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Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Preadolescent Cliques*

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A critical structural form organizing the social arrangement of children's lives is the clique. This primary group colors the character of children's preadolescent years and shapes their socialization to adult life. In this paper we draw on longitudinal participant observation and on depth interviews with advanced elementary-school children to explore the central feature of clique dynamics: the techniques of inclusion and exclusion. Cliques are circles of power wherein leaders attain and wield influence over their followers by cyclically building them up and cutting them down, first drawing them into the elite inner circle and allowing them to bask in the glow of popularity and acceptance, and then reducing them to positions of dependence and subjugation by turning the group against them. We conclude by discussing the generic features of these inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics, the characteristics of this cyclical pattern, the implications of this socializing experience for the broader societal dynamics of power and manipulation, and the kind of in-group/out-group differentiation that can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

One of the dominant features of children's lives during the later elementary school years (fourth through sixth grades) is the popular-clique structure that organizes their social worlds. The fabric of their relationships with others, their levels and types of activity, their participation in friendships, and their feelings about themselves are tied to their involvement in, around, or outside the cliques organizing their social landscape. Cliques are basically friendship circles, encompassing a high likelihood that members will identify each other sociometrically as mutually connected (Hallinan 1979; Hubbell 1965; Peay 1974). Yet cliques are more than that: they have a hierarchical structure, being dominated by leaders, and are exclusive, so that not all individuals who desire membership are accepted. They function as bodies of power within grades, incorporating the most popular individuals, offering the most exciting social lives, and commanding the most interest and attention from classmates (Eder and Parker 1987). As such they represent a vibrant component of the childhood experience.

Studying popular cliques offers vital sociological insight because these groups mobilize powerful forces that produce important effects on individuals. They are primary groups, offering individuals the opportunity to form close friendships of their own choosing (Elkin and Handel 1989), to learn about society, to practice their behavior, and to evolve their selves and identities. Autonomous from the world of adults (Fine 1981), they are often forged in opposition to adult values (Elkin and Handel 1989), with a culture of resistance to adult standards (Corsaro 1985). Thus they represent a robust form of children's peer culture that is unique in its own right, and yet at the same time is a staging ground for future adult behavior.

The research on cliques is cast within the broader literature on elementary-school children's friendship groups. One group of such works examines independent variables that can influence the character of children's friendship groups. These include studies focusing on the way children clump together into racial groups (Criswell 1937; Schofield 1981; Singleton and Asher 1977), into class-stratified groups (Coleman 1961; Gordon 1957; Hollingshead 1949), and into gender-segregated groups (Berentzen 1984; Best 1983; Goodwin 1990; Hallinan 1979; Lever 1976; Thorne 1993; Thorne and Luria 1986).

Other studies in this group look at the influence of structural characteristics of classrooms and schools, such as size or organization (Dawe 1934; Gump and Friesen 1964;...
Hallinan 1979; Wicker 1969), how students’ shared interests create bonds (Cusik 1973), and the influence of weak social skills (the social skill deficit hypothesis) (Asher and Renshaw 1981; Gottman, Gonso, and Rasmussen 1975; Kinney 1993; Oden and Asher 1977; Putallaz and Gottman 1981) on children’s ability to form and be accepted into friendship groups.

Yet another cluster of research within this genre employs sociometric measures to investigate the characteristics of friendship circles. Asking children to identify schoolmates they liked or disliked, researchers generated models of reciprocal choice. These studies examine the number, size, exclusiveness, and stability of children’s friendship groups (Glidewell et al. 1966; Hallinan 1979) as well as their sociometric exclusion, or social isolation, and its negative consequences (Asher, Oden, and Gottman 1977; Gronlund 1959; Hymel and Asher 1977; Roff, Sells, and Golden 1972).

Although the term clique is used occasionally in this literature, its definition differs from the way we use it here. These previous scholars considered cliques as fundamentally equivalent to friendship groups, and identified from four to eight per grade level. That usage lacks the feature of exclusiveness, whereby only one clique dominates the upper status rung of a grade and is identified by members and nonmembers alike as the “popular clique.”1 We begin to see studies engaging the exclusivity feature in the research on popularity, which incorporates the element of status stratification, such that members of groups identified as popular are more likely to be true cliques. These studies focus primarily on identifying the features designed to foster popularity in children (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992; Asher et al. 1977; Young and Cooper 1944).

A second body of literature examines the features of children’s inter- and intragroup relations. Thick barriers exist between groups of popular and unpopular children, keeping them firmly separated socially (Kinney 1993). Research on in-group/out-group relations discusses the conflict, hostility, and possible bias engendered by in-group toward out-group members (Hamilton and Gifford 1976; Sherif et al. 1961; Tajfel 1978; Tajfel et al. 1971). This notion is tied to the contact hypothesis, namely that lack of contact leads people to assume that out-group members are different and undesirable (Allen and Wilder 1979). This is opposed by two hypotheses: the similarity theory, that contact under favorable conditions will dissipate in-group/out-group hostility and will lead to friendship (Homans 1950), and the idea that some contact may make relations even worse than they had been in the abstract (Perlman and Oskamp 1971; Schofield 1981; Triandis and Vassilou 1967). Looking internally at groups as social systems, studies have shown that contact with both competing out-groups and unpopular individual children can help in-groups to define their behavior boundaries and make them more cohesive (Allen 1981; Best 1983; Sherif et al. 1961).

A third group of studies examines the behavioral dynamics associated specifically with cliques. Corsaro (1981, 1985) explored the origins of cliques in a preschool; he noted that among the children he observed, conflicts developed between others’ attempts to be included in their play space and these children’s resistance to those intrusions. Joint play thus formed the basis for friendship groups that included some children and excluded others. Best (1983) traced the development of cliques in an elementary school, following a group of boys and their leaders through the early elementary grades and observing the progressive formation of the “tent club,” an exclusive group that included the popular boys and made the others into outcasts.

Researchers have also articulated the presence of behavioral cycles engendered by cliques. Epperson (1963) examined how excluded individuals reacted with behaviors that exacerbated their rejection, which led them to redouble their offensive efforts and thus to cycle progressively further into unpopularity. Eder (1985) described the “cycle of popularity” characterizing popular middle-school girls, who reached their peak popularity shortly after being accorded entry to the popular group; thereafter their popularity plummeted as a result of their abandonment of old friends, their failure to respond to friendly overtures by out-group members, and their exclusive friendship with other popular

1 In contrast to the popular cliques, smaller, less exclusive friendship circles can be found among the unpopular children (see Adler and Adler undated). Although these circles would fit the characteristics of sociometric groups, they cannot be considered true cliques.
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girls. Other girls’ earlier admiration and liking for them was replaced by dislike and disrespect. Blau (1964) proposed a cyclic model of small-group dynamics wherein individuals inflate the talents, abilities, and potential contributions they can offer a group in order to gain entry. Subsequently they diminish themselves modestly by flaunting their weaknesses, thereby reducing the competitive status striving within the group and promoting social integration. All of these cycles involve downward progressions, two through the actions of others and one by choice.

