it should be noted that none of the groups scored exceedingly low on these measures; therefore, the comparatively lower ratings reported by rejected children are not necessarily consonant with a negative outlook. It is also interesting to note that the rejected children showed no difference from the other groups on the more general measure of cognitive competence. Because this measure assessed very broad questions, perhaps it was more difficult for children to make meaningful distinctions about their abilities.

The predictions about neglected children were supported for each academic measure. Consistent with predictions, popular and neglected children were statistically similar for all measures, with results suggesting that they have positive academic perceptions. These results are consistent with literature suggesting that popular and neglected students are the most academically motivated of the status groups (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Also, this evidence is contrary to claims in the literature that neglected children are at-risk for academic difficulty (Newcomb et al., 1993).

Research Question 2

Do social status groups differ in their social perceptions?

All hypotheses regarding rejected children were addressed using simple

planned contrasts and where appropriate, post-hoc Tukey analyses. All

hypotheses regarding neglected children were addressed using *t*-test procedures.

Hypothesis 2a. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of perceived social acceptance.

This hypothesis was not supported. A simple planned contrast revealed that the rejected children did not differ from their comparison group for perceived social acceptance ($F(4) = 1.49, p < .21$). Means and standard deviations for each group are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for social perceptions by status group

	Avg. (n=42)		Pop. (n=15)		Rej. (n=19)		Neg. (n=13)		Contr. (n=12)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Children's perceived social acceptance	3.2	.73	3.6	.43	2.9	.91	3.4	.58	3.2	.40
Teacher assessed social acceptance	3.2	.65	3.8	.39	3.2	.57	3.4	.62	3.4	.62
Children's prosocial behaviors	4.3	.57	4.6	.35	4.3	.49	4.8	.18	4.0	.59
Children's compliance behaviors	4.4	.69	4.6	.69	3.9	.58	4.7	.27	4.3	.59
Children's composite social responsibility	4.4	.56	4.6	.56	4.1	.51	4.7	.17	4.2	.55

Hypothesis 2b. It was predicted that teachers would rate rejected status children significantly lower than other status groups on a measure of social acceptance.

This hypothesis was also not supported. When teacher ratings for rejected status children were compared with their classmates, no difference emerged ($F(4) = 2.03, p < .09$).

Hypothesis 2c. It was predicted that rejected status children would score significantly lower than the other status groups on a measure of social responsibility (prosocial behavior, compliance behavior, and composite measure).

This hypothesis was supported. Simple planned contrasts showed that rejected status children rated themselves less positively than peers for perceived prosocial behavior ($F(4) = 2.61, p < .04$), although Tukey post-hoc tests indicated no further differences between rejecteds and the other groups.

Rejected children also reported lower self-evaluations for compliance behavior when compared with the overall group ($F(4) = 5.26, p < .001$); post-hoc Tukey analyses indicated that rejected children specifically differed from average, popular, and neglected groups.

Finally, rejected children showed lower self-reports for the composite measure of social responsibility ($F(4) = 4.37, p < .003$). Post-hoc tests revealed that rejected children differed from both popular and neglected children.

Hypothesis 2d. It was predicted that neglected status children and popular children would not differ from each other on the social responsibility measure.

As predicted, neglected and popular children were once again indistinguishable from each other. These groups evidenced no differences for measures of prosocial behavior ($t(25) = -1.257, p < .22$), compliance behavior ($t = -.276, p < .78$), and composite social responsibility ($t(25) = -1.01, p < .32$).

Therefore, Research Question 2 was partially supported. Neither the children's nor the teacher's responses to the general measure of social competence differentiated the status groups. These findings lend credence to the suggestion that children have difficulty appraising very general abilities.

In support of Research Question 2, rejected status children did report lower levels of social responsibility than the other groups. This evidence supports the researcher's assertions (Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Finn, 1985) that low level of class participation is associated with social and academic difficulties. Of course, it must be noted that the differences in means among groups were relatively small. However, researchers have stipulated that the small differences observed in the early grades may be the precursors for later academic and social difficulties (Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; O'Neil et al., 1997).

