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Correlates of Early Adolescent Friend Choice Order in a Colombian Sample: Interactions between Friend, Individual, and Contextual Prosocial Behavior and Aggression

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How early adolescents characterize their friendships has yet to be fully explored. The current report examines this issue from two different models of friend selection (the similarity model vs. the features model). Friendship choice order was examined as a function of prosocial and aggressive behavior of the friend. Using multi-level modeling, we tested whether these associations differed based on the individual's prosocial and aggressive behavior. Finally, contextual variables such as individualism and collectivism were also used to explain same-sex peer group differences. Data was collected from 420 early adolescents (M_{age} = 9.49 years, SD = .67; 124 male, 296 female) from six all-girls classes and six mixed-sex classes from Bogotá, Colombia. Interactions between friend and individual prosocial behavior and aggression were observed. In sum, the results provided support for both the similarity model and the features model of friendship and contextual differences were observed as a function of peer group levels of individualism and collectivism. The discussion highlights the novelty of this research question and methodological approach and offers potential future directions.

Keywords: Friendship, Aggression, Prosocial Behavior, Multi-level Modeling, Individualism and Collectivism

Multiple studies of peer relationships have shown the powerful effect that friendships have on children's development (Berndt, 1982; 2002). A recurrent topic in this area of research is the question of how children go about choosing certain peers to be their friends and how these friendships are characterized (Morry, 2005; 2007). Traditionally, there have been two models that explain this process of peer attraction and selection. The first one, the similarity model, states that individuals are attracted to others who are similar to them in different domains. The

second model, the features model, suggests that children are attracted towards individuals who have certain desirable features (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996; Byrne, 1971). The current study aims to compare and contrast these two models by testing what influences children's selection of peers as close friends (best friend or second best friend, etc.) compared to other more distal friends.

Researchers have identified several characteristics that are reliable predictors of friendship selection in early adolescence. According to Bukowski, Brendgen, and Vitaro (2007) two of the most consistent are aggression and prosocial behavior. These two variables are not only correlates of social acceptance among peers, but they have also been associated with the quality of friendships in children. In general, it has been found that children who are prosocial and engage in cooperative behaviors with their peers are more accepted and are popular, whereas children who display aggressive or disruptive behaviors have low acceptance and are usually rejected by their peers (Wentzel & Erdley, 1993).

Another basic premise in peer relations research is that beyond the nature of the interactions themselves, the contexts in which these interactions take place have an important effect on the psychosocial adjustment of children and ultimately, on their well-being (Schneider, 1989). According to cultural psychologists, individuals living in different contexts or societies are likely to have different experiences that lead to different psychological processes (Oyserman & Spike, 2008; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). In that sense, it is plausible that children who grow up in different contexts will choose their friends not only based on certain behavioral attributes (such aggression or prosociality), but will also be importantly influenced by their collective experiences in that context.

Taking these ideas together, the purpose of the present study is to explore whether differences in friend choice order are associated with personal attributes of these friends such as aggressiveness and prosociality. Moreover, the current study assesses the interplay between

friend characteristics, child characteristics, and the context in which the friendship occurs. Using multi-level modeling, we examine how the friends' behavior is associated with friend choice order, and how these associations differ as a function of the behaviors of the child. Finally, we determine whether contextual aspects of the peer group moderate any of these links.

Models of Selection and Attraction.

As previously mentioned, the similarity model states that liking is associated with similarity on one or more characteristics of the people involved in a relationship (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Griffitt, 1969). In other words, people who have similar characteristics tend to be attracted to each other. In addition, this model assumes that the more similar two individuals are, the stronger the attraction will be between them. According to Morry (2007), the similarity model is also based on the interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979). This theory predicts that social norms and previous interactions are the elements that "lead individuals to expect the partner to be similar to the self" (p.119). In that sense, social norms correspond to the ideas people have related to the formation and maintenance of friendships.

A widely accepted finding in the friendship literature is that children are similar to their friends in aspects such as abilities, attitudes, or values (Haselager, Hartup, van Lieshout, & Riksen-Walraven, 1998). A study conducted by Burleson (1994) illustrated these attraction similarities. Burleson found that classmates who had similar levels of social, cognitive and functional communication skills were more likely to be attracted to each other, compared with classmates who were less similar. In the same line of thought, various researchers have reported that children who are similar in aggression and withdrawn behavior are more likely to become friends compared with children who differ on these characteristics (Haselager et al., 1998; Mrug, Hoza, & Bukowski, 2004). Researchers have also reported concordances in self reports of sociability and aggression between children and their friends (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 1991). Moreover, according to Kupersmidt, De Rossier, and Patterson (1995), evidence shows

that the more similar two children are in terms of their academic, behavioral, and socio-demographic attributes, the more likely they are to become friends.

