

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In middle childhood both integration into the peer network and friendship become developmental tasks (e.g., Havighurst, 1972). Compared to earlier ages children participate in more social interaction with peers and, generally, the size of the peer group increases (Higgins & Parsons, 1983). Children are brought into contact with a more diverse set of peers, although they are mostly similar to them in age (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998).

Integration into the peer network and peer group acceptance, and on the opposite pole of peer group acceptance, peer rejection represent group-related concepts while friendship represents a dyadic concept, and these concepts are rather different, although they are not completely independent from each other (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Solving these developmental tasks is critical for children's development (Hartup, 1992b, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss, 1980). It has been suggested that peer group acceptance represents the basis for children's subsequent opportunities to establish friendships (Bukowski et al., 1996) because the developmental task of group integration emerges earlier than the developmental task of friendships (cf., Sullivan, 1954). Hence, being accepted by ones peers is assumed to represent a developmental context for children's attempts to establish satisfying friendship relationships.

Research on peer relationships shows that subgroups of children who differ in the degree of success of solving the developmentally earlier task of peer group integration differ in their experiences when trying to establish friendships. Peer group integration is typically assessed by classifying children as belonging to various sociometric status groups (e.g., Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). The focus of the present study is on the most stable classifications of sociometric status: Popular, average and rejected children. Both popular and average children are well-liked by their peers, although for popular children this is more extremely the case. In contrast, rejected children are extremely disliked by their peers. Research on these sociometric groups has shown that they are characterized by differences in behaviors, social cognitions, and interpretations of their social experiences (e.g., Zakriski, Jacobs, & Coie, 1997). Moreover, these sociometric groups are confronted with differences in opportunities and constraints when trying to establish friendships (e.g., Bukowski et al., 1996). As a

consequence of these differences, the likelihood of participating in dyadic and mutual friendship relationships differs across sociometric groups. However, not all children who are rejected by their peers are friendless and not all children who are well-integrated into the peer group participate in dyadic and mutual friendships (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2000). Thus, each sociometric group is comprised of a group of children who participate in mutual friendships and group of children who does not participate in friendships.

In addition to friendship participation, friendship quality represents an important aspect of friendships. Friendship quality is comprised of positive (e.g., intimacy) and negative (e.g., conflict) features of friendship interactions. The present study investigates children's own views of both intimacy and conflict as well as their friends' views of these qualitative aspects of friendship. Importantly, previous research has shown that even friendless children report about qualitative features of their unilateral friendships, although their perceptions of friendship quality is lower compared to children whose friendship nominations are not reciprocated by the nominated friends (e.g., Krappmann, Oswald, Weiss, & Uhlendorff, 1993).

In general, perceived control refers to a whole set of beliefs about how effective the self can be in producing desired and preventing undesired outcomes. Accordingly, the present study employs a multi-dimensional conceptualization of perceived control based on action theory (e.g., Skinner, 1995; 1996; 1999; Skinner et al., 1988) as a theoretical framework. This model addresses both functional and developmental aspects of perceived control across the life span. A major assumption of the model is that the effects of perceived control on outcomes such as friendships are mediated by goal-directed behaviors. To date there is no research addressing the question whether different dimensions of perceived control are differentially related to different types of goal-directed behaviors in the domain of friendship. The present study addresses this question employing three behavioral strategies which children use when confronted with problems in their friendships. Based on the literature of children's coping Direct Action, Seeking Help, and Action Omission are identified to represent important behavioral strategies when confronted with friendship problems.

On the basis of an integration of these empirical findings regarding the investigated sociometric groups of friended and friendless children and theoretical assumptions of the employed action-theory model of perceived control specific hypotheses regarding perceived control, behavioral strategies, and friendship outcomes are derived.