Although these studies are diverse in their focus, they identify several features as central to clique functioning without thoroughly investigating their role and interrelation: boundary maintenance and definitions of membership (exclusivity), a hierarchy of popularity (status stratification and differential power), and in-group/out-group relations (cohesion and integration). In this paper our goal is to investigate these dynamics and their association, and to add to these previous concerns an interest in how clique leaders generate and maintain their power and authority (leadership, power/dominance) and what influences followers to comply so readily with those leaders’ demands (submission). We offer a model of clique dynamics that shows their connection to these critical elements of clique functioning, and modifies Eder’s and Blau’s earlier models of cyclic behavior within cliques. Inclusionary dynamics form the basis for the attraction of cliques; exclusionary dynamics reinforce cohesion. Yet individuals experience these dynamics cyclically: they are drawn (and redrawn) into the inner circles of cliques and are treated positively, only to be relegated to the outer circles by dominating and exclusionary behaviors. These interactional models are not intended to describe all children’s friendship groups—only those (consisting of one-quarter to one-half of the children) which embody this exclusive and stratified character.

We begin by discussing the combination of longitudinal participant observation and depth interviews that we conducted with elementary-school children. Then we follow the children through the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, showing the relationship of these processes to the core features of cliques identified above. We conclude by constructing a model of inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics of cliques, showing both the interconnection of the factors and their effect on clique members. We compare this model with other images of clique behavior and consider the implications of this form of childhood socialization for adult society.

METHODS

In this paper we draw on data gathered through longitudinal participant observation and interviews with students in the upper grades (4 through 6) of elementary schools. Over the course of seven years (1987–1994) we observed and interacted with children both inside and outside their schools. The children we studied came from seven public and five private schools drawing on middle- and upper middle-class neighborhoods (with a smattering of children from lower socioeconomic areas) in a large, predominantly white university community with a population of around 85,000. While conducting our research, we occupied several roles: parent, friend, counselor, coach, volunteer, and carpooler (see Fine and Sandstrom 1988). We undertook these diverse roles both as they presented themselves naturally and as deliberate research strategies; sometimes we combined the two as opportunities for interacting with children became available through familial obligations or work/school requirements. As a research team, we are of different genders; thus we could interact well with both boys and girls, and employ an array of roles and perspectives.

In interacting with children we tried to develop and expand on the “parental” research role by observing, casually conversing and interacting with, and interviewing children, children’s friends, other parents, and teachers. This approach built on our natural parenting activities, contacts, interests, and style, taking us into locations and events populated by children. In this way, we followed our generally “laissez-fairest” approach (Adler and Adler 1984). Thus at some times we used our age, experience, and authority to make suggestions and interdictions, but more often we cast aside these attitudes and demeanors and hung around

2 Blau’s model is based on small groups and is not addressed directly to children’s cliques, but it resembles these other cyclical models and thus warrants mention here.
with the children, getting involved in their gossip and (mis)adventures. Most often we interacted with children nonjudgmentally, drawing on our own childhood experiences, and reduced our tendency to take responsibility, give help, or make decisions. As a result, some children inquired why we were so knowledgeable about their scene, but more often than not children regarded us as “cool” parents because we knew what was going on and because they could talk to us. Many of the children, and their parents as well, knew that we had written or were writing papers about features of their experience, because we discussed this subject openly when it came up in conversation at sporting, social, and school events. The children we befriended relished the role of research subjects because it raised their status in adults’ eyes to that of “experts,” whose lives were important and who were consulted seriously about various matters. On our part, this role involved a delicate balance between caring parents and accepting friends.

We did most of our research outside the schools. We followed our daughter and son, their friends and enemies, the children of our neighbors and friends, and other children we met through our involvement in youth leisure activities through their school and out-of-school experiences. Studying the circles to which our children belonged usually boosted the research: we had a “membership role” (Adler and Adler 1987) in the setting and came naturally into contact with children and their parents, we knew and interacted with many of them over a period of years, and we could triangulate (Denzin 1989) by observing them, talking with them, and hearing about them from others. Our children inadvertently obliged us by occupying or passing through different strata of the clique hierarchy: one consistently belonged to the popular group, but the other moved between the popular, the follower, and the unpopular groups.3

Though most studies of children focus on institutionalized educational settings, we concentrated on children’s recreational settings, becoming involved in various after-school arenas such as organized youth sports, extracurricular academic activities, and neighborhood play. Although we derived our main understanding of the setting and the participants’ behavior from our years of participant observation with nearly 100 children of each gender, we augmented these data with more narrowly focused conversations with children. We conducted in-depth unstructured interviews with approximately 40 boys and girls from a variety of ages and social groups, selecting individuals from the popular inner circles, the follower groups, and the unpopular out-groups.4 Parents and children with whom we had already talked helped us with our research by referring new subjects to us, thus helping us to sample theoretically (Glaser and Strauss 1967) for others in different situations.

We continued these snowball referrals (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) until we believed we had covered the range of existing social roles and experiences and had reached theoretical saturation. Then we conducted interviews with seven selected teachers at three different elementary schools. In this way we gained a broader overview of social cliques and their dynamics from individuals whose experiences were rooted more comparatively as a result of working with many different groups of children over the years. Throughout the data-gathering process we engaged in continual inductive analysis (Becker and Geer 1960), developing categories and typologies of behavior that fit within these inclusionary and exclusionary stages and forging them into the broader generic model we present in the conclusion.

TECHNIQUES OF INCLUSION

Cliques maintained exclusivity through careful membership screening. Cliques are not static entities; they shifted irregularly and evolved their membership as individuals moved away or were ejected from the group and others took their place. In addition, cliques were characterized by frequent group activities designed to foster some individuals’ inclusion while excluding others. They had embedded, although often unarticulated, modes of considering and accepting or

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3 For a further discussion of methodological epistemological, and ethical issues associated with researching in the parental role, see Adler and Adler (1996).