These similarities between friends are considered to be developmentally crucial. Their benefits include feelings of being understood, validation of personal views, increases in positive mood, decreases in the sensation of loneliness, and prevention of disagreements or conflicts (Morry, 2005).

In contrast to the similarity model, the features model states that children choose certain friends because they feel attracted to particular attributes of the peers. According to Bukowski, Sippola, and Newcomb (2000) this model implies that individual differences in attractiveness are due to variability in the characteristics of individuals. In this framework, friendship selection reflects particular needs of the individuals and a definition of what is desirable in a group of peers. Aboud and Mendelson (1996) state that children would feel attracted towards peers that have attractive characteristics such as social competence, self-control, and positive friendship qualities.

It is worth noting that research on peer attraction and selection using this model has produced some significant but disjointed findings. In their study, Brendt and Das (1987) found that children who had stable relationships with their friends throughout the school year (i.e.: those who were repeatedly selected as friends) were more prosocial and less aggressive compared to children who did not have stable friendships. Stocker and Dunn (1990) also reported that high sociability and low emotionality in children predicted closeness and low hostility of a best friend. Finally, Buhrmester (1990) reported that, among older children's companionship, ratings of intimacy and satisfaction with a friend were related to high ratings of interpersonal competence, self-esteem and sociability of that friend.

Personal Attributes and Context.

Researchers have identified different

measures of social competence that are consistent predictors of friendship selection (Cillessen, Jiang & West, 2005). According to Aboud and Mendelson (1996), children who are attractive, and socially and cognitively skilled tend to be more liked by their peers. In contrast, children who are aggressive, disruptive, and lack cognitive and social skills tend to be rejected. As a result, researchers have observed that frequently, children who are identified as prosocial or socially skilled are more likely be be selected as friends. Conversely, children who are aggressive tend to be rejected and have few or no friends (Pellegrini, Bartini & Brooks, 1999; Poulin, Cillesse, Hubbard, Coie, Dodge & Schwartz, 1997).

Finally, research suggests that context is a key element that may moderate the dynamics of peer interactions. Contexts can be conceptualized as different cultures in which varying social and psychological processes take place. Researchers have characterized these differences in cultures or social contexts by using two constructs: individualism and collectivism. These two concepts summarize differences in the relationship between individuals and societies and whether individuals or groups are seen as the basic social units (Oyserman & Spike, 2008). According to Oyserman and Spike (2008), in individualistic cultures, it is assumed that societies exist to promote the well-being of individuals. Persons are seen as separate from one another and as the basic units of functioning. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, the basic unit is the group and one can assume that collectivistic societies exist to promote the well-being of the group as a whole. In that sense, individuals must fit into groups; people are fundamentally connected and linked through relationships and group memberships.

Nevertheless, the examination of contexts is not without controversy. Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) illustrate that the use of individualism and collectivism has not always been an accurate reflection of the overall society or macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) level influences. They illustrate the large degree of variability which exists within societies in measures of individualism and collectivism.

Moreover, these variables have, as a result, been used to measure characteristics more salient to early adolescents, particularly the classroom context (Santo et al., 2013). Chang (2004) punctuated how classrooms differ in how powerful the classroom context can be in shaping individual behavior.

The contextual differences mentioned above point clearly to the need for using a multilevel approach to the study of the association between friend choice order, aggression, and prosocial behavior between children and their friends. Associations between these variables are expected to vary across contexts that differ in individualism and/or collectivism. Although in many studies assumptions about the characteristics of particular contexts, we chose to directly measure these characteristics. Specifically, direct assessments were made of the dimensions of individualism and collectivism at the classroom level.

The Present Study. Researchers have found strong links between friendship selection and personal attributes of children. The evidence presented above illustrates how researchers have conceptualized the process of choosing friends in early adolescence, and the impact that behavioral attributes and contexts have on this process. In that sense, and based on the extant literature, the main objective of this study is to examine how differences in adolescents' friend choice order are related to particular characteristics of their friends, such as aggressiveness and prosociality and subsequently related to the characteristics of the child. However, to our knowledge the specific influences of friendship choice order or ranking have yet to be explored. This question is explored in the present study using two theories of friend selection (the similarity model and the features model). The key aspect of the current project is that it aims to elucidate how both models may play a role in understanding children's friendships. Additionally, this study aims to explore if context can moderate the relationship between friendship rankings and prosocial behavior and aggression.