### A Multi-dimensional Model of Perceived Control Based On Action Theory as a Theoretical Framework

The present study employs a multi-dimensional conceptualization of perceived control based on action theory (e.g., Skinner, 1995; 1996; 1999; Skinner et al., 1988) as a theoretical framework. In general, perceived control represents the children's interpretations of objective control conditions for action. Actions are defined as goal-directed and intentional behaviors consisting of a number of sequential components that are carried out in social and cultural contexts (Skinner, 1999; Skinner et al., 1988b; see also Skinner & Chapman, 1984). Objective control conditions refer to the amount of control actually available in a situation for successful goal-pursuit. Both the *contingencies* provided by the social and physical world and the *competence* of the children to operate them determine the objective control conditions for goal-directed behaviors.

The theory defines means-ends beliefs as children's interpretations of contingency and agency beliefs as children's interpretations of their competence to operate them. Hence, means-ends beliefs represent the child's perceptions whether an outcome is contingent on a specific means. Agency beliefs represent the child's perceptions of his or her access to or possession of an outcome-relevant means; that is, the child's perceptions of his or her competence. Outcome-relevant means can be self-related (i.e., internal) such as effort and external such as luck and help provided by powerful others. Finally, the theory proposes global perceptions of control which make no reference to specific action means as a third type of beliefs about control. In the present study perceptions of Goal Difficulty are employed as a global perception of control which mainly reflects children's views of contingencies in the domain of friendship.

**A: Does Children's Sociometric Status Moderate the Relationships among Perceived Control, Action Strategies, and Friendship Outcomes (i.e., Self-rated and Friend-rated Friendship Quality, and Number of Mutual Friends)?**

As a major goal the present dissertation examines the influence of peer group acceptance or sociometric status on mean levels and relationships of perceived control, action strategies, and friendship outcomes. I use a multi-dimensional control belief scale for friendship (Multi-dimensional Control, Agency, and Means-ends beliefs Inventory for Friendship; Multi-CAM, Little & Wanner, 1997) which is based on the multi-dimensional conceptualization of perceived control based on action theory. Based on findings of children's spontaneous attributions of outcomes in peer relationships (Sobol & Earn, 1985), the present study investigates beliefs about the following action means: Personal attributes, effort, ability, luck, and teachers and parents as powerful others.

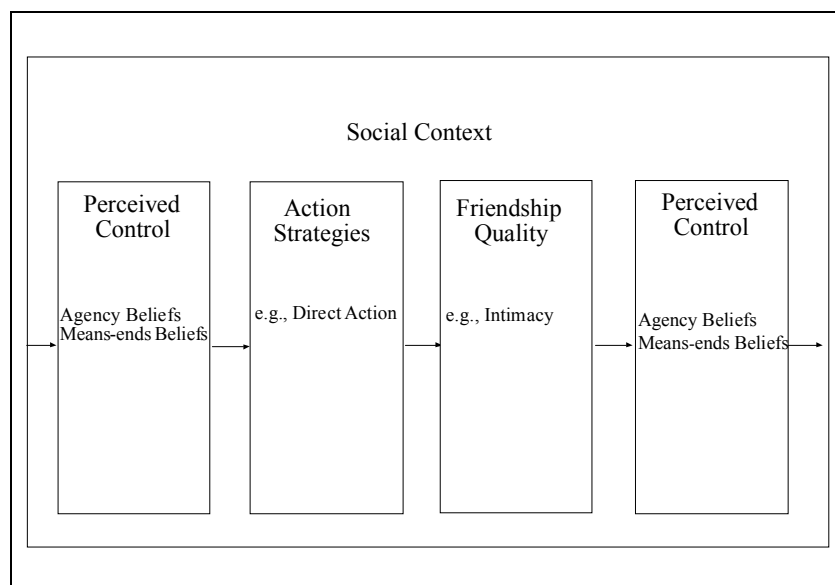
Figure 1 shows the working model of the present dissertation which is based on the the following outlined assumptions. The action theory of psychological control posits that the effects of perceived control (i.e., agency and means-ends beliefs, and Goal Difficulty) on outcomes such as friendship relationships are mediated by goal-directed behaviors. In the present study, children's self-reported action strategies to cope with difficulties in friendship relationships are assumed to result in friendship outcomes such as friendship quality. In turn, children's evaluation of friendship outcomes are posited to feed back on their perceived control about friendship. Thus, the relationships of perceived control, action strategies, and friendship outcomes are assumed to be reciprocal. Importantly, the assessment of children's action strategies to cope with difficulties in friendship relationships is in line with the assumption that perceived control is most important when difficulties arise during goal pursuit (e.g., Bandura, 1982; 1997; Carver & Scheier, 1998).