Also important were the relatively high scores that both popular and neglected children obtained for the social measures. While a well-established literature supports the social savvy of popular children (Buzzelli, 1992; Gest et al., 2001), neglected children have usually been considered as candidates for

social difficulties (Morris et al., 1995). Neglected children's high ratings for both academic and social realms lend support to the idea that they aren't just shy, passive children in the classroom. Rather, these results support claims put forth by Wentzel (1999b) that neglected children are highly functioning, motivated individuals who know how to succeed in the classroom.

Still, perceptions are not the same as actions. Children may believe and say that they are competent at a task without necessarily demonstrating that competency. Providing teacher assessments for these academic and social tasks is another way to assess the congruence of children's beliefs with their behaviors.

Finally, it should be noted here that multiple *t* tests were performed without controlling for Type 1 error. Therefore, results should be interpreted cautiously due to possible inflated Type 1 error rate.

Research Question 3

Do relations exist between teacher's academic assessments of children and children's academic self-perceptions?

Hypotheses for Research Question 3 were tested using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient. In order to correlate variables among the different scales, all data were first transformed into standardized *z*-scores. The critical value of $p < .05$ was then set for testing the significance of the correlations.

Results for Research Question 3 are displayed for the whole group in Table 5, and results are broken down by status in Tables, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Hypothesis 3a. It was predicted that teacher assessments of cognitive competence would have a significant positive correlation with children's scores of perceived cognitive competence.

The results for this hypothesis were mixed. When correlations for the whole group were tabulated, teacher's and children's ratings indicated a modest positive correlation ($r=.22, p<.05$). However, when correlations for each status group were computed, only the rejected and neglected statuses evidenced moderate positive correlations between child and teacher cognitive variables ($r=.48$ and $r=.55, p<.05$, respectively). The other three status groups had almost no correlation for these variables. These results are somewhat surprising, given that teachers and students responded to the same questionnaire about school performance. Because teachers are a primary source of information for children to assess their cognitive abilities, it is unusual that no relation exists between these sources of information for three of the groups.

Hypothesis 3b. It was predicted that teacher assessments of cognitive competence would have a significant positive correlation with children's perceived reading competence, reading attitude, perceived reading difficulty, and composite self-concept.

The results indicate modest support for this hypothesis when the entire group was assessed. Small correlations were found between the teacher measure and perceived reading competence, reading attitude, and the composite score

($r=.24$ and $r=.20$, $p<.05$; and $r=.26$, $p<.01$ respectively). When individual status groups were assessed, the only significant correlation occurred for popular status children, in a direction opposite to what was expected. Popular status children actually had a negative correlation between their perceptions of reading difficulty and teacher ratings of their cognitive competence ($r= -.54$, $p<.05$). This result was also surprising; it would seem logical that teacher's cognitive evaluations of their students would be related to student perceptions in a fundamental domain such as reading.

Therefore, the results of Research Question 3 indicate that the teacher and student surveys may not necessarily be measuring the same constructs. Children are reporting internal feelings while teachers are reporting external appraisals. It is also possible that teachers give more realistic appraisals about children's academic abilities than the children themselves do. As has been mentioned previously, young children tend to be overly optimistic about their competence beliefs (Jacobs et al., 2002). Still, these explanations do not account for the observed negative correlations between teacher and student cognitive assessments. These results also raise some questions about the theoretical conceptions underlying these measures.