4 Many of these interviews (especially with the younger children) were conducted with the mothers present. The mothers reminded their children about forgotten past experiences and translated some of our ideas for the children into concrete situations involving specific people.
rejecting potential new members. These modes were linked to the leaders' critical power in making vital group decisions. Leaders derived power from their popularity and used it to influence membership and social stratification within the group. This stratification manifested itself in tiers and subgroups within cliques, composed of people who were ranked as leaders, followers, and wannabes (see Adler and Adler undated). Cliques embodied systems of dominance whereby individuals with more status and power exerted control over others' lives. They accomplished this by alternately applying the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion to various people, both within and outside the boundaries of the clique (see Elkin and Handel 1989).

Recruitment

As Blau (1964) noted in discussing small groups and organizations, initial entry into cliques often occurred at the invitation or solicitation of clique members. Those at the center of clique leadership had the most influence over this process; they defined potential members as acceptable or unacceptable, and their definitions were followed by other members of the group. If clique leaders decided they liked someone, the mere fact of their friendship with that person accorded him or her status and membership in the group, as Eder (1985) noted in her study of popular middle-school girls.

Potential new members also could be brought to the group by established members who had met and liked them. The leaders then decided whether these individuals would be granted a probationary period of acceptance in which they could be informally evaluated. If the newcomers were liked, they were allowed to remain in the friendship circle; if they were rejected, they were forced to leave. Alexis, a popular, dominant seventh-grade girl, reflected on the boundary maintenance that she and her best friend, Hope, two clique leaders, had exercised in sixth grade:

Q: Who defines the boundaries of who's in or who's out?

Alexis: Probably the leader. If one person might like them they might introduce them, but if one or two people didn't like them, then they'd start to get everyone up. Like in sixth grade, there was Dawn Bolton and she was new. And the girls in her class that were in our clique liked her, but Hope and I didn't like her, so we kicked her out. So then she went to the other clique, the Margo clique.

Timing was critical to recruitment. The beginning of the year, when classes were reconstructed and people were shuffled into new social configurations, was the major time when cliques considered new additions. Once these alliances were set, cliques tended to close their boundaries once again and to socialize primarily within the group. Kara, a fifth-grade girl, offered her view:

In the fall, right after school starts, when everyone's lining up and checking each other out, is when people move up, but not during the school year. You can move down during the school year, if people decide they don't like you, but not up.

Although people could play with friends who were in different classes, getting together at lunch, at recess, and before and after school, individuals in elementary school were bound more tightly to their classrooms than they would be when they reached middle or junior high school (Hallinan 1979; Hansell 1984). At the beginning of the year, individuals separated from their key allies in their clique (often through conscious planning by the school), assessed the new pool of eligibles in their classes, and tried to recruit them into the clique (through what Rizzo 1989 called “friendship bids”).

Most individuals felt that an invitation to membership in the popular clique was irresistible. They asserted repeatedly that the popular group could get any people they wanted to join with them. One of the strategies used by the cliques was to try to select new desirables and seek them out. This usually entailed separating those people from their established friends. Melody, an unpopular fourth-grade girl, described her efforts to hold on to her best friend, who was being targeted for recruitment by the popular clique:

She was saying that they were really nice and stuff. I was really worried. If she joined their group she would have to leave me. She was over there and she told me that they were making fun of me, and she kind of sat there and went along with it. So I kind of got mad at her for doing that. “Why didn’t you stick up for

Davies (1982) observed that proximity rather than liking is often the most basic element in children's friendships.
me?" She said, "Because they wouldn't like me anymore."

Melody subsequently lost her friend to the clique.

When clique members wooed someone to join them, they usually showed only the better side of their behavior. The shifts in behavior associated with leaders' dominance and status stratification activities did not begin until the new person was firmly committed to the group. Julie recalled her inclusion in the popular clique, and its aftermath:

In fifth grade I came into a new class and I knew nobody. None of my friends from the year before were in my class. So I get to school a week late, and Amy comes up to me and she was like, "Hi Julie, how are you? Where were you? You look so pretty." And I was like, wow, she's so nice. And she was being so nice for like, two weeks, kiss-ass major. And then she started pulling her bitch moves. Maybe it was for a month that she was nice. And so then she had clawed me into her clique and her group, and so she won me over that way, but then she was a bitch to me once I was inside it, and I couldn't get out because I had no other friends. 'Cause I'd gone in there and already been accepted into the popular clique, so everyone else in the class didn't like me, so I had nowhere else to go.

Eder (1985) also has noted that popular girls are often disliked by unpopular people because of their exclusive and elitist manner (befitting their status).

Application

A second way in which individuals gain initial membership into a clique is through actively seeking entry (Blau 1964). Several factors influence the likelihood that a person will be accepted as a candidate for inclusion, as described by Darla, a popular fourth-grade girl:

Q: What about movement between cliques? Did you ever see people come up into being in the popular clique?

Darla: Coming in, it's really hard coming in, it's like really hard, even if you are the coolest person. They're still like, "What is she doing?" (exasperated) You can't be too pushy, and like I don't know, it's really hard to get in, even if you can. You just got to be there at the right time, when they're nice, in a nice mood.

According to Brian, a fifth-grade boy who was in the popular clique but not a central member, application for clique entry was accomplished more easily by individuals than by groups. He described how individuals found routes into cliques:

It can happen any way. Just you get respected by someone, you do something nice, they start to like you, you start doing stuff with them. It's like, you just kind of follow another person who is in the clique back to the clique and he says, "Could this person play?" So you kind of go out with the clique for a while and you start doing stuff with them, and then they almost like invite you in. And then soon after, like a week or so, you're actually in. It all depends. . . . But you can't bring your whole group with you, if you have one. You have to leave them behind and just go in on your own.

Successful membership applicants often experienced a flurry of immediate popularity because their entry required clique leaders' approval, which gave them associational status.

Realignment of Friendships

Status and power in a clique were related to stratification; those who remained more closely tied to the leaders were more popular. Individuals who wanted to be included in the inner circle often had to work regularly to maintain or improve their position.

Like initial entry, this was sometimes accomplished by people striving on their own for upward mobility. Danny was brought into the clique by Tim, a longtime member who went out of his way to befriend him. Soon after joining the clique, however, Danny abandoned Tim when Jesse, the clique leader, took an interest in him. Tim discussed the feelings of hurt and abandonment caused by this experience:

I felt really bad, because I made friends with him when nobody knew him and nobody liked him, and I put all my friends to the side for him, and I brought him into the group, and then he dumped me. He was my friend first, but then Jesse wanted him. . . . He moved up and left me behind, like I wasn't good enough anymore.

The hierarchical structure of cliques, and the shifts in position and relationships within them, caused friendship loyalties within these groups to be less reliable than they might have been in other groups. People looked toward those above them, and were more susceptible to being wooed into friendship with individuals more popular than them-
selves. When courted by a higher-up, they could easily drop their less popular friends.