On the basis of a multi-dimensional model of children's coping in the domain of friendship (Lopez & Little, 1996) and research findings of children's coping strategies, the action strategies *Direct Action*, *Seeking Help*, *Avoidance Behaviors*, and *Doing Nothing* are identified to represent important strategies children employ when confronted with difficulties in friendships. Based on previous findings indicating that Behavioral Avoidance and Doing

Nothing represent related strategies to cope with problems in peer relationships (Little et al., 2001; Losoya et al., 1998), in preparatory analyses, I will examine whether these two action strategies can be invariantly represented as a higher-order construct representing the strategy *Action Omission* across the investigated age range.

Figure 1

*Working Model: Reciprocal Relationships among Perceived Control, Action Strategies, and Friendship Outcomes*



In line with assumptions of the action theory of psychological control, researchers (Dodge & Feldman, 1990; Rubin & Krasnor, 1986; Spivack & Shure, 1982) have posited that active problem solving attempts (i.e., Direct Action) are more adaptive in peer relationships than passive behaviors (i.e., Action Omission). Moreover, on the basis of various theories in the fields of coping and peer relationships and research on relationships of adult intervention and peer relationships, I hypothesize that seeking out adults' help also may be a maladaptive action strategy in the domain of friendship. Hence, I hypothesize that Direct Action is positively related to friendship outcomes while both Action Omission and Seeking Help are negatively related to friendship outcomes.

Preparatory analyses: Development of the correlational structure of dimensions of perceived control and their functioning in the domain of friendship. The action-theory of psychological control posits that the relationships of agency and means-ends beliefs, action

strategies, and friendship outcomes are affected by children's development. Because research on the development of perceived control about friendship is scarce, as preparatory analyses, I cross-sectionally examine the development of perceived control about friendship across grades 3 to 6. During middle childhood children's understanding that powerful others and luck are potentially uncontrollable represents a major development (Flammer, 1990; Skinner, 1991, 1995; Skinner et al., 1998; Weisz, 1983). This developmental change in children's understanding of these action means is reflected in children's means-ends beliefs. Empirical findings show that in the friendship domain children's means-ends beliefs about Powerful Others (i.e., Parents) and Luck show decreases in mean levels and are less highly correlated with self-related (i.e., Effort and Personal Attributes) belief dimensions at the end of the investigated age range (grades 3 - 6) (Skinner 1990b). The preparatory analyses explore whether these differences in the mean-levels and intercorrelations found in the means-ends beliefs (e.g., Skinner, 1990b) are also found in the agency belief system. The assumption, that agency and means-ends beliefs may show similar developmental differences is based on previous findings indicating that both types of beliefs are highly correlated; children of grades 3 - 5 differentiate only to a low degree among agency and means-ends beliefs (Wanner, 1995). Alternatively, it could be that the lack of developmental differences in the agency beliefs found in the academic domain generalizes into the friendship domain. However, based on assumptions of the action theory of control (e.g., Skinner, 1995), I hypothesize that with age and accumulating failure experiences children increasingly differentiate among agency and means-ends beliefs (i.e., the correlations of agency and means-ends beliefs decrease).

