Associations Among Parent-Child Relationship, Child Emotion, and Child Friendship During Middle Childhood

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Abstract
NICHD SECCYD data were used to test a latent variable model of parent-child relationship quality, child internalizing emotion, and child friendship quality from 3rd to 5th grades. Predictive pathways were found from parent-child relationship to friendship quality and from friendship quality to internalizing emotion. These findings align with previous research and extend our understanding of the developmental influences among these constructs over time.

Introduction
• Previous research has found an association between the quality of the parent-child relationship and the quality of the child's peer relationships (McElwain et al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2001).
• Peer relationships become increasingly important during middle childhood and best friendships, in particular, support children's adjustment (Hodges et al., 1999).
• Healthy emotion management is a significant developmental achievement of childhood, but impaired emotion self-regulation may be manifested in anxiety or depression and affect peer relationships.
• A longitudinal design enables the developmental influences among parent-child relationship, child internalizing emotion, and child friendship quality to be examined over time.

Hypotheses
• The constructs of parent-child relationship quality (PCR), child internalizing emotion (CIE), and child friendship quality (CFQ) will each be stable during middle childhood.
• The three constructs will be associated within and across time points.
• Higher parent-child relationship quality will predict fewer child emotion difficulties and higher friendship quality over time.
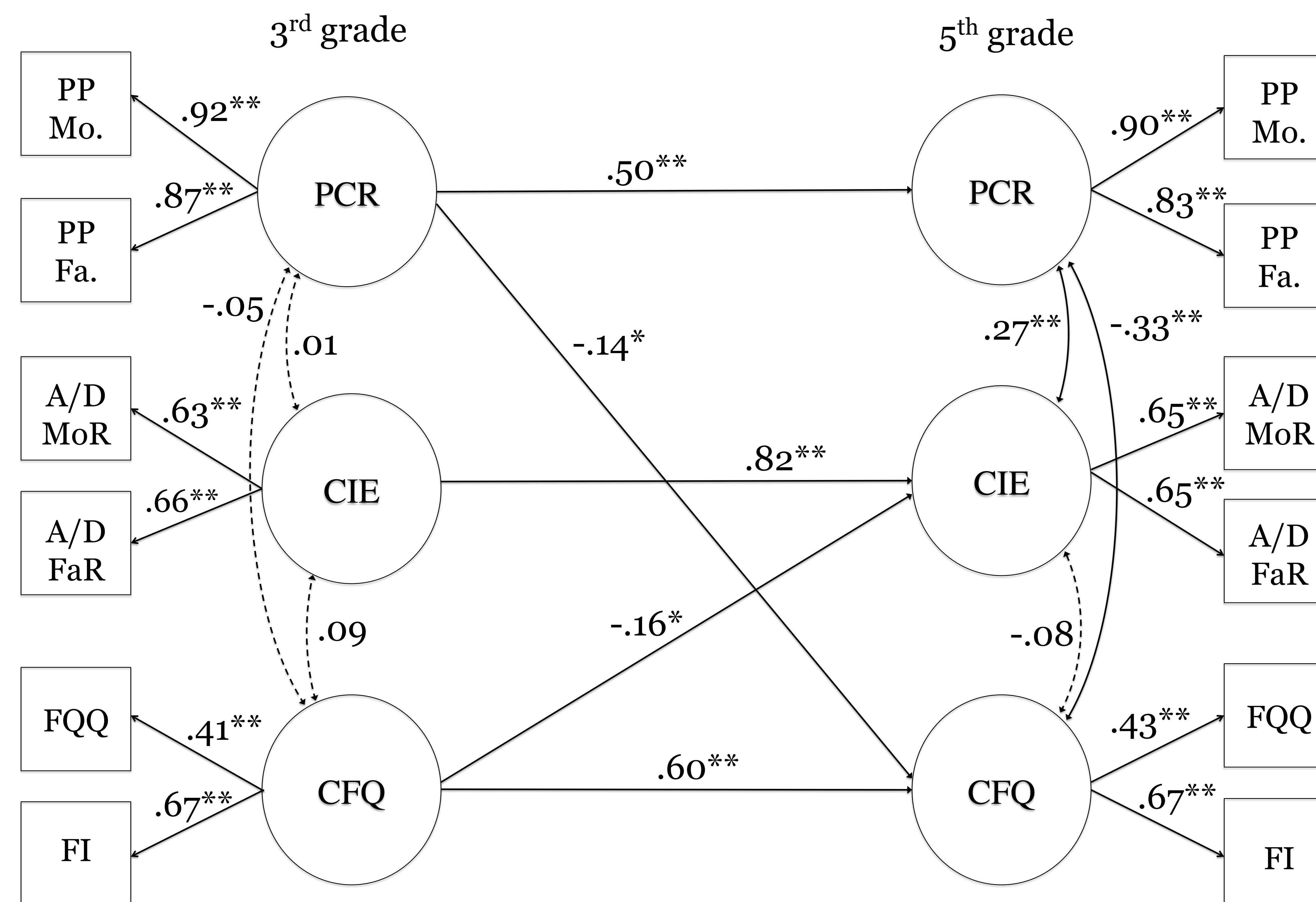

Figure 1. Final model.
CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06; standardized. *p < .01. **p < .001.

Methods
Participants. A subsample of 982 of the 1364 families recruited into the NICHD SECCYD were used (51% boys).
Procedure. Data were collected from mothers, fathers, and children in the lab at 3rd and 5th grades.
Measures. Children completed the Relatedness Questionnaire Psychological Proximity subscale (PP) separately for mothers and fathers to capture the quality of the relationship with each (quality is reverse scored). Mothers and fathers each completed the Child Behavior Checklist Anxiety/Depression subscale (A/D) to capture the child's internalizing emotion difficulties. Children completed the Friendship Quality Questionnaire (FQQ) to capture the quality of their best friendship. The Friendship Interview (FI) was conducted by an experimenter who asked children a series of questions about the quality of their best friendship. Socioeconomic status (SES) was assessed via the family's income-to-needs ratio in 3rd grade.
Data analysis. Latent factors were constructed for PCR, CIE, and CFQ. For each latent variable the two indicators were treated as parallel with each manifest variable fixed to one. Child gender and family SES were controlled for in all analyses.

Results
• Mplus 6 was used to conduct a latent variable autoregressive structural equation model. All factor loadings were statistically significant with standardized loadings ranging from .41 to .92.
• The fit indices indicate that the final model provided an acceptable fit to the data (CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06, SRMR=.07).
• All autoregressive paths were significant.
• Bivariate associations among constructs at 3rd grade were not significant, while PCR correlated significantly with CIE and CFQ at 5th grade.
• Higher quality PCR at 3rd grade significantly predicted higher CFQ at 5th after controlling for gender, SES, and earlier construct scores.
• Higher CFQ at 3rd grade significantly predicted lower CIE at 5th grade after controlling for gender, SES, and earlier construct scores.

Discussion
• Parent-child relationship quality at 3rd grade was not associated with child emotion or friendship quality at that time point. Higher quality **parent-child relationship led to higher quality child friendship over time** and within time correlations among constructs emerged at 5th grade.
• Understanding of the associations between parent-child and child peer relationships is deepened with this longitudinal perspective.
• **Greater friendship quality led to fewer internalizing emotion problems over time**, supporting findings regarding the significance of friendship for healthy adjustment (Burgess et al., 2006).
• The predictive pathways indicate middle childhood may be **an important window for the developmental organization** of children's internalizing emotion and relationships with parents and peers.

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