The stratification hierarchies in cliques might motivate lower-echelon members to seek greater inclusion by propelling themselves toward the elite inner circles, but membership in these circles was dynamic; active effort was required to sustain it. More popular individuals also had to invest repeated effort in their friendship alignments to maintain their central positions relative to people just below them, who might rise and gain in group esteem. Efforts to protect themselves from potential incursions by others took several forms, including cooptation, position maintenance, realignment of followers, and challenge to membership, only some of which draw on inclusionary dynamics.6

Realignment of followers involved the perception that other clique members were gaining in popularity and status, and might challenge the leaders’ position. The leaders, however, instead of trying to hold them in place (position maintenance) or exclude them from the group (membership challenge), shifted their base of support: they incorporated lesser but still loyal members into their activities, thereby replacing previous, problematic supporters with new ones. This happened when Davey, a fifth-grade clique leader, began to feel that Joe was becoming very popular in his clique, developing followers who were loyal to him exclusively and not to Davey. He stopped inviting Joe to his house after school and to sporting events with his family, and began to play with other clique members who were outside Joe’s circle. This realignment pushed Joe and his group out of the center of the clique, elevating Davey’s new best friends to the top.

In cooptation, leaders diminished other members’ threats to their position by drawing them into their orbit, thus increasing their loyalty and diminishing their independence.

Clique members who were gaining in popularity thus sometimes received special attention. At the same time, leaders might try to cut out their rivals’ independent base of support from other friends. Melanie, a fourth-grade girl, had occupied a second-tier leadership position with Kristy, her best friend. She explained what happened when Denise, the clique leader, came in and tore apart their long-standing friendship:

Denise split me and Kristy up. Me and Kristy used to be best friends but she hated that, ‘cause even though she was the leader, we were popular and we got all the boys. She didn’t want us to be friends at all. But me and Kristy were, like, getting to be a threat to her, so Denise came in the picture and tore me and Kristy apart, so we weren’t even friends. She made Kristy make totally fun of me and stuff. And they were so mean to me.

Clique leaders were able to undercut potential challengers by coopting them and cutting them off from their bases of support. Thereby they illustrated Simmel’s (1950) concept of the tertius gaudens, the one who draws advantage from the quarrels of others by dividing and conquering.

Julie’s experiences illustrated how it felt to be the one realigned into the higher level of popularity. She elaborated further on how she, in the fifth grade, had been induced by a very dominant clique leader to drop her best friend:

Yeah, Amy tore me and Debby apart, ‘cause I still wanted to be Debby’s friend and Amy was like, “She’s a bitch, we don’t want to be friends with her. She’s ugly, she’s mean.” And I was like, “Yeah, you’re right.”

In friendship realignment, clique members abandoned previous friendships or destroyed existing ones in order to assert themselves as part of relationships with those in central positions. All of these actions were geared toward improving the instigators’ position and thus assuring their inclusion. The outcome, whether anticipated or not, was often the separation of people and the destruction of their relationships.

**Ingratiation**

In addition to being wooed into the elite strata and breaking up friendships to consolidate or use power in the group, currying favor with people in the group was another dynamic

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6 Position maintenance involved friendship stasis—the opposite of friendship realignment—and required a conscious effort to hold the primary loyalty and friendship of important clique members so that they would not turn away from the leaders to potential rising stars. Because this subject falls outside both inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics, we do not discuss it here.

Challenge to membership involved an attack on rising stars’ popularity and power, accompanied by efforts to ostracize them from the group. Because this dynamic is exclusionary, we discuss it later in the paper.
of inclusion found in clique behavior. Like the previously described inclusionary endeavors, ingratiation can be directed either upward (supplication) or downward (manipulation). Addressing the former, Dodge et al. (1983) noted that children often begin their attempts at entry into groups with low-risk tactics; rather than ingratiating themselves directly with the leader, they first attempt to become accepted by more peripheral members. They elevate their gaze and their attempts at inclusion only later. The children we observed did this as well, making friendly overtures toward clique followers and hoping to be drawn by them into the center. More often, however, group members curried favor with the leader to enhance their popularity and obtain greater respect from other group members. One way of doing this was by imitating the group leaders’ style and interests. Marcus and Andy, two fifth-grade boys, described how borderline people fawned on their clique and its leader to try to gain inclusion:

Marcus: Some people would just follow us around and say, “Oh yeah, whatever he says, yeah, whatever his favorite kind of music is, is my favorite kind of music.”

Andy: They’re probably in a position where they want to be more in because if they like what we like, then they think more people will probably respect them. Because if some people in the clique think this person likes their favorite group, say it’s REM or whatever, so it’s, say, Bud’s [the clique leader’s], this person must know what we like in music and what’s good and what’s not, so let’s tell him that he can come up and join us after school and do something.

Not only outsiders and peripherals fawned on more popular people. This was also common practice among regular clique members, even those with high standing. Melanie, the second-tier fourth-grade girl mentioned earlier, described how, in fear, she used to follow the clique leader and parrot her opinions:

I was never mean to the people in my grade because I thought Denise might like them and then I’d be screwed. Because there were some people that I hated that she liked and I acted like I loved them, and so I would just be mean to the younger kids, and if she would even say, “Oh she’s nice,” I’d say, “Oh yeah, she’s really nice!”

Clique members, then, had to stay abreast of the leader’s shifting tastes and whims if they were to maintain status and position in the group. Part of their membership work involved a constant awareness of the leader’s fads and fashions, so that they could align their actions and opinions accurately with the current trends, in a timely manner (also see Eder and Sanford 1986).

The art of ingratiating oneself with a clique was not practiced only upward, however. Besides outsiders’ supplicating insiders and insiders’ supplicating those of higher standing, individuals at the top had to consider the effects of their actions on their standing with those below them. Although leaders did not have to imitate their followers’ style and taste, they had to act so as to hold their adulation and loyalty. To begin this process, people at the top made sure that those directly below them remained firmly placed where they could count on them. Any defection, especially by the more popular members of a clique, could threaten their standing. Leaders often employed manipulation to hold clique members’ attention and loyalty. Oswald et al. (1987) noted that one way in which children assert superiority over others and obligate them with loyalty is to offer them “help,” either materially or socially.

Another technique involved acting in different ways toward different people. Bill, a sixth-grade boy, recalled how the clique leader in fifth grade used this strategy to maintain his position of centrality:

Mark would always say that Trevor is so annoying, “He is such an idiot, a stupid baby,” and everyone would say, “Yeah, he is so annoying. We don’t like him.” So they would all be mean to him. And then later in the day, Mark would go over and play with Trevor and say that everyone else didn’t like him, but that he did. That’s how Mark maintained control over Trevor.