Table 5. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for sample

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	.22*	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	.24*	.50*	--			
4. Reading attitude	.20*	.17	.23*	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	.06	.21*	.33*	.27*	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	.26**	.45**	.83**	.69**	.04	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Table 6. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for average status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	-.03	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	.12	.29	--			
4. Reading attitude	.23	.19	.17	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	-.10	.15	.31*	.02	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	.17	.33*	.85**	.60**	.50**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Table 7. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for popular status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	-.21	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	-.19	-.46	--			
4. Reading attitude	.03	-.36	.002	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	-.54*	-.002	.50	.01	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	-.19	-.40	.36	.89**	.44	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Table 8. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for rejected status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	.48*	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	.17	.68**	--			
4. Reading attitude	.20	.30	.47*	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	.25	-.002	.53*	.45*	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	.22	-.40	.94**	.73**	.67**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Table 9. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for neglected status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	.55*	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	.23	.69**	--			
4. Reading attitude	.25	.72**	.84*	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	.42	.59*	.55*	.66*	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	.31	.75**	.88**	.98**	.79**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Table 10. Intercorrelations among cognitive variables for controversial status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Teacher assessed cognitive competence	--					
2. Perceived cognitive competence	.009	--				
3. Perceived reading competence	.23	.23	--			
4. Reading attitude	.32	-.24	.24	--		
5. Perceived reading difficulty	-.03	-.52	-.08	.45	--	
6. Composite perceived reading self-concept	.31	-.009	.78**	.76**	.41	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$.

Research Question 4:

Do relations exist between a teacher's social assessment of children and children's social perceptions?

Hypotheses for Research Question 4 were also tested using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient with a significance level of $p < .05$. Data were transformed into standardized z scores to measure correlations. Results for Research Question 4 are displayed for the entire group in Table 11, and the results for each status group are located in Tables 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16.

Hypothesis 4a. It was predicted that teacher assessments of children's social acceptance would have a significant positive correlation with children's perceived social acceptance.

This hypothesis failed to receive support. No correlation was found between teacher assessed and child assessed social acceptance for the whole group ($r = .18$, n.s.). When the correlations were measured for each status group, no correlations were statistically significant.

Hypothesis 4b. It was predicted that teacher assessments of children's social acceptance would have a significant positive correlation with children's perceived social responsibility.

This hypothesis received scant support. No associations were found when the whole group was assessed. When correlations were computed for each status, a small positive correlation was found for the average status group between

teacher assessments and perceived compliance ($r=.32, p<.05$). However, for the rejected status group, negative correlations resulted between teacher assessments and compliance behavior ($r=-.51, p<.05$), as well as teacher assessments and composite social responsibility behavior ($r=-.45, p<.05$).

Table 11. Intercorrelations among social variables for sample

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	.18	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	.02	.10	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	.15	.03	.56**	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	.11	.37**	.85**	.91**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as $*p<.05$; and $**p<.01$

Table 12. Intercorrelations among social variables for average status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	.23	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	-.004	.14	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	.32*	-.007	.59**	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	.19	.07	.89**	.91**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$

Table 13. Intercorrelations among social variables for popular status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	.47	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	-.23	.10	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	-.13	-.07	-.29	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	-.27	-.005	.35	.80**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$

Table 14. Intercorrelations among social variables for rejected status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	.10	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	-.33	.29	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	-.51*	.22	.76*	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	-.45*	.27	.93**	.95**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$

Table 15. Intercorrelations among social variables for neglected status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	-.02	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	.006	-.24	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	.22	.16	.12	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	.18	.003	.63*	.85**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$

Table 16. Intercorrelations among social variables for controversial status children

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher assessed social acceptance	--				
2. Perceived social acceptance	.11	--			
3. Perceived prosocial behavior	.18	-.08	--		
4. Perceived compliance behavior	.14	-.22	.45**	--	
5. Perceived social responsibility behavior	.17	-.16	.94**	.93**	--

Note: Significance levels are shown as * $p < .05$; and ** $p < .01$

The relations between teacher's and children's social assessments also seem tenuous. It is understandable that the measures did not correlate, given that the author of the instrument (Harter, 1984) found no relation between these measures in her validation studies. As I mentioned previously, it appears that for the social questionnaire, teachers are asked how children behave socially in situations that are mostly outside the classroom, and thus outside the teacher's realm of experience. Thus, it appears that more appropriate teacher and student surveys should be created in order to measure these constructs accurately.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

What knowledge has been gained from this study of the relation between social status and children's self-perceptions? In this section, I will discuss important findings of this study as they relate to the broader research literature. I will also address limitations of this study. Finally, I will discuss implications this study has for both research and practice.