The action theory of psychological control posits that the developmental increases in differentiation between (a) agency and means-ends beliefs and (b) beliefs about external and self-related causes are related to their functioning. In line with theoretical assumptions of locus of control (Rotter, 1966), when children understand that external means such as Luck and Help provided by Powerful Others are less controllable than self-related means such as Effort, high means-ends beliefs about external means indicate low feelings of control. Thus, at older ages external means-ends beliefs are hypothesized to be negatively related to effort investments (i.e., Direct Action) and friendship outcomes. Moreover, at older ages external

means-ends beliefs are hypothesized to be positively related to Action Omission and Seeking Help. In contrast, at earlier ages external means-ends beliefs are hypothesized to evince similar relationships with Direct Action and friendship outcomes as external agency beliefs. All dimensions of agency beliefs and self-related means-ends beliefs are hypothesized to be positively related to Direct Action and friendship outcomes, although agency beliefs about external means may evince lower relationships than beliefs about self-related means. In contrast, agency beliefs are hypothesized to be negatively related to Action Omission and Seeking Help. Moreover, I hypothesize that with increasing age the relationships among agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs), action strategies, and friendship outcomes may increase because with age and accumulating experiences, children's perceived control about friendship may become more realistic.

Furthermore, as preparatory analyses, I examine whether both agency and means-ends beliefs can be invariantly represented by higher-order structures across the investigated age range. Specifically, I assume that beliefs about the means Effort, Ability, and Personal Attributes can be invariantly represented as higher-order constructs (i.e., agency and means-ends beliefs about Self) across the investigated grade levels. Moreover, I assume that beliefs about Parents and Teachers as Powerful Others can be invariantly represented as a higher-order construct (i.e., agency and means-ends beliefs about Adults as Powerful Others).

Sociometric status is a proxy variable of objective control conditions. Figure 1 also depicts the assumption of action theory that action happens in context (e.g., Boesch, 1976). Based on an integration of empirical findings in the domain of peer relationships and assumptions of the action theory of psychological control, I propose that children's sociometric status is a proxy variable of objective control conditions. Specifically, sociometric status is related to children's competence and contingencies provided by the peers. Research has shown that rejected children manifest lower social competencies than accepted children (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994). Moreover, due to reputational biases, that the peers tend to interpret rejected children's action more negative than average children's actions while they interpret popular children more positive than average children's actions (e.g., Hymel, et al., 1990). Thus, the contingency of the friends' responses to children's actions

appears to be inversely related to the children's sociometric status. Hence, I assume that popular children act under higher objective conditions of control than average children, while rejected children act under lower conditions of control than average children.

The correlational structure of dimensions of perceived control and their relationships with action strategies, and own views of friendship quality are invariant across sociometric groups. According to the action theory of psychological control, the cyclic relationships of perceived control, action, and action outcomes are unaffected by differences in objective control conditions. Differences in objective control are posited to affect the mean levels of beliefs. Accordingly, if children perceive their friendship outcomes to be low, their perceived control can be assumed to be low. In contrast, if children perceive friendship quality to be high, their their perceived control can be assumed to be high. Thus, the relationships of perceived control, action strategies, and own views of friendship quality are hypothesized to be invariant across sociometric groups. In a similar vein, the correlational structure of perceived control is hypothesized to be invariant across sociometric groups.

To summarize the expected relationships of the investigated constructs: Agency beliefs, self-related means-ends beliefs, and Direct Action are expected to be positively correlated. Moreover, these constructs are expected to correlate positively with self ratings of friendship quality (inverse relationships with conflict). Agency beliefs, self-related means-ends beliefs are expected to be negatively related to Action Omission and Seeking Help. Generally, the relationships of self-related agency and means-ends beliefs with the remaining constructs are expected to be higher than the corresponding relationships of external agency beliefs. External means-ends beliefs and Goal Difficulty are assumed to be positively correlated with Action Omission and Seeking Help. External means-ends beliefs, Goal Difficulty, Action Omission, and Seeking Help are hypothesized to be inversely related to friendship outcomes compared to agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs, and Direct Action); that is, external means-ends beliefs, Goal Difficulty, Action Omission, and Seeking Help are hypothesized to be negatively related to friendship outcomes.