Three general hypotheses were explored. First, in line with the similarity model, it was expected that the association between friend choice order and the friend's characteristics (specifically, aggression and prosocial behavior) would depend on the child's level of aggression and prosocial behavior. In other words, we expected that children who were high in prosocial behavior would positively rank friends also high in prosocial behavior. Likewise, we expected that aggressive children would also positively rank aggressive friends. Second, we believed that support for the features model would be observed such that the association between friend choice order and the friend's characteristics (specifically, aggression and prosocial behavior) would vary depending on the characteristics of the peer group. Specifically, we expected that the positive relationship between friend choice order and friends' prosocial behavior will be stronger in collectivistic societies due to the focus on group functioning, and the negative relationship between friend choice order and friends' aggressive behavior would be weaker in individualistic societies due to the focus on individual goals.

Methods

Participants. The sample consisted of 420 early adolescents (M_{age} = 9.49 years, SD = .67; 124 male, 296 female) from six all-girls classes and six mixed-sex classes from Bogotá, Colombia. Permission was first obtained from the school principals. Following, active consent was required from the parents of the potential participants. Participants were then informed of the purpose and procedure of the study in their classrooms. Using this recruitment procedure, a participation rate of approximately 89% was obtained. Each participating child was "nested" into a peer group that included all of his/her same-sex classmates who were taking part in the study. These same-sex classroom-based peer groups served as the between-group units in the multilevel analysis.

Procedure and Measures. A questionnaire designed to be completed in a group administration fashion during a one-hour class session was used. Children participating in the study completed a Spanish version of the questionnaire originally designed to be

administered in English. The original English version was given to psychologists from Colombia, who assessed their meaning and relevance for Colombian children. The questionnaires were translated into Spanish by translators working in the fields of education and psychology, and then back-translated into English by a separate group of individuals to ensure that the meaning of items was retained in the translation.

Participants were administered a friendship nomination form which consisted of a list of every participating member of the class, organized into two columns, with girls on one side and boys on the other. The children were asked to identify their same-sex best friends by writing a number in the box beside the name of each child they considered a friend (1 = best friend, 2 = second best friend, 3 = third best friend, 4 = other friend). Children were asked to write only one 1, one 2 and one 3, however they

could write as many 4s as they wished, as long as they considered that person to be a friend. The participants were then asked to do the same for other-sex friends. The sociometric nominations were used to obtain information about friendship dyads. Only reciprocated same-sex friendships were used. On average, the participants nominated seven same-sex best friends ($M = 6.67$, $SD = 4.43$). The values were then reverse-coded and standardized within each child so that peers nominated as best friends received higher choice order scores whereas those nominated as additional friends received lower scores.