Important findings

Measurement of young children's school-related perceptions

This study addressed a significant gap in educational and developmental literature—children's experiences as they transition to school. While researchers have studied the tasks involved with the transition, few have tried to ask children about their impressions of it. This study was in part my attempt to give voice to the impressions that young children form about the myriad social and academic challenges that await them.

Studying young children at this stage of development is also crucial because the initial years of schooling provide a foundation, albeit positive or negative, for children's subsequent educational experiences. The results of this study provide a snapshot of how young children viewed their competencies within their school environment. For the most part, it appears that young children

viewed their abilities in positive terms: even the groups who scored the lowest on these measures evaluated themselves positively. Still, although there was a trend toward optimism for the participants as a whole, it is important to recognize that certain groups--namely rejected children--tended to score significantly lower on these measures. Not so coincidentally, these lower ratings of academic and social ability are consistent with the pattern of academic and social difficulties that rejected children face as they pass through the school system (O'Neil et al., 1997; Wentzel, 2003).

Thus, results of this study show that young children can and do make meaningful distinctions in their self-evaluations. Although their distinctions may be slighter than those of older children or adults, these distinctions can nevertheless signal that real differences exist among groups.

Importance of developing appropriate survey instruments for children

While selecting and administering the instruments in my study, I found that it was not easy to find instruments for the research questions I was exploring. Some current instruments in use seem to have major psychometric and procedural flaws that limit their usefulness. Harter's PSPCSA (1981) used in this study is one such example. While this instrument is designed in an easy to use pictorial format, the instrument has some weak psychometric properties. In particular, the teacher versions of this survey evidenced no correlation with the child's version,

even though the same questions were administered for both. This lack of relation between the teacher and child surveys limited the results that others and myself have been able to obtain (Madigan et al., 2002). As mentioned previously, perhaps the teacher surveys were not measuring the same construct as the child surveys. Several of the questions that teachers were asked required them to make evaluations of children's behavior when they were not in the classroom. Teachers may not have very much access to their students to knowledgeably evaluate them outside the classroom context. It is also possible that children considered their social relationships beyond the classroom when choosing their responses, while teachers were constricted to answering based on what happens in the classroom. For example, children might have interpreted statements such as, "This child had friends to play games with," according to experiences at home, in their local neighborhoods, or other settings in addition to school. Also, because the Harter measure contained fairly general questions (e.g., This child knows lots of things in school, or This child has pretty many friends to play games with), it appeared that there was room for much fluctuation between teacher and child answers and perhaps their interpretation of what the items were asking. A teacher survey could be improved with the inclusion of more specific behaviors for teachers to evaluate, behaviors that were more specific to the classroom context, and stated in unambiguous language.

The Harter instrument also contained some unusual wording choices that had to be explained to children. For example, one question was worded to ask children if they had a few friends, or “pretty many” friends. This could be a problem for both students and teachers, as discussed above. Similarly, the Reading Self-Concept Scale (Chapman & Tunmer, 1993) used in this study contained a few strange wording choices that had to be explained or altered for clarity (e.g., children were asked if they knew how to “work out” what a story means). My use of these instruments could have been improved if I had altered some of the unusual wording to more accessible language. Likewise, measures in general could be improved if researchers used language with which children were more familiar.

Instruments should also be designed with sensitivity toward participants’ ethnic and cultural differences. While the pictorial format utilized in the Harter instrument were interesting and enticing for participants in the study, the pictures did not feature any racial or ethnic differences among the children depicted in them. Considering that minority populations comprise a significant percentage of school-age children, my results may have been stronger if I had altered the pictures to show more racial diversity. For example, I could have colored some of the pictures to portray children of African-American and Latino ethnicity. Finally, researchers must also be mindful that the definition of a family has

evolved to include not just parents and children, but other caregivers such as step-parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, guardians, and friends (Lewis, Feiring, & Kotsonis, 1984; Tietjen, 1989). For example, some questions on the Reading Self-Concept Scale required children to evaluate their feelings about reading to their parents. Questions of this type could be expanded to include a wider range of possibilities in keeping with children's living situations. While older children might understand that they could substitute "grandparent" for parents in a question such as this, younger children tend to think more literally about language (Gleitman, 1990).