Do friended-rejected children overestimate their control? In line with the assumption of differences in objective control, there is empirical evidence that friended-rejected children's



friends perceive friendship quality less positively than popular and average children's friends and the rejected children themselves (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2000). In contrast, friended-rejected children have been found to perceive the quality of their mutual friendships (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2000) and competence-related aspects of perceived control equally positive as popular and average children (e.g., Patterson et al., 1990). Based on these findings and the proposed cyclic relationships among perceived control, action, and action outcomes, I hypothesize that the three friended groups of children also do not differ in the mean-level profiles of perceived control and action strategies. This would be consistent with the assumption that friended-rejected children's subjective views of perceived control do not correspond with objective conditions of control as indicated by sociometric status. Because rejected children are assumed to act under lower objective conditions of control compared to well-integrated children, equally high perceptions of control indicate that rejected children overestimate their actual amount of control.

Does children's sociometric status moderate the relationships among perceived control, action strategies, friend-rated friendship quality, and number of mutual friendships? Although it has been proposed that psychologically healthy individuals are characterized by illusory high perceptions of control (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988), empirical evidence regarding the effects of illusory high perceived control is mixed. On the basis of the literature on positive illusions and assumptions of life span theory (Baltes, 1987), I conclude that the effects of illusory high perceived control may be neutral, negative, or positive depending on which of the possible action outcomes are considered.. Specifically, as outlined above, I expect that illusory high perceived control has a neutral effect on self ratings of friendship quality. In contrast, I assume that illusory high perceived control has negative effects on rejected children's friends' views of friendship quality whereas I expect positive effects of rejected children's illusory high perceived control on the number of mutual friendships. The hypothesized effects of illusory high perceived control are first outlined for the friends' views of friendship quality. Subsequently, the hypothesized effects of illusory high control on friendship participation or the number of mutual friendships is outlined.

Generally, the expected lack of mean level differences in perceived control across sociometric groups of friended children indicates that the amount of overestimation of objective control varies across sociometric status. Specifically, popular children's perceived control may be more realistic than friended-average children's perceived control, whereas friended-rejected children may overestimate objective control conditions to a higher degree than average children. As a consequence of differences in the degrees of correspondence between perceived and objective control across the different sociometric status groups (i.e., Perceived Control x Objective Control/Sociometric Status interaction), I expect that sociometric status moderates the relationships of perceived control and friendship outcomes (i.e., friends' views of friendship quality and the number of mutual friendships).

In general, a negative relationship between perceived control and friend-rated friendship quality can be expected if perceived control overestimates objective control conditions to a high degree. The more children's perceived control is higher than their objective control, the more likely their actions fail. In turn, the more often children's actions fail, the more action failure may negatively affect the friends' evaluation of friendship quality. Consequently, the higher the illusion of perceived control, the more systematically it may negatively affect the friends' evaluation of friendship quality. Thus, I hypothesize that rejected children's illusory high agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs and Direct Action) are negatively related to the friends' views of friendship quality.

If, on the other hand, perceived control overestimates objective control conditions to a lower degree, action failure is less likely, and, thus, may affect the friends' perceptions of friendship quality less systematically. In contrast, if objective and subjective control correspond to a high degree, children's actions are more likely to succeed and, thus, may affect the friends' perceptions of friendship quality positively. As a consequence, I hypothesize that popular and average children's agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs and Direct Action) will be positively related to the friends' views of friendship quality. Moreover, due to the higher correspondence of objective and subjective control for the popular group compared to average group, I assume that the relationship of perceived control

and the friends' evaluation of friendship quality is higher in the popular group compared to the average group.

