Peers

Joseph Szabo, photographer

Peers: topics

- Peer groups: origins
- Structure of peer groups
  - Crowds vs. cliques
- Sociometric status
  - Likeability by peers

Peer Groups

- Groups of people who are roughly the same age
- Effect of modernization
  - More age segregation in schools, workplace, and community
- More time spent with peers
  - Less adult supervision
  - Maternal employment, child labor laws, longer formal schooling
- Changes in population: Baby Boom
  - Accessibility of peers
There is a sharp increase during adolescence in the time spent with peers versus adults.

Is there a separate youth culture?

- Many have same values as parents rather than with those of same age
- Young people maintain attitudes/values different from the rest of society
  - Individuality, learning, knowledge
  - Consumer behavior
  - Music, movies/TV, technology

Peer Group Structure
Crowds

- Larger, more vaguely defined groups, based on reputation
  - Jocks, brains, nerds, druggies
- May or may not spend time together
- Peak in importance in middle adolescence
- Vary according to involvement in adult institutions vs. peer activities

A model for mapping the social world of adolescent peer groups

Middle school (Grades 6-8)

Early high school (Grades 9-10)

Later High School (Grades 11-12)
Crowds (cont’d)

- Gradually becomes
  - more differentiated
  - more permeable
  - less hierarchical
- Allows adolescents more freedom to change crowds, enhance status

Brown et al. (1994)

- Social world of teens is multi-faceted
- Relational perspective:
  - Assists in social identity
  - Locate others in a social framework
  - Permits friendships, romantic relationships (dyadic relationships)
Cliqués

- Small groups defined by common activities or simply by friendship
  - same age
  - same race
  - same socioeconomic background
  - same sex - at least during early and middle adolescence

Cliqués (cont’d)

- Shared interests and activities
  - Orientation toward school
  - Orientation toward the teen culture
  - Involvement in antisocial activity

- Deviant peer groups
  - Aggressive adolescents gravitate toward each other

Adolescents and their Cliqués: Common Interests among Friends

- Role of family in friendship choice
  - Parents socialize certain traits
  - Predispose teens toward certain crowds
  - Crowds reward them for the traits that led them there in the first place
  - Traits are strengthened

- Antisocial peers reinforce antisocial traits
Cliques (cont’d)

- Selection or Socialization?
  - Antisocial activities, such as delinquency: selection
  - Aggression: socialization
  - Alcohol, tobacco, depression: both factors

Adolescent friendship patterns by age

- Early Adolescence (10-13 yrs): superficial, activity centered, based on similarity of attitudes and interests, mostly same sex

Adolescent friendship patterns by age

- Middle Adolescence (14-16 years): more emotionally intense and relationship oriented, consideration of personal qualities, dating begins, but same sex friendships more important than opposite sex friendships
Adolescent friendship patterns by age

- Late Adolescence (late teens, early 20s): greater mutuality and intimacy and commitment, opposite sex friendships become more common, supplementing rather than replacing same-sex friendships.

Popularity

- Where you fit in vs. how well-liked are you by others
- Popularity during adolescence
  - Act appropriate in eyes of peers
  - Meet needs of others
  - Confident but not conceited
  - Related to social skills

Categories of Peer Reputation

- Popular (high +/-low – nominations) 16%
- Rejected (low +/-high – nominations) 17%
- Neglected (few nominations either + or –) 11%
- Controversial (high + and –) 8%
- Average (no extreme) 48%
Categories of Peer Reputation

- **Popular** (high +/low – nominations) **16%**
  - Attractive, intelligent, outgoing, cooperative, and able to lead others, moderately high levels of self-esteem = interact with many different kinds of adolescents, not just those like themselves, good sense of humor, and fun.

- **Rejected** (low +/high – nominations) **17%**
  - Actively disliked, physically and verbally aggressive, highly disruptive in classroom, do poorly in school, chose companions that are unpopular, spend time with younger teens in smaller groups, externalizing problems (drug abuse, delinquent behaviors).

- **Neglected/Isolated** (few nominations either + or –) **11%**
  - Shy, withdrawn, internalizing problems (anxious, low-self-esteem, depression); others show no more behavioral problems than average or popular teenagers.
Categories of Peer Reputation

- Controversial (high + and –) 8%

- Aggressive and disruptive, yet also show good leadership and assertiveness skills, hence highly visible members of peer groups, elicit ambivalent reactions

Categories of Peer Reputation

- Average/Acceptable (no extreme) 48%

- Members of various groups, are not as well liked or actively sought after by their peers as their more popular counterparts. Tend to blend into the crowd.