Researchers could also improve the study of young children if more qualitative protocols (e.g., interviews) were used. Anecdotally, I noticed that when I administered the surveys in my study, children often volunteered insightful explanations for their answers. For example, when asked about whether they helped their classmates, several children described instances where they provided help. Many of the children also told me why they engaged in particular behaviors. For example, one participant told me that it made her feel good to help others. Others told me that if they helped their peers, it would make the teacher happy. These qualitative responses not only provided useful information; they clarified that the participants understood what the survey questions were really asking. Given that many researchers shy away from

working with young children because of the concern that they will not understand the questions, using qualitative techniques could help to alleviate some of these concerns.

Multidimensional nature of social status

This study was also in part an effort to describe and understand more fully the various social status typologies. While most social status research has focused on the study and treatment of rejected children, my study was an attempt to flesh out the characteristics and experiences of neglected status children, an understudied but potentially interesting group. In my study, I found evidence that neglected children are virtually indistinguishable from popular children with regard to their highly positive academic and social self-perceptions. This information, obtained at the first grade level, corresponds with the behaviors and attitudes described by Wentzel and her colleagues (Wentzel & Asher, 1995) regarding middle school students. These results also challenge the conclusions that many researchers have reached, namely that neglected children are most similar to the average social status (Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). The results of my study, while exploratory, support a promising avenue of inquiry into the functioning of neglected children. If neglected children have a tendency to become scholastic superstars, it seems that it would be more

beneficial to discover this information earlier rather than later in the schooling process.

Obviously, much more research would need to be conducted to understand young neglected children's functioning. However, the results of this study do show that the profile of characteristics ascribed to neglected children can be examined in a different way. Researchers have already broadened their study of status groups to acknowledge the complexities of categories. Rejected children are routinely delineated into subgroups of aggressive-rejected and submissive rejected behaviors (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). Similarly, researchers are now noting that popularity as a status is more complex than originally assumed; some children are popular because they are highly prosocial, while others are popular because they project a tough, antisocial image, and still others may not fit neatly into either characterization (Rodkin et al., 2000; Xie et al., 1999). Perhaps, then, the classification of neglected status could also be expanded to allow for at least two profiles. Some neglected children may in fact be socially ignored, and other neglected children may actively choose a lower level of participation in the peer group.

Studied in a broader context, neglected children could offer some additional insights into the development of social competence. Many researchers have equated children's social success with visible popularity among others. However, in my study, the results suggested that neglected children perceived

themselves as socially successful without attaining the visibility associated with popularity. It would be a beneficial and complementary line of inquiry to discover how neglected children achieve social success while functioning under the radar of social visibility.

While my findings about neglected children were intriguing, my study was limited by several factors. First, the small sample of neglected status participants (n=13) limits the ability to generalize the findings to the larger population. Second, the measures employed in this study evidenced some psychometric flaws, as discussed previously. Third, while the measurement of self-perceptions is useful, the study could have been more powerful if social observations and achievement data were obtained in conjunction with the perceptions. Obviously, more studies of neglected children would need to be undertaken to more fully understand their characteristics.

Implications for research

A main goal of researchers in the social status field has been to design effective intervention studies for rejected children to combat their academic and social difficulties. My study indicates that rejected children start having lower self-perceptions than their peers as early as first grade. Thus, based on the results of my study, it would seem logical that intervention studies should be implemented during children's early years of school when change is easier.

Traditionally, intervention studies geared toward improving the quality of rejected children's school experience have focused on changing either their social skills or their academic skills (Bierman, 1986; Coie & Krehbiel, 1984; Lochman, Coie, Underwood, & Terry, 1993). Results from my study indicate that rejected children's lower self-evaluations within both realms might make them candidates for an intervention that would simultaneously target both areas. Interestingly, rejected children rated their competence and ease with reading lower than the other statuses, but they still reported positive attitudes toward reading. This result is important because it points to some potentially useful intervention strategies, namely the use of class reading and literary activities to facilitate academic and social skills changes.