The children also completed an unlimited-choice peer-assessment questionnaire (Masten, Morison, & Pelligrini, 1985). Each participant was given a list of all the participating children in her/his class and a list of several characteristics and behaviors. Participants were asked to indicate which of their participating classmates fit each characteristic or behavior on the list. Among the
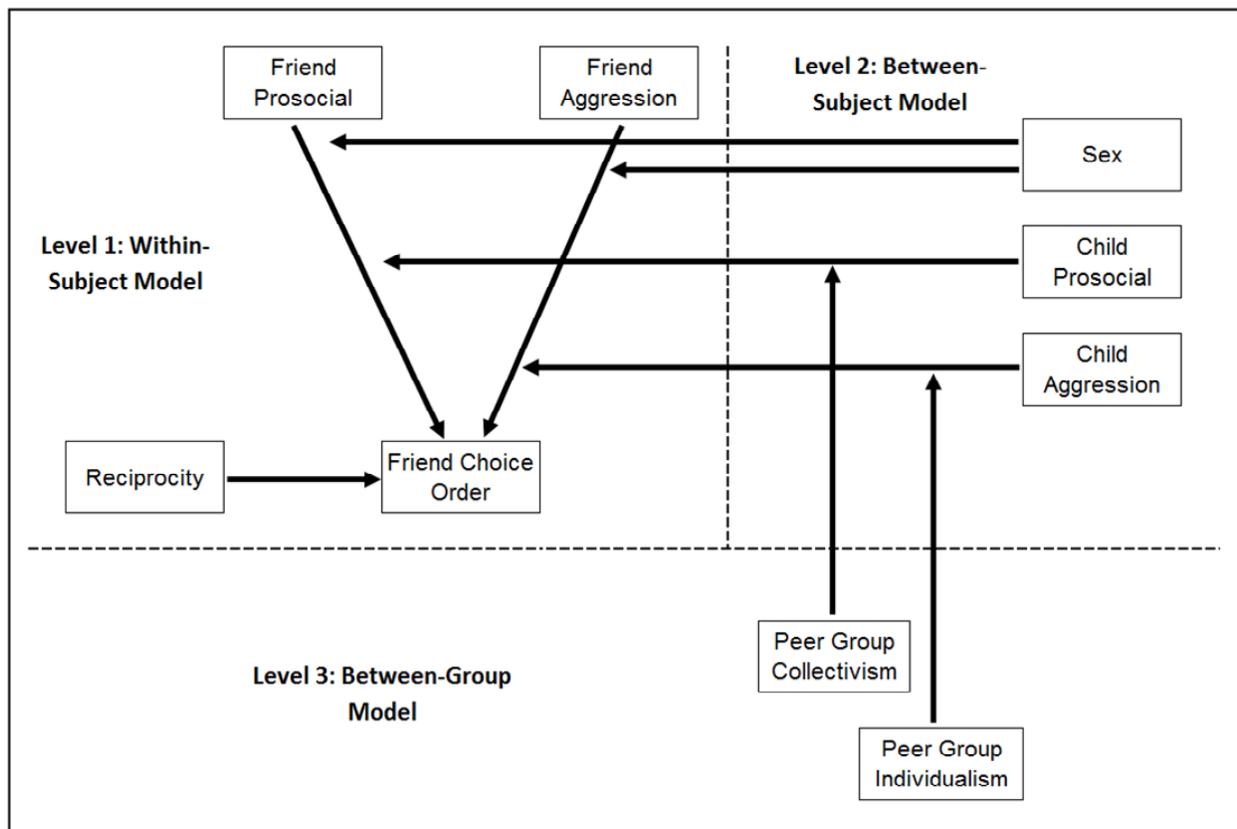

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the full hypothesis testing approach.

behaviors were six items to assess aggression (i.e., someone who hits or pushes people, gets involved in physical fights, tries to keep others out of the group, talks bad about others behind their backs to hurt them, calls others bad names, and makes fun of others to hurt them; Cronbach's alpha = .92). There were also five items to assess prosocial behavior (i.e., someone who plays fairly, makes sure that everyone is treated equally, realizes when other people are sad, cares about other people's feelings, and helps others when they need it; Cronbach's alpha = .91). Each child was given a score on each item indicating how often she/he had been chosen for it by her/his participating same-sex classroom peers. Only same-sex nominations were used to calculate the final scores of each measure.

To assess individualism and collectivism, various scales at the level of the self, the peer group, and the family were created. These scales assessed concepts such as reliance on others, conformity, and group success/collective achievement for collectivism and self-sufficiency/self-reliance, unique-ness/difference and individual achievement/personal success for individualism. These multiple items were averaged to create separate means for self, peer group, and family individualism and collectivism. To create an overall measure of collectivism, we used the average of the self, peer group, and family collectivism means (Cronbach's alpha = .60) and did the same to create an overall measure of individualism (Cronbach's alpha = .71). The individualism and collectivism scores for each child were then averaged for the peer-groups to be used as the between-group predictors.

Statistical Analyses. To analyze the data in such a way as to identify the variance in friendship choice order accounted for by each predictor at several levels, a three level multi-level modeling approach was used (HLM; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Specifically, friend nominations (level 1) were nested within each child (level 2) who were themselves nested in same-sex peer groups (level 3). Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the analytic approach used in the current study. To test for within-subject variability (i.e., at the level of the friend being rated; level 1), the outcome was friend choice order and the predictors were based on characteristics of the friend (the friend's peer-assessed prosocial behavior and aggression). Also included was whether or not the friendship was reciprocated (as a covariate).

At the level of the child (i.e., the person rating each friend; level 2), the variables used to account for between-subject variability included the child's peer-assessed prosocial behavior and aggression. Child's sex was also added to the level 2 model as a covariate. Meanwhile, to account for between-peer group variability (level 3), the peer groups' mean level of individualism and collectivism were added. All variables were grand mean centered and entered into the models as random (i.e., assumed to vary at levels 2 and 3) with the exception of the covariates.