External means-ends beliefs (and Goal Difficulty, Action Omission, and Seeking Help) are expected to be negatively related to friend-rated friendship quality. However, whereas for agency beliefs the relationships with friendship quality is expected to be higher for popular children than for average children, for external means-ends beliefs the relationships should be higher for average children than popular children. Generally, friends tend to interpret the popular children's actions more positively compared to average children's actions (e.g., Hymel, 1986). Thus, the friends' tendencies to positively interpret popular children's action strategies may attenuate the expected negative relationships among Action Omission, Help Seeking (and external means-ends beliefs and Goal Difficulty), and friend-rated friendship quality. In addition, popular children may implement these strategies more often in appropriate situations than average children because they have higher social skills. As a consequence, for popular children compared to average children, implementing passive and help seeking strategies may be less detrimental for the friends' evaluations of friendship. In a similar vein, if rejected children behave passively or seek adults' help their friends can be expected to interpret these behaviors much more negatively than if average children do the same. In addition, due to their deficits in social competence, rejected children may often employ these strategies in inappropriate situations. Because these strategies are assumed to mediate the effects of external means-ends beliefs (and Goal Difficulty), similar moderating effects of sociometric status on the negative relationships of these beliefs and friend-rated friendship quality are expected. .

With a single exception, I expect similar relationships of perceived control and the number of mutual friendships as expected for the friends' views of friendship quality. The exception is that rejected children's illusory high agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs and Direct Action) may be *positively* related to the number of mutual friendships, although these relationships may be weaker compared to the average group. Rejected children's illusory high agency beliefs encourage direct actions when facing problems with friends. Active problem-solving attempts imply interaction and involvement. As a

consequence, the nominated friends may perceive a relationship with the rejected children, although the friends' regard the quality of these relationships as being low.

In contrast, the proposed relationships between perceived control and the number of mutual friendships imply that friendless children have lower perceptions of control as indicated by *lower* agency beliefs (and self-related means-ends beliefs and Direct Action) and *higher* external means-ends beliefs (and Goal Difficulty, Action Omission, and Seeking Help) when compared to the groups of friended children. This assumption is supported by the finding that, when controlling for popularity, friendless as compared to friended children score lower on social competence (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Moreover, due to the assumed cyclic relationships of perceived control and friendship outcomes, children who have low perceptions of friendship outcomes can be assumed also to have low feelings of control. Thus, the finding that friendless children perceive their friendships less intimate than children whose friendships are reciprocated (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; see also, Krappmann et al., 1993) provides further support for the assumption that friendless children have low perceptions of control. As a consequence, in terms of mean level differences it is expected that sociometric groups of friendless children have lower perceptions of control compared to sociometric groups of friended children.

**B:** What mechanisms might underlie the relationship between perceived control and friendship? Do Friendless Children Differ in the Ascribed Importance of Friendships from Friended Children?

Theories of goal striving and the literature on peer relationships propose two alternative explanations of children's failure to establish satisfying and mutual friendships. These explanations are based on the premise that, in addition to perceived control, goal importance determines whether efforts are invested in goal pursuit (e.g., Atkinson, 1964). Given this, friendless children may regard friendships as unimportant. This could occur because they may not have adopted having friendships as a personal goal. Alternatively, friendless children may have reactively decreased the importance of this goal because they feel low in control to obtain it. Decreasing goal importance and commitment to an unattainable goal is one strategy used to cope with low control conditions (e.g., Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). If such