Researchers have noted that classroom interventions are more likely to work if activities can be embedded within the naturally occurring classroom tasks (Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001; Detrich, 1999; Gut & Safran, 2002). Thus, reading tasks would be ideal to use for intervention strategies. For example, Bhavnagri and Samuels (1996) found that preschool children improved their understanding of peer relationships after their teachers read and discussed stories with them that emphasized various aspects of friendship and social relations. These literary activities were a naturally occurring part of the children's academic life. Similarly, West (2002) documented how a teacher used reading activities to help a rejected student improve his learning motivation. This teacher used

reading activities as an opportunity to pair her rejected student with other students who also enjoyed reading. The teacher found that these pairings mutually benefited the children. She noted that her rejected student gained social skills as well as academic motivation from the collaborations, and that the children he was paired with became friendlier toward him.

Embedding intervention activities within familiar classroom tasks has also shown value because it allows all children in the classroom to potentially benefit from the instruction. Researchers have tended to focus somewhat myopically on the perceived shortcomings that rejected children display without considering the weaknesses that other status groups exhibit. In fact, most interventions are designed under the assumption that the rejected child is the one who should change behaviors and attitudes. However, this approach ignores the fact that children may be rejected for a variety of reasons, many times due to factors that they cannot control, such as physical appearance, or socioeconomic level; the rejection may even be a result of poor social behavior on the part of other status groups. Trying to get rejected children to change their behaviors and attitudes may not help them much in these cases. Therefore, it might be more fruitful to develop interventions that target the rejectors as well as the children being rejected.

Literary activities have been shown to be powerful tools for these instances, because they can be structured to include the entire class without

singling out certain individuals or groups. As an example, Harrist and Bradley (2003) conducted an intervention in which they engaged the class in reading, discussing, and acting out a story about peer rejection. In the context of this discussion, the children decided to adopt a new classroom rule that would not allow them to exclude anyone from playing together. Harrist and Bradley found that all status groups reported liking each other better after adopting their new rule.

In summary, the results of my study demonstrated that all of the status groups appeared to have a positive attitude toward reading, even if they found it difficult. Researchers might potentially take advantage of the positive attitudes by designing interventions that would incorporate literary activities as a means of improving children's academic and social functioning.

Implications for practice

The findings from this study suggest that children start to develop and differentiate their self-evaluations very early in the schooling process. Classroom teachers during the early grades thus have a great opportunity to help shape the progress and direction of their student's perceptions.

In the case of rejected children, it appears that some begin to develop declining perceptions of competence very soon after school entry. Teachers can make the transition easier for rejected children by creating an environment that minimizes the formation of social cliques while allowing for children to work

collaboratively (Farver, 1996; Snyder et al., 1997). Studies indicate that children use teacher comments as a primary means of forming their opinions about classmates, whether positive or negative (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Taylor, 1989).

In terms of neglected children, this study supports the claim that neglected children may prove to be good students, both socially and academically, although they may not evidence their skills as openly as popular children. It is important for teachers to recognize that some children may choose a lower level of social involvement with peers. Wentzel (1995) even suggested that neglected children may prefer to interact with teachers more than with classmates. It could be that teachers serve as important influences to make up for any lack of social interaction that neglected children experience, although this assertion warrants further study.