Mark employed similar techniques of manipulation to ensure that all the members of his clique were similarly tied to him. Like many leaders, he shifted his primary attention among the different clique members, so that everyone enjoyed the power and status associated with his favor. Then, when his followers were out of favor, they felt relatively deprived and strove to regain their privileged status. This process ensured their loyalty and compliance.

To a lesser degree, clique members curried
friendship with outsiders. Although they did not accept them into the group, they sometimes included them in activities and tried to influence their opinions. While the leaders had their in-group followers, lower-status clique members could look to outsiders for respect, admiration, and imitation if they cultivated them carefully. This attitude and this behavior were not universal, however, because some popular cliques were so disdainful and so unkind to outsiders that nonmembers hated them. Diane, Jennifer, and Alyssa, three popular junior high school girls who had gone to two different elementary schools, described how the grade school cliques to which they had belonged displayed different relationships with individuals of lesser status:

Diane: We hated it if the dorks didn’t like us and want us to be with them. ‘Cause then we weren’t the popular-est ones, ‘cause we always had to have them look up to us, and when they wouldn’t look up to us we would be nice to them.

Jennifer: The medium people always hated us.

Alyssa: They hated us royalty and we hated them back whenever they started.

Thus, despite notable exceptions (as described by Eder 1985), many popular-clique members strove from time to time to ingratiate themselves with people less popular than themselves, to ensure that their dominance and adulation extended beyond their own boundaries, throughout the grade.

TECHNIQUES OF EXCLUSION

Individuals enhanced their own and others’ status by maneuvering into more central and more powerful positions and/or recruiting others into such positions. These inclusionary techniques reinforced their popularity and prestige while maintaining the group’s exclusivity and stratification. Yet the inclusionary dynamics failed to contribute to other, essential clique features such as cohesion and integration, the management of in-group and out-group relationships, and submission to the clique’s leaders. These features are rooted, along with other sources of domination and power, in the exclusionary dynamics of cliques. Exclusionary techniques illuminate how clique leaders enhanced their elite positions by disdaining and deriding others lower in the prestige hierarchy both inside and outside their cliques, thus supporting their power and authority on the foundation of others’ subservience. These very techniques fostered clique solidarity, however, because members developed internal cohesion through their collective domination over others, and were tied to the leaders by their fear of derision and exclusion by the leader-dominated group.

Subjugation of the Out-Group

When clique members were not being nice to outsiders to try to keep them from straying too far outside their influence, they largely subjected them to exclusion and rejection. Insiders were entertained by picking on these lower-status individuals. As one clique follower remarked, “One of the main things is to keep picking on unpopular kids because it’s just fun to do.” Eder (1991) observed that this kind of ridicule, in which the targets are excluded and are not encouraged to join in the laughter, contrasts with teasing, in which friends make fun of each other in a more lighthearted manner but permit the targets to remain in the group by also jokingly making fun of themselves. Hilary, a fourth-grade clique leader, described how she acted toward outsiders:

Me and my friends would be mean to the people outside of our clique. Like, Eleanor Dawson, she would always try to be friends with us, and we would be like, “Get away, ugly.”

Interactionally sophisticated clique members not only treated outsiders badly, but managed to turn others in the clique against them. Parker and Gottman (1989) observed that gossip is one way of doing this. Hilary recalled how she turned all the members of her class, boys as well as girls, against an outsider:

I was always mean to people outside my group like Crystal, and Emily Fiore; they both moved schools. . . . I had this gummy bear necklace, with pearls around it and gummy bears. She came up to me one day and pulled my necklace off . . . it was my favorite necklace, and I got all of my friends, and all the guys even in the class, to revolt against her. No one liked her. That’s why she moved schools, because she tore my gummy bear necklace off and everyone hated her. They were like, “That was mean. She didn’t deserve that. We hate you.”

Turning people against an outsider solidi-
fied the group and asserted the power of the strong over the vulnerability of the weak. Other classmates tended to side with the dominant people over the subordinates, not only because they admired their prestige but also because they respected and feared the power of the strong.

In the ultimate manipulation in leading the group to pick on outsiders, insiders instigated the bullying and caused others to take the blame. Robert, a fourth-grade clique follower, described with some mystification and awe the skilled maneuvering of Scott, his clique leader:

He'd start a fight and then he would get everyone in it, 'cause everyone followed him, and then he would get out of it so he wouldn't get in trouble.

**Q: How'd he do that?**

Robert: One time he went up to this kid Hunter Farr, who nobody liked, and said, "Come on Farr, you want to talk about it?" and started kicking him, and then everyone else started doing it. Scott stopped and started watching, and then some para-professional came over and said "What's going on here?" And then everyone got in trouble except for him.

**Q: Why did he pick on Hunter Farr?**

Robert: 'Cause he [Farr] couldn't do anything about it, 'cause he was a nerd.

Being picked on instilled outsiders with fear, grinding them down to accept their inferior status and discouraging them from rallying together to challenge the power hierarchy (see Eder and Sanford 1986). In a confrontation between a clique member and an outsider, most people sided with the clique member. They knew that clique members banded together against outsiders, and that they themselves could easily become the next target of attack if they challenged them. Clique members picked on outsiders with little worry about confrontation or repercussion. They also knew that their victims would never carry the tale to teachers or administrators (as they might in dealing with other targets; see Sluckin 1981) for fear of reprisal. As Matt, a fifth-grade clique follower, observed, "They know if they tell on you, then you'll beat them up, and so they won't tell on you. They just kind of take it in, walk away."

**Subjugation within the In-Group**

A second form of domination occurred through picking on people within the clique. More central clique members commonly harassed and were cruel to those with lesser standing? Many of the same factors that prompted the ill-treatment of outsiders motivated high-level insiders to pick on less powerful insiders. Craig, a sixth-grade clique follower, articulated the systematic organization of downward harassment:

Basically the people who are the most popular, their life outside in the playground is picking on other people who aren't as popular, but are in the group. But the people just want to be more popular so they stay in the group. They just kind of stick with it, get made fun of, take it. . . . They come back every day, you do more ridicule, more ridicule, more ridicule, and they just keep taking it because they want to be more popular, and they actually like you but you don't like them. That goes on a lot, that's the main thing in the group. You make fun of someone, you get more popular, because insults is what they like. They like insults.

The moving finger of ridicule was capricious, and could stop at any individual but the leader. It might turn toward a person because he or she did something deserving insult; it might be directed toward someone who the clique leader felt had become an interpersonal threat; or it might fall on someone for no apparent reason (see Eder 1991). Melanie, the second-tier fourth-grade girl discussed earlier, described the ridicule she encountered and told of her feelings of mortification when the clique leader derided her hair:8

Like I remember, she embarrassed me so bad one day. Oh my God, I wanted to kill her! We were in music class and we were standing there and she goes, "Ew! What's all that shit in your hair?" in front of the whole class. I was so embarrassed 'cause I guess I had dandruff or something.