accommodative strategies are available to a child, it may be that some children who perceive that they lack control to attain satisfying friendships may rate that goal to be less important. Overall, the literature on children's coping shows that their coping responses can be classified according to two strategy types derived from the adult literature (e.g., Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990): Assimilative (or problem-focused coping) and accommodative (or emotions-focused) coping. Assimilative processes are targeted at changing the situation in accordance with goals. Accommodative processes are targeted at changing goals in accordance to situational circumstances. However, it appears that skills necessary for accommodative coping develop later than skills for assimilative coping. Accommodative processes such as re-scaling goal importance may represent an important developmental progression late in middle childhood. However, abandoning friendship goals may be difficult for these children because alternative goal options are restricted in childhood. Due to the cross-sectional design of the present study it will not be possible to disentangle this issue, but it will be important to keep in mind in the interpretation of findings. As a consequence, mean levels of perceptions of Goal Importance of friendship goals are compared across groups of friended and friendless children. With regard to friended popular, average, and rejected children, I hypothesize that they don't differ in their perceptions of Goal Importance. However, in general, I assume that Goal Importance is highly related to agency beliefs, thus, both types of constructs may evince similar correlations with action strategies and friendship outcomes.

### Overview of the Theoretical Background

In Chapter 2, I review three bodies of literature relevant to this investigation of perceived control, action strategies, and friendship in the context of peer status. In Section 2.1 theories of goal striving are presented. It is proposed that both friendship and peer group acceptance represent middle-level goals in a hierarchical structure of goals. The concept of developmental tasks is presented as a source of thematic issues of personal goals. As described in Section 2.1.1.1, peer group acceptance and friendship represent developmental tasks that normatively emerge in middle childhood. Some researchers have framed the concept of developmental tasks within the notions of stress and coping. The assumption that solving developmental tasks such as friendships can be stressful and difficult points to the

usefulness of investigating perceived control and action regulation in the domain of friendships. Process models of action regulation posit that perceived control is most important when difficulties arise in goal pursuit and after failure experiences.

Generally, self-regulation theories of goal striving posit that each of the motivational and volitional components of action is influenced by perceived control. In addition to perceived control, goal importance is posited to determine whether an individual decides to increase efforts or to give up when difficulties in goal pursuit arise. Generally, there are two possible reasons why friendless children may regard friendships as unimportant. On the one side, they may not have selected friendships as a personal goal. On the other side, they may have reactively decreased the importance of this goal. The assumption that individuals adjust the importance of goals based on their perceived control is further discussed under the notion of accommodative processes in Section 2.3.1.1. Finally, beginning with preadolescence thematic issues based on implicit theories gain in importance. The effects of implicit theories on perceived control is taken up when summarizing the development of perceived control in Sections 2.2.1.8 and 2.2.1.9.

In Section 2.2 the multi-dimensional conception of perceived control based on action theory (e.g., Skinner, 1995) is employed as a theoretical framework.

In Section 2.3 the effects of perceived control on action regulation under high and low conditions of objective control are discussed. The literature on children's coping shows that their coping responses can be classified according to the distinction of assimilative modes of coping and accommodative modes of coping. Assimilative processes involve changing the situation in accordance with goals. Accommodative processes involve changing goals in accordance to situational circumstances. Moreover, a multi-dimensional conceptualization of assimilative coping strategies in the domain of friendship in middle childhood (Lopez and Little, 1996) is presented. In Section 2.3.1 it is outlined how the degree of correspondence between objective control conditions and perceived control may affect friendship outcomes. Moreover, it is suggested that these effects may vary across the possible consequence of actions.

In Section 2.4 the levels of analysis of friendships (i.e., friendship participation, quality, and quantity) and their relationships with peer group acceptance are summarized. Friendship quality encompasses positive features such as intimacy and negative features such as conflict. Both intimacy and conflict reflect the children's perceptions of their own and their friends actions and action outcomes. In Section 2.4.3 the mutual influences of friendship and peer group acceptance were discussed. Due to the sequencing of developmental significance the influence of sociometric status on friendships may be stronger than the influence of friendships on sociometric status. Peer status is related to opportunities and constraints for actions in the domain of friendship. Moreover, the friends may interpret rejected children's actions more negatively than average children's action. In contrast, they may interpret popular children's actions more positive. Hence, the contingencies on children's actions provided by the friends may differ across sociometric groups. In addition, rejected children have lower social competencies than accepted children. Because both competence and contingency constitute objective control conditions, sociometric status can be used as a marker of objective control.