Appendix A

Graphical Representation of Status Categories

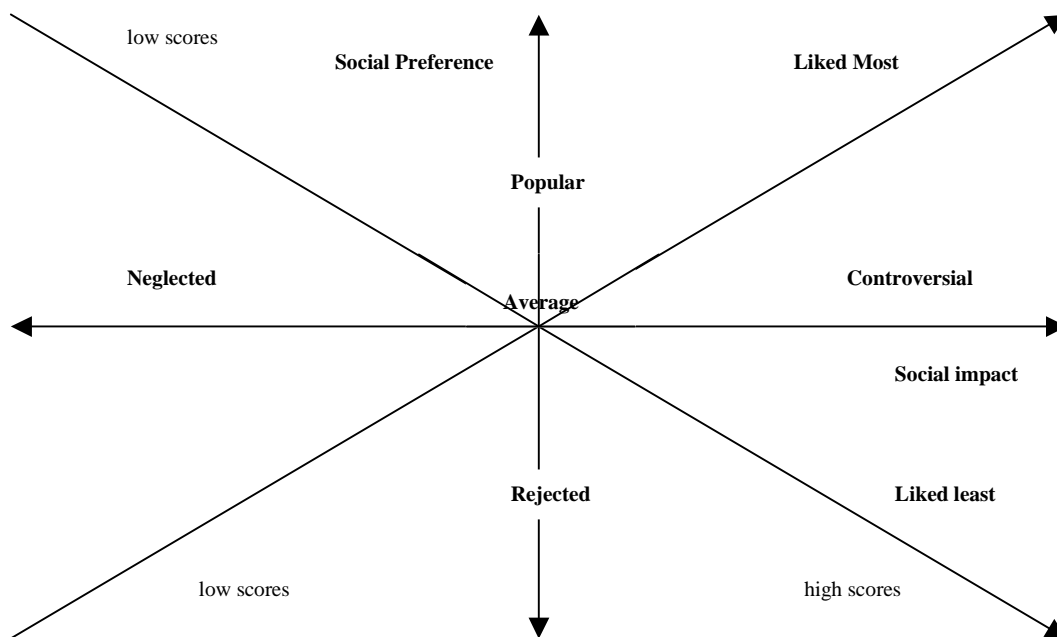


Figure 1. The relations between positive and negative social choice measures, the dimensions of social preference and social impact, and five types of social status.

Appendix B

Parental Consent Form

Relations Between Children's Social Status and Self-Perceptions of Both Academic and Social Competence

Your child is invited to participate in a study of how children's social relationships relate to their school achievement and thoughts about themselves. My name is Lorrie Powdrill, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation research. The children in your child's class were selected as participants in this study because they are in first grade. Your child will be one of approximately 100 participants chosen for this study. This study is being done in cooperation with the first grade teachers at your child's school.

I will talk with children who participate in the study individually, and ask them questions about their friends, their classroom behaviors, and their thoughts about themselves. This will take about 20 minutes and occur at school during a time convenient with your child's teacher. In addition, I will ask your child's teacher to rate his or her behavior and interest in school.

The benefits of participating in the study are as follows. First, your child's participation in the study will provide useful information about friendships, classroom behaviors, and perceived abilities. Furthermore, this information may contribute to future studies looking at ways to enhance children's friendships and achievement. From my observations, children have found the study to be both interesting and fun.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your child's grades nor your future relationship with your child's school nor the University of Texas at Austin. There are few foreseeable risks with this research, and it is anticipated that the benefits will outweigh the risks of the study. However, the measures given ask the participants to consider their social relationships with classmates. This may cause unpleasantness for some children. If this occurs, I will talk with them about their concerns. If the discomfort continues, parents will be notified. If any other discomfort arises during the study, you are welcome to contact me or my faculty supervisor. I can be reached by phone at 448-3301, and by mail at the University of Texas, Department of Educational Psychology, Austin, Texas, 78712. My faculty supervisor is Dr. Claire Ellen Weinstein, and she may be reached by phone at 471-1375. You may also withdraw your child from the study at any time without a penalty.

Any information obtained from this study will remain confidential. The teachers and principals will not be given information about the results of individual children. Likewise, any written results will discuss group findings, not information identifying

individual students. Please indicate by checking the appropriate line whether your child may participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above. You may keep the extra copy of this consent form for your records.

Yes, my child may participate in this study.

No, my child may not participate in this study.

Child's Name

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix C

Children's Assent Form

Relations Between Children's Social Status and Self-Perceptions of Both Academic and Social Competence

I agree to be in a study that is about how children's friendships go along with their behavior in school and thoughts about themselves. This study has been explained to my parent or guardian, and he or she has said that I can be in it.