Results

Level 1 Model (Within-Subject Analyses). A correlation matrix for the within-subject variables is provided in Table 1. The first variable entered into the model was friendship reciprocity (i.e., the friend choice order that child received from the friend) as a covariate. Not surprisingly, children were more likely to ascribe higher choice order to friends that ranked them similarly high (b = .37, SE = .02, $t_{(2687)}$ = 17.86, p < .05). This variable explained 16.17% of the within-subject variability. Friend prosocial behavior also had a significant positive effect (b = .15, SE = .02, $t_{(17)}$ = 6.32, p < .05) explaining 4.65% of the remaining within-subject variance. Contrary to our initial predictions, aggressive behavior did not have a statistically significant main effect (b = .02, SE = .01, $t_{(13)}$ = 1.46, p > .05) explaining only .25% of the remaining within-subject variance. Regardless, tests of between-subject and between-group variability for both these effects were significant, signifying that individuals and same-sex peer groups differed in these associations. The final level 1 model reduced prediction error by a total of 20.26%, reflecting a significant improvement to the model ($\Delta\chi^2_{(12)}$ = 85.07, p < .05). In sum, the level 1 analyses provide partial support for the features model. Specifically, the positive association between prosocial behavior and friendship choice

Table 1.
Correlation matrix for the within-subject variables.

	Friendship Choice Order	Reciprocated Friendship	Friend Prosocial Behavior	Friend Aggression Behavior
Friendship Choice Order	-	.40*	.13*	-.02
Reciprocated Friendship		-	-.06*	.02
Friend Prosocial Behavior			-	-.14*
Friend Aggression Behavior				-

* significant at $p < .05$

order signifies that prosocial behavior is a feature "prized" among friends of early adolescents.

Level 2 Model (Between-Subject Analyses). Then, the child's prosocial behavior and aggression scores were added to the model as potential moderators of the associations at the level of the friend, using the child's gender as a covariate. It is worth noting that a weak, yet significant, sex effect was observed on the friend's prosocial behavior slope; for boys the association between the friend's prosocial behavior and the friendship choice order was slightly stronger. Stated another way, the positive effect of the friend's prosocial behavior on friend choice order was somewhat stronger among boys. As expected, the association of the friend's prosocial behavior and friend ranking was stronger among children who were themselves high in prosocial behavior ($b = .04$, SE $= .02$, $t_{(17)} = 2.62$, $p < .05$). This effect accounted for a 1.23% reduction in the proportion of prediction error on the slope of friend's prosocial behavior (Figure 2) reflecting a significant improvement to the model ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 22.19$, $p < .05$). To explain this interaction, the positive effect of the friend's prosocial behavior on friend choice order was stronger among children who were more prosocial themselves.

In addition, there was also a significant effect

of the child's aggression on the friend's aggression slope ($b = .03$, SE $= .01$, $t_{(17)} = 2.99$, $p < .05$). Specifically, among children high in aggression, the friend's aggression was positively associated with friend choice order. The association was weakly negative among children low in aggression (Figure 2). This effect reduced the between-subject prediction error on the slope of friend's aggressive behavior by 22.89%, reflecting a significant improvement to the model ($\Delta\chi^2_{(2)} = 11.48$, $p < .05$). In sum, the level 2 analyses provide support for the similarity model. Specifically, the positive association between prosocial behavior and friendship choice order was stronger among children high in prosocial behavior themselves. On the other hand, children who were similar to their friends in aggression showed a stronger association between the friends' aggressive behavior and friend choice order.