Derision against insiders often followed a pattern: leaders started a trend and everyone followed it. This multiple force intensified the sting of the mockery. Jeff, a fifth-grade boy,

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7 Eder (1991) also noted that when insiders picked on other members of their clique, this could have good-natured overtones, an indication that they liked them.

8 Eder and Sanford (1986) and Eder and Parker (1987) discussed the importance of physical appearance, particularly hair, in adhering to group norms and maintaining popularity.
compared the behavior of people in cliques to the links on a chain:

Like it's a chain reaction. You get in a fight with the main person, then the person right under him will not like you, and the person under him won't like you, and etcetera, and the whole group will take turns against you. A few people will still like you because they will do their own thing, but most people will do what the person in front of them says to do, so it would be like a chain reaction. It's like a chain. One chain turns and the other chain has to turn with them, or else it will tangle.

Compliance

When leaders or other high-status clique members initiated such negative and wounding power dynamics, others followed, participating either actively or passively in the derision. Active participation occurred when instigators persuaded other clique members to become involved in picking on their friends. This often happened in telephone prank calling, when leaders conceived the idea of making trick calls and convinced their followers to do the dirty work. They might start the call and then place followers on the line to finish it, or they might pressure others to make the entire call, thus keeping one step away from becoming implicated if the victim's parents should complain.

In passive participation, followers went along when leaders were mean and manipulative, as when Ryan acquiesced in Brad's scheme to convince Larry that Rick had stolen his money. Ryan knew that Brad was hiding the money, but he watched while Brad whipped Larry into a frenzy, pressing him to deride Rick, destroy Rick's room and possessions, and threaten to expose Rick's alleged theft to others. Only when Rick's mother came home, interrupting the bedlam, was the money revealed and Larry's onslaught stopped. The following day at school, Brad and Ryan could scarcely contain their glee. Rick was demolished by the incident and was cast out by the clique. Ryan was elevated to the status of Brad's best friend by his conspiracy in the scheme.

Many clique members relished the opportunity to go along with such exclusive activities, welcoming the feelings of privilege, power, and inclusion. Others appreciated the absence of ridicule towards themselves. This situation sometimes was valued by new members, who often feel unsure about their standing in a group (Sanford and Eder 1984).

Two fifth-grade clique followers expressed their different feelings about such participation:

Q: What was it like when someone in your group got picked on?

Gary: If it was someone I didn't like or who had picked on me before, then I liked it. It made me feel good.

Nick: I didn't really enjoy it. It made me feel better if they weren't picking on me. But you can't do too much about it, so you sort of get used to it.

Like outsiders, clique members knew that complaining to persons in authority did them no good. Quite the reverse: such tactics made their situation worse. So did showing their vulnerabilities to the aggressors. Kara, a popular fifth-grade girl, explained why such declarations had the opposite of the intended effect:

Because we knew bugged them, so we could use it against them. And we just did it to pester 'em, aggravate 'em, make us feel better about ourselves. Just to be shitty.

When people saw their friends in tenuous situations, they often reacted passively. Popular people who got into fights with other popular people might be able to count on some of their followers for support, but most people could not command such loyalty. Jeff, the fifth-grade boy discussed earlier, explained why people went along with hurtful behavior:

It's a real risk if you want to try to stick up for someone because you could get rejected from the group or whatever. Some people do and nothing happens because they're so high up that other people listen to them. But most people would just find themselves in the same boat. And we've all been there before, so we know what that's like.

Clique members thus cooperated in picking on their friends, even though they knew it hurt, because they were afraid (also see Best 1983). They became accustomed to living in a social world where the power dynamics could be hurtful, and accepted it.

Stigmatization

Beyond individual incidents of derision, clique insiders often were made the focus of
stigmatization for longer periods. Unlike outsiders, who commanded less enduring interest, clique members were much more deeply involved in picking on their friends, whose discomfort held their attention more readily. Jeff described how negative attention could focus on a person for longer than a single incident:

Usually at certain times, it’s just a certain person you will pick on all the time, if they do something wrong. I’ve been picked on for a month at a time, or a week, or a day, or just a couple of minutes, and then they will just come to respect you again.

When people became the focus of stigmatization, as happened to Rick above, they were rejected by all their friends. The entire clique rejoiced in celebrating their disempowerment. They were made to feel alone whenever possible. Their former friends might join hands and walk past them at recess, physically demonstrating their union and the discarded person’s aloneness.

Worse than being ignored was being taunted. Anyone who could create a taunt was favored with attention and imitated by everyone else (also see Fine 1981). Taunting included verbal insults, put-downs, and sing-song chants. Even outsiders, who normally were not privileged to pick on a clique member, could elevate themselves by joining such taunting (also see Sanford and Eder 1984).

The ultimate degradation was physical. Although girls generally confined themselves to verbal humiliation, the culture of masculinity allowed boys to injure each other (Eder and Parker 1987; Oswald et al. 1987; Thorne 1993). Fights occasionally broke out in which boys were punched in the ribs or stomach, kicked, or given black eyes. When this happened at school, adults were quick to intervene. After hours or on the school bus, however, boys could be hurt. Physical abuse was also heaped on people’s homes or possessions. People spat on each other or on others’ books or toys, threw eggs at their families’ cars, and smashed pumpkins in front of their houses.

**Expulsion**

Most people returned to a state of acceptance after a period of severe derision (see Sluckin 1981 for strategies used by children to help attain this end), but this was not always the case. Some people were excommunicated permanently from the clique. Others could be cast out directly without undergoing a transitional phase of relative exclusion. This could happen to clique members from any stratum of the group, although it was more likely among people with lower status. Jason, a sixth-grade boy, described how expulsion could occur as a natural result of the hierarchical ranking, in which a person at the bottom rung of the popularity ladder was pushed off. He described the ordinary dynamics of clique behavior:

**Q: How do they decide who they are going to insult that day?**

**Jason:** It’s just basically everyone making fun of everyone. The small people making fun of smaller people, the big people making fun of the small people. Nobody is really making fun of people bigger than them because they can get rejected... then they can say, “Oh yes, he did this and that, this and that, and we shouldn’t like him anymore.” And everybody else says, “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” ‘cause all the lower people like him, but all the higher people don’t. So the lower-case people just follow the higher-case people. If one person is doing something wrong, then they will say “Oh yeah, get out, good-bye.”