If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked questions about my friendships, the things I do at school, and how I feel about myself. Information about what I say or do will not be given to anyone else.

When I sign my name to this page, it means that it was read to me and that I agree to be in this study. I understand that it is all right if I decide later not to be in the study or if I stop the study at any time.

Signature of Child

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix D

Child Version of the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children.

Harter, S., & Pike, R.G. (1981). *The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children*. Denver, Colorado: University of Denver.

Excerpt from child's version: Cognitive Competence

1. This girl/boy isn't very good at numbers. (Point to corresponding gender appropriate picture) This girl/boy is pretty good at numbers (Point to gender appropriate corresponding picture).

If child says she/he isn't very good at numbers, ask: Are you not too good at numbers or sort of good at numbers?

If child says she/he is pretty good at numbers, ask: Are you really good at numbers or pretty good at numbers?

Excerpt from child's version: Perceived Social Acceptance

2. This girl/boy has a lot of friends to play with. (Point to corresponding gender appropriate picture). This girl/boy doesn't have very many friends to play with. (Point to corresponding gender appropriate picture).

If child says she/he has a lot of friends to play with, ask: Do you have a whole lot of friends to play with, or do you have pretty many friends to play with?

If child says she/he doesn't have very many friends to play with, ask: Do you have hardly any friends, or a few friends?

Appendix E

Excerpt from Teacher Version: Harter Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for young children

Harter, S., & Pike, R. (1981). *The Teacher Version of the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for young children*. Denver, Colorado: University of Denver.

Directions: Please circle the number which corresponds with how true each statement is for this child.

- 1=Not true**
- 2=Sort of true**
- 3=Pretty true**
- 4=Really true**

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. This child is good at math. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. This child has friends to play with him/her. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. This child knows a lot in school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Other children share with this child. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Appendix F

Excerpt of Reading Self-Concept Scale

Chapman, J.W., & Tunmer, W.E. (1993). *Reading Self-Concept Scale*. Palmerstown North, New Zealand: Educational Research and Development Centre, Massey University.

- 1=No, never**
2=No, not usually
3=Understands sentence, but isn't sure
4=Yes, usually
5=Yes, always

Excerpts from Perceived Competence Scale Items

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Can you work out what a story means? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Are you good at remembering words? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Excerpts from Perceived Difficulty Scale Items

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. Is reading to the class hard for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Do the other kids in your class read harder words than you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Excerpts from Reading Attitude Scale Items

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. Do you feel good when you do reading work? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Do you like word games in class? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix G
Social Responsibility Scale

Wentzel, K. R. (1991c). *Social Responsibility Scale* (Unpublished scale).
College Park, Maryland: Department of Human Development, College of
Education, University of Maryland.

- 1=Rarely**
- 2=Hardly ever**
- 3=Sometimes**
- 4=Usually**
- 5=Always**

1. How often do you try to share what you've learned with your classmates?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How often do you try to help your classmates solve a problem once you've figured it out?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How often do you try to be nice to kids when something bad has happened to them?	1	2	3	4	5
4. How often do you try to help other kids when they have a problem?	1	2	3	4	5
5. How often do you try to cheer someone up when something else has gone wrong?	1	2	3	4	5
6. How often do you try to help your classmates learn new things?	1	2	3	4	5
7. How often do you try to keep promises that you've made to other kids?	1	2	3	4	5

Social Responsibility Scale continued

- 1=Rarely**
- 2=Hardly ever**
- 3=Sometimes**
- 4=Usually**
- 5=Always**

8. How often do you try to do what your teacher asks you to do?	1	2	3	4	5
9. How often do you try to be quiet when others are trying to study?	1	2	3	4	5
10. How often do you try to keep working even when you're tired?	1	2	3	4	5
11. How often do you try to keep working even when there's a whole lot of noise?	1	2	3	4	5
12. How often do you try to keep working even when other kids are goofing off?	1	2	3	4	5

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