Level 3 Model (Between-Peer Group Analyses). Lastly, the moderating effect of the peer groups' individualism and collectivism was explored. Peer group collectivism significantly influenced the slope of the child's prosocial behavior ($b = .12$, SE $= .05$, $t_{(13)} = 2.32$, $p < .05$). This effect reduced the between-class prediction error in the slope between child's prosocial behavior and friendship choice by 45.16% (Figure 3), significantly improving the model
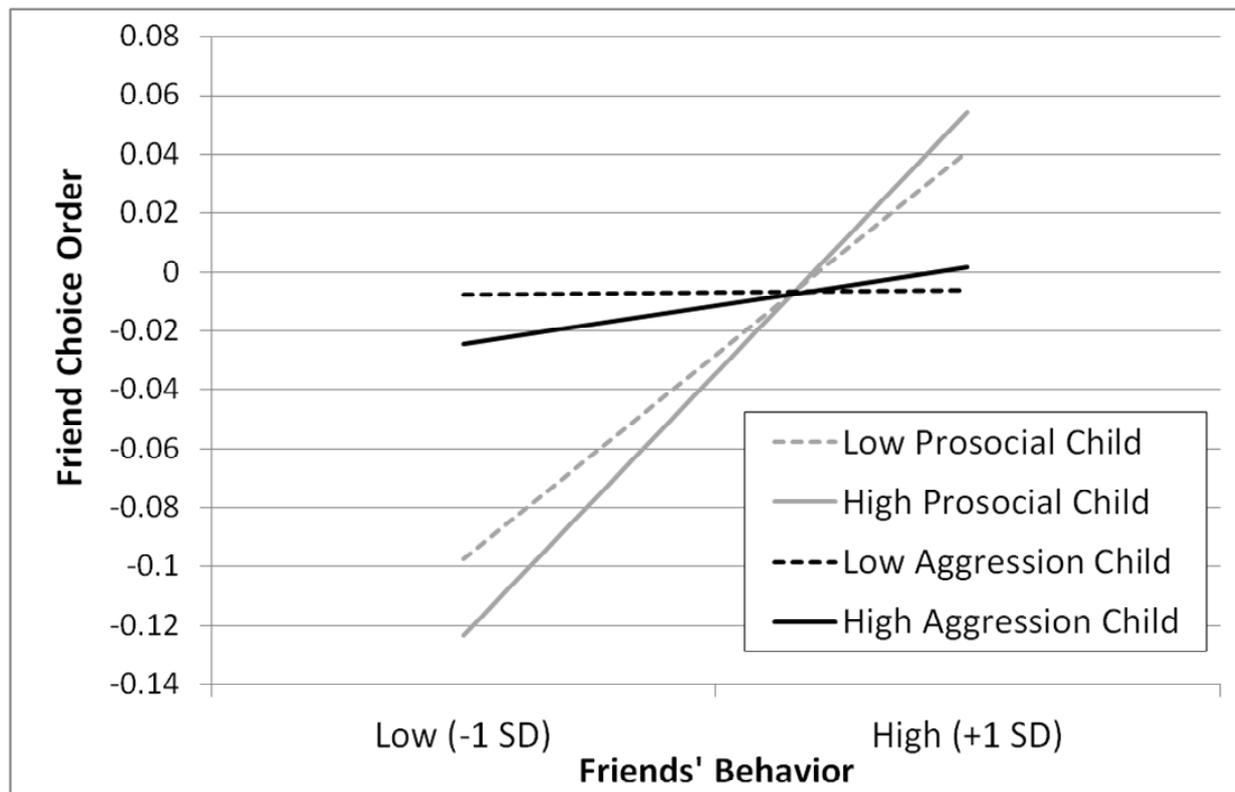
Figure 2. The association between friend choice order and friends' behavior as a function of children's prosocial behavior and aggression.

$(\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.01, p < .05)$. Specifically, when classes were high in collectivism and the child was high in prosocial behavior, the association between the friend's prosocial behavior and friendship choice order was strongest. There was no observable effect of the peer groups' individualism on the aggression slopes (nor the collectivism slopes). As such, the between-group results also provide support for the features model in that there were significant differences in friend choice order as a function of the characteristics of the peer group suggesting that the peer group context influences the attractive features.

Discussion

The current study was conducted to expand on several issues pertinent to the understanding of a widely studied question in the social developmental literature: the mechanisms by which children or early adolescents choose

particular friends. Specifically, this study examined how differences in children's ranking of their friends are related to individual characteristics of both the child and the friend such as aggression and prosocial behavior. The analysis conducted also explored the role of context as a moderator of the relationships mentioned above. This study highlights the need to incorporate friend, child, and group characteristics in a holistic fashion using multi-level modelling. In general, this study demonstrated that friend, child, and group characteristics all play a role in early adolescents' determination of who are their best friends, compared to who are other more distal friends.