Being cast out could result either from a severely irritating infraction or from individuals’ standing up for their rights against the dominant leaders.

Sometimes expulsion occurred as a result of breakups between friends or realignments in friendship leading to membership challenges (described earlier), in which higher-status people carried the group with them and turned their former friends into outcasts. Adam was able to undercut Kevin’s rising popularity and to coopt his friendship by cutting off the support of Kevin’s longtime friend Nick. Adam pretended to be best friends with both Kevin and Nick, but secretly encouraged each one to say bad things about the other so that he could carry each one’s nasty remarks back to the other. By escalating these hurtful remarks, Adam finally wounded Nick severely. Nick retaliated against Adam in a way that Adam used to turn both Kevin and the whole clique against Nick, and to expel him from the group.

On much rarer occasions, high-status
clique members or even leaders could be cast out of the group (see Best 1983). One sixth-grade clique leader, Tiffany, was deposed by her former lieutenants for continued petulance and self-indulgent manipulations. She recounted the moment of her expulsion:

Do you want to know why I turned dweeb? Because they kicked me out of the clique.

**Q: Who kicked you out?**

Tiffany: Robin and Tanya. They accepted Heidi into their clique and they got rid of me. They were friends with her. I remember it happened in one blowup in the cafeteria. I asked for pizza and I thought I wasn’t getting enough attention anymore, so I was pissed and in a bitchy mood all the time and stuff, and so I asked them for some, so she said like “Wait, hold on, Heidi is taking a bite,” or something, and I got so mad I said “Give the whole fuckin’ thing to Heidi” and something like that, and they got so sick of me right then, and they said, like, “Fuck you.”

When clique members are kicked out of the group, they leave an established circle of friends and often seek to make new ones. Some people find it relatively easy to make what Davies (1982) called “contingency friends” (temporary replacements for their more popular friends), and were described by a fifth-grade teacher as “hot items” for the unpopular crowd. James, a sixth-grade clique follower, explained why people expelled from a popular clique might be in demand with nonclique members:

Because they want more people, who are bigger, who have more connections, because if you get kicked out of the group, usually you still have a friend who is still going to be in the group, so then they can say, “Oh yeah, we’ll be more popular even though this person isn’t respected anymore. At least there is one person who still respects them in the group, so he’ll get a little higher up or more popular, or we just should give him a chance.”

Many cast-outs, however, found new friendships harder to establish. They went through a period when they kept to themselves, feeling rejected, stigmatized, and cut off from their former social circle and status. Because of their previous behavior and their relations with other classmates, they had trouble being accepted by unpopular children. Others had developed minimum acceptability thresholds for friends when they were in the popular crowd, and had difficulty stooping to befriend unpopular people. Todd, a fifth-grade boy who was ejected from his clique, explained why he was unsuccessful in making friends with the unpopular people:

Because there was nobody out there I liked. I just didn’t like anybody. And I think they didn’t like me because when I was in the popular group we’d make fun of everyone, I guess, so they didn’t want to be around me, because I had been too mean to them in the past.

Rejects from the popular clique occasionally had trouble making friends among the remainder of the class because of interference by their former friends. If clique members became angry at one of their friends and cast that person out, they might want to make sure that nobody else befriended him or her. By soliciting friendship with people outside the clique, they could influence outsiders’ behavior, causing their outcast to fall beyond the middle crowd to the status of pariah or loner. Melanie, a fourth-grade popular girl, explained why and how people performed such manipulations:

**Q: Have you ever seen anyone cast out?**

Melanie: Sure, like, you just make fun of them. If they don’t get accepted to the medium group, if they see you, like “Fuck, she’s such a dork,” and like you really don’t want them to have any friends, so you go to the medium group, and you’re like “Why are you hanging out with that loser, she’s such a dork, we hate her,” and then you be nice to them so they’ll get rid of her so she’ll be such a dork. I’ve done that just so she’ll be such a nerd that no one will like her. You’re just getting back at them. And then they will get rid of her just ‘cause you said to, so then you’ve done your way with them. If you want something, you’ll get it.

People who were cast out of their group often kept to themselves, staying in from the playground at recess and going home alone after school. They took the bus to school, went to class, and did what they had to do, but they didn’t have friends. Their feelings about themselves changed; this was often reflected in the way they dressed and carried themselves. Being ejected from the clique thus represented the ultimate form of exclusion, carrying severe consequences for individuals’ social lives, appearance, and identity.

**CONCLUSION**

The techniques of inclusion and exclusion described here represent the means by which
the behavioral dynamics of cliques are forged. As such they offer the basis for a
generic model of clique functioning that
interweaves these processes with the essential
clique features of exclusivity, power and
dominance, status stratification, cohesion and
integration, popularity, submission, and in-
group and out-group relations. Lemert (1972)
outlined some of the features of the exclusion-
ary dynamic, focusing on how paranoid
persons become ostracized from informal
groups and organizations. As critical features
of the exclusion process he noted the secret
nature of decisionmaking within groups, the
isolation of individuals who oppose the
leaders' policies, and the removal of those
individuals from access to information and
power. Yet he failed to elaborate them
thoroughly or to tie them explicitly to the
corresponding dynamic of inclusion.

Together these two dynamics form the
basis of clique functioning. The inclusionary
dynamics are central to cliques' foundation of
attraction. Boundary maintenance makes
cliques exclusive: they can recruit the individ-
uals they want, wooing them from competing
friendships, and can reject the suplications
of others they evaluate as unworthy. The
popularity of their members (with leaders to
bestow status and followers to bestow power)
strengthens their position at the center of
activity. Upheavals and realignments of
friendships within cliques keep the hierarchi-
cal alignment of prestige and influence fluid,
giving those who succeed in maneuvering
toward and staying near the top the greatest
esteem among their peers. The attractiveness
of inclusion in the clique is enhanced by the
systematic self-ingratiation of individuals
toward the leading members and by the
leading members' ability to easily ingratiate
themselves downward with others, thereby
securing the favors they desire.

The exclusionary dynamics are central to
the bases of cohesion in cliques. Clique
members join together in disparaging outsid-
ers, they learn that those in the in-group can
freely demean out-group members, and that
their targets will return for renewed attempts
at acceptance. They learn sensitivity toward
changes in group boundaries, acting in one
way toward insiders and another toward
outsiders. This lesson manifests itself not
only at the group's outer edges but also within
the clique, as individuals move in and out of
relative favor and must position themselves
carefully to avoid the stigma of association
with the disfavored. Members also learn the
hierarchy of group positions and the perquir-
es of respect and influence that accompany
those roles; they submit to the dominance of
clique leaders in order to earn a share of their
reflected status and position. The periodic
minicyclings of exclusion serve to manipulate
followers into dependence and subservience
while enhancing leaders' centrality and au-
thority. The ultimate sanction, expulsion, is a
dramatic example of the effects of exclusion,
weakening potential rivals or bringing them
down from positions of power while herding
other group members into cohesion. The
dynamics of inclusion lure members into
cliques; the dynamics of exclusion keep them
there.