Unpopular adolescents: Summary

- Three types
  - Aggressive
    - fights with other students, bullies others
    - Overt vs. relational aggression
  - Withdrawn
    - exceedingly shy, timid, and inhibited
    - victims of bullying
  - Aggressive-Widrawn=combination
    - hostile, but nervous about initiating friendships
Eder (1995)

- Participant observation method
  - Hard to understand what students defined as being popular but clear that students were not all equals
  - Visibility, attention were important
  - Strong influence of social class
  - Low end of hierarchy
    - Unattractiveness, atypical gender behavior, lower intelligence, unusual behavior

Determinants

- Unpopular youngsters may lack the social skills and social understanding necessary to be popular with peers
- Hostile attributional bias
  - Plays central role in aggressive behavior
- Withdrawn kids
  - Peer group entry, poor self-esteem, lack of confidence
  - Cycle of victimization

Hostile Attributional Bias

- Imagine it is break time at school. You sit at your table and are in an intensive conversation with your neighbor. You have already placed your books and folders for the next lesson on the table. Suddenly, on of your classmates runs past very close to your table so that all your things are scattered on the ground.

- Imagine you have spent all afternoon in the swimming pool with your friends. Now you’ve packed your things and are ready to go home. On the way to the exit you walk past the pool. One of your classmates jumps into the pool just as you pass by, and you get wet all over.
Hostile Attributional Bias

- Imagine you arrive in school in the morning as usual, enter the building and then walk to the room in which you have your first lesson. From the corridor, you can hear your fellow classmates chat and laugh inside the classroom. When you open the door, you encounter a sudden silence.

- Imagine you are in a French lesson, sitting at one of the front tables. When the lesson starts, the teacher asks you to summarize the topics of the previous lesson. As you are trying to give an answer, your classmates behind you start whispering and giggling.

Consequences

- Teens with poor peer relationships are more likely to:
  - Be low achievers in school
  - Drop out of high school
  - Have a range of learning disabilities
  - Show higher rates of delinquent behavior
  - Suffer from emotional and mental health problems as adults

Types of aggression

- Overt Aggression
  - Hit, kick, or punch others
  - Say mean things to others to insult them or put them down
  - Call other mean names
  - Push and shove others around
  - Tell others that they will beat them up unless they do what they want

- Relational Aggression
  - Try to make another classmate not like by others by spreading rumors or talking behind their back
  - Get even by keeping a person from being in their group of friends
  - Ignore others or stop talking to them
  - Tell their friends they will stop liking them unless the friends do what they say
  - Keep certain people from being in their group when it is time to do an activity
Percentage of High School Students Who Were in a Physical Fight,* by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2003

** National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2003

Percentage of boys’ and girls’ responses about girls’ behavior
What girls do when they want to be mean to another girl

Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996

Percentage of boys’ and girls’ responses about girls’ behavior
What girls do when they want to be mean to a boy

Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996
Percentage of boys' and girls' responses about boys' behavior
What boys do when they want to be mean to another boy

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Percentage of boys' and girls' responses about boys' behavior
What boys do when they want to be mean to a girl

Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996

Consequences of relational aggression
Aggressive adolescents are more rejected, more socially isolated and engage in lower levels of prosocial behaviors

Crick & Grotpeter
Relational Aggression in college students
Werner & Crick, 1999

- Had to nominate up to five people who would best fit each description
- Also asked about
  - Disordered eating patterns
  - Life satisfaction
  - Personality assessment
  - Borderline personality factors

Prosocial behavior items
1. Dependable
2. Lends money
3. Kind to others
4. Make sure others get invited to activities
5. Makes others feel welcome
6. Lends belongings
7. Good listener

Peer acceptance
With whom do you like to spend time the most?

Peer rejection
With whom do you like to spend time the least?

Relational aggression
1. When angry, gives others the silent treatment
2. When mad, tries to damage others’ reputations by passing on negative information
3. When mad, retaliates by excluding others from activities
4. Intentionally ignores others until they agree to do something for him/her
5. Makes it clear to his/her friends that he/she will think less of them unless they do what he/she wants
6. Threatens to share private information with others in order to get them to comply with his/her wishes
7. When angry with same-sex peer, tries to steal that person’s dating partner

Consequences of relational aggression

Crick & Grotpeter, 1995

Relational Aggression in college students
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Results

- Relational aggressive college students were more likely to be rejected, had antisocial personalities features and had low levels of prosocial behavior.
- Relationally aggressive women, but not men, were relatively dissatisfied with their lives, reflected in feelings of sadness, pessimism about future, and low positive affect.