As expected, the first covariate added to the model was significant, that friend choice order would be positively associated with reciprocated friend choice. This finding is fairly consistent with what has been found in previous research.
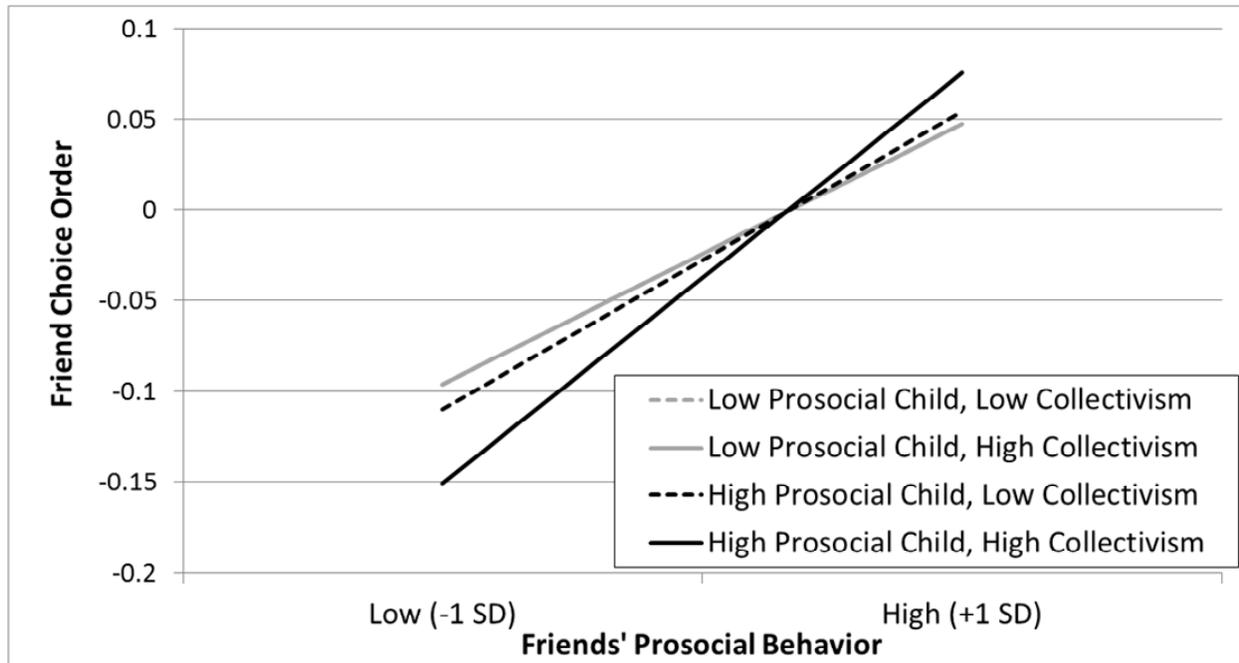
Figure 3. The association between friend choice order and friends' prosocial behavior as a function of child's and the peer group's collectivism.

Children tend to nominate peers that they like as their friends, and these friends also tend to nominate that child as their friends in turn (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996). Next, it was expected that friendship selection would be associated with characteristics of the friend, specifically, aggression and prosocial behavior. The current study showed a significant positive effect for prosocial behavior on friendship order ranking. Prosocial behavior has been found to be a consistent predictor of peer acceptance and liking in the literature. For instance, in a study conducted by Warden and Mackinnon (2003) which investigated the links between children's prosocial behavior, sociometric status, and empathy for bullies, victims, and friends, results showed that children who were highly prosocial had more positive and satisfying peer relations in general. In that sense, the findings of these studies related to prosocial behavior echo the association shown in the literature with friendship status.

On the other hand, the lack of a significant main effect for aggression might be partly explained by the fact that this study did not focus on peer acceptance or liking. Instead, the focus

was on the likelihood of nominating a specific peer as a "first choice" friend compared to other friends. Many studies have shown a robust association between aggression and peer rejection (e.g., Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). In that sense, it is possible that a peer's aggressive behavior and the subsequent rejection by peers, might have already determined that a child would not choose this peer as a friend in the first place. This could be minimizing the likelihood of observing a main effect of aggression in friendship choice order. To test this assertion, a longitudinal project would be necessary to examine the role of a friend's aggression in friend choice order above and beyond its effects on liking and/or choosing that person to be a friend.

The next hypothesis tested was that the association between friend choice order and the friends' characteristics would vary as a function of the child's characteristics. In other words, we expected that children who were high in prosocial behavior would choose friends who were also high in prosocial behavior. Likewise, we expected that aggressive children would also choose aggressive peers as friends. The current

study supported the moderating influence of child characteristics on the association of friend prosocial behavior and friend choice order. Similar to our expectations, friendship choice order was more strongly influenced by friends' prosocial behavior for children who were themselves high in prosocial behavior, and friendship choice order was more strongly influenced by friends' aggressive behavior for children who were themselves high in aggressive behavior.

Taken together, these findings provide support for the similarity model. In particular, the results supporting the similarity–attraction hypothesis indicate that, among high prosocial children, a positive relationship was found with their friends' prosocial behavior (Figure 2). In general, the friendship similarity literature addresses the idea that children are expected to be similar to their friends in abilities, attitudes and life styles (Haselager, Hartup, van Lieshout, & Riksen-Walraven, 1998). As previously mentioned, friendship similarities have been found in variables such as sociability and aggression (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 1991).