These dynamics have a further cyclical
effect, affecting individuals' roles in the
clique and their sense of self. Both Eder
(1985) and Blau (1964) posited cyclical
models in their portrayals of clique, small-
group, and organizational dynamics. Eder
followed girls' progression into cliques: once
inside, they lost their recently gained popular-
ity because they abandoned old friends. Blau
suggested that individuals first inflate their
worth in order to be accepted into groups,
then deflate it to promote integration and
stability. Blau and Eder agree that individuals
reach a peak in popularity and acceptance
shortly after joining groups, and fall thereaf-
ter either because of outsiders' evaluations or
their own self-diminution.

The cycle of inclusion and exclusion
presented here adheres to this general form in
that individuals experience their greatest
feelings of acceptance and self-worth shortly
after they are included in the clique. If they
are recruited by clique leaders, they are
showered with attention because followers
maintain themselves by keeping abreast of
leaders' current favorites. If they are accepted
as applicants, their approval by clique leaders
similarly casts them into a world filled with
welcoming new friends. This honeymoon
does not last, however; the positive treatment
diminishes as clique leaders and members
shift their focus elsewhere. Higher-status
members then subjugate the new participants
to ensure that their own positions are not
challenged, and followers are freed to vie
more openly with the newcomers for status
and popularity. Individuals go through a cycle
of being drawn into the group, cut off from
outside friends, placed in positions of subservience, and kept there by the concerted status striving of others. This cycle of inclusion and exclusion repeats itself as members are drawn again toward the center by the leaders’ renewed interest, only to be pushed toward the periphery again and again as new people rise in favor.

Although our model partially resembles those of Eder and Blau, it differs in several respects. First, it is recurrent: it describes clique members’ repeated travels through the cycle of inclusion and exclusion, not only after initial entry but throughout their participation in the clique. Second, the process of being brought in and put down is handled by clique insiders, not by outsiders (as Eder believes) or voluntarily by the individuals involved (as Blau suggested). Outsiders lack the power to effect such a diminution, and the individuals involved lack the motivation. Leaders maintain their positions, then, not through the attractive qualities and important contributions they can offer the group, as Blau suggested, but through their inherent grasp of the subtleties of these dynamics, and their ability to manipulate them.

In this research we have suggested that clique dynamics begin earlier and have different characteristics than those found in middle and high school. Whereas Eder (1985), Canaan (1987), and Eckert (1989) proposed a shifting, more differentiated model for older cliques, we found that those in the fourth through the sixth grades, when cliques tend to emerge, were less complex, less specialized, and more overarching than those in the older groups, and paralleled the general features of elementary school social relations. Future research could benefit from addressing the structure and processes of change in cliques as children move from elementary to middle school, when they are mixed together into larger classroom and grade populations and when the subject-to-subject, free-floating model of class attendance replaces the locked-in homeroom structure.

This research also was limited by its white, middle-class population of subjects. It may well be that race and class variables significantly affect the processes of group formation and group dynamics, fostering fixed bases for status stratification in more diverse communities. Groups that are homogeneous as to race and class may have greater opportunities to demonstrate the flux arising from strong inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. Future research also could benefit from examining clique dynamics in populations with a broader or more contrasting range of these demographic characteristics.

Throughout this analysis we have avoided using gender as a variable and have typologized boys’ clique behavior together with girls’. It has been well documented in the literature that boys and girls show different patterns of friendship and interaction: boys have been found to play in large, competitive, athletically oriented groups, while girls tend toward small, intimate, nurturant groups (Best 1983; Fine 1987; Goodwin 1990; Lever 1987; Thorne 1993; Thorne and Luria 1986). These observations are joined by the conventional folk wisdom on children’s social dynamics, which differentiates by gender: it suggests that girls lash out at each other verbally and wound each other emotionally, while boys, who lack the intricacy of interpersonal skills, merely wound each other physically.

Although we were sensitive to these differentiations, our research found few significant variations in clique dynamics by gender; the boys we interviewed and observed were no less skilled at intricate emotional woundings and manipulations than were the girls. Inclusionary and exclusionary clique dynamics seem to be a strong common element of both boys’ and girls’ culture, located in girls’ equalitarian but emotionally vindictive relationships and in boys’ conflict-filled but emotionally uninvolved worlds. Thus we reinforce Thorne’s (1993) assertion of gender differences, in contrast to the more conventional portrayal of gender differences.

In addition to teaching children the dynamics of power and manipulation, clique interactions impress upon children the importance of conformity. Although social conformity has many prosocial functions and ensures the survival of the group, it also represents an opposing force to self-awareness (Diener 1980). When carried to its extreme, it can lead to what Janis (1972) called “groupthink,” a reduction in the capacity for critical reflection. Sociologists have long sought to discover the basis of social conformity and have pondered citizens’ adherence to totalitarian or repressive regimes, especially their passive acquiescence to the regimes of mass annihilation during World
War II. Classical experiments, such as those by Asch (1955) and Milgram (1963, 1965), shocked the academic world by documenting the lengths to which people will go, in response to mild social pressure, to align themselves with others’ instructions or behaviors. Although subservience to peer groups is common in childhood, it becomes dangerous under two conditions: when it is carried to an extreme and leads participants into dangerous or immoral acts, and when children fail to outgrow it in adulthood (Stone and Church 1984). The depth and severity of the pressures toward group conformity that children experience through the clique dynamics of inclusion and exclusion help to explain the strength of the early foundations of conforming behavior, and the reward and punishment systems through which it is socialized.

Finally, these clique dynamics teach children to reproduce society’s strong feelings of differentiation between in-groups and out-groups. Children become highly sensitized to the opposition in which these groups are juxtaposed and to the sharply defined boundaries separating them. They develop feelings of intolerance toward individuals who are not privileged to be accepted as members, adopting an ethnocentric perspective that accords higher status to their own attitudes, values, and behaviors while disvaluing those of others. Tajfel (1982) called this the “generic norm of in-group/out-group bias.” Such a norm fosters what Pettigrew (1979) called the “ultimate attribution error,” leading clique members to deny credit to out-group members while overrating the abilities of in-group members. Clique dynamics of inclusion and exclusion teach young people the fundamental values of conflict and prejudice. As such, they may form the basis for the societal reproduction of racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry and discrimination.

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