One might even argue that these results provide weak support for the features model such that for those children who were low in prosocial behavior, there was also a positive relationship between friendship order ranking and their friends' prosocial behavior. From the perspective of the features model, friendship selection is a reflection of the particular needs of the individuals or a definition of what is desirable in a group (Aboud & Mendelson, 1996). In these studies, results showed that children who were not high in prosocial behavior chose peers that had an attractive characteristic: prosocial abilities. However, more convincing support for the features model was provided by the between-group comparisons.

We expected that the characteristics of the context in which children interact would influence friend choice order. In particular, we also had the expectation that collectivism would moderate the association between friendship ranking and prosocial behavior, whereas

individualism would influence the association between friendship ranking and friend aggressive behavior. This hypothesis was only partially supported in that only collectivism showed a significant influence. Specifically, it moderated the association between friend prosocial behavior and friendship choice order. That is, the prosocial behavior of the friend was a stronger predictor of friend choice order among more prosocial children in more collectivistic groups. This finding is concordant with the premises of the collectivism construct. According to Oyserman and Spike (2008), in groups in which collectivism predominates, people are not seen as separate entities, and the main purpose of the person is to promote the well-being of each group. In that sense, for highly prosocial children in a group that values collectivism, the degree of prosocial behavior that one's peers engage in would be a salient factor in determining friend choice order.

Limitations. The current study relied primarily on peer assessments of child behavior. One could argue that using self-report measures of aggression and prosocial behavior would yield a different set of results. However, the use of self-reports of aggression was discouraged due to relatively consistent findings in the literature regarding biases of social desirability. As the current study aims to elucidate the effects of contexts on the associations between friendship selection and aggressive and prosocial behavior, biases inherent to self-report measures would likely have made the associations impossible to interpret. Moreover, evidence exists to demonstrate that peer reports of aggression are a reliable indicator of the observed levels of such behavior (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Finally, concerning self-report measures, evidence also suggests that peer reports and self-reports on a combination of measures, while different, remain comparable (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001).

Moreover, the study in the current report focused primarily on identifying the variables associated with friend choice order without also accounting for how the variables concurrently influence friendship selection. To explain, the factors that would serve to account for differences in friend choice order are already at

play when accounting for differences in friend selection. Because friendship selection must occur before being able to rank one's friends, it would be of value to account for the correlates of friendship selection concurrently. Although the future directions below will attempt to address this oversight, it is important to note that the factors associated with friendship selection are already reasonably well established. Meanwhile, the variables associated with how children rank their best friends as opposed to more peripheral friends has received very little attention. In fact, to our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the simultaneous peer, child, and group influences on friendship choice order.

Future Directions. Although this study has attempted and hopefully succeeded in answering a number of questions concerning how characteristics of children, their friends, and their peer group shape the nature of friendships, a number of additional questions remain. Future research in this area should strive to simultaneously account for the variables which influence initial friendship selection while examining how friend choice order is influenced.

Moreover, future studies should examine other variables associated with friendship selection, such as leadership. In addition, although the current study focused on using an omnibus measure of aggression and prosocial behavior, future research may examine the relevant components of these constructs separately. For example, instead of looking at a general index of aggression, measures of reactive, proactive, physical, verbal, or relational aggression may be used.

Finally, this area of research would be enriched by examining the associations detailed above in other contexts, such as all-boy schools compared to all-girl schools, due to evidence suggesting that peer processes can differ as a function of the sex-composition of the peer group (Velásquez, Santo, Saldarriaga, Lopez, & Bukowski, 2010). Likewise, comparing the findings in other cultural samples would be fruitful. Lastly, although individualism and collectivism were used as measures of the peer-group contexts in the current study, other, more

nuanced, indicators which may better explain the between-group differences in the data (e.g., classroom climate) may be measured.

In summary, this study extended and clarified previous studies of how children go about choosing certain peers to be their closest friends, and how these friendships are characterized (Morry, 2005; Morry, 2007). Although there have been two models that have served to explain the processes of peer selection and attraction, the current studies supported the similarity-attraction hypothesis for two predictors used in the past to examine friendship selection: aggression and prosocial behavior. Using multi-level modeling, we demonstrated partial support for both models of friendships selection and how these associations differed as a function of the behaviors of the peer, the child, and the peer group.

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