

Clique Dynamics

PATRICIA ADLER AND PETER ADLER

Patricia Adler and Peter Adler take a look at clique formation and friendship groupings in schools. In their study of children's friendship groups, they analyze how cliques can generate tremendous power and influence over clique members.

A dominant feature of children's lives is the clique structure that organizes their social world. 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, at their base, friendship circles, whose members tend to identify each other as mutually connected. Yet they are more than that; cliques have a hierarchical structure, being dominated by leaders, and are exclusive in nature, 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. . . . As such they represent a vibrant component of the preadolescent experience, mobilizing powerful forces that produce important effects on individuals.

The research on cliques is cast within the broader literature on elementary school children's friendship groups. A first group of such works examines independent variables that can have an influence on the character of children's friendship groups. A second group looks at the features of children's inter- and intra-group relations. A third group concentrates on the behavioral dynamics specifically associated with cliques. 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 relations between in-groups and out-groups (cohesion and integration).

In this [essay] we look at these dynamics and their association, at the way clique leaders generate and maintain their power and authority (leadership, power/dominance), and at what it is that influences followers to comply so readily with clique leaders' demands (submission). These interactional dynamics

From: Patricia Adler and Peter Adler. 1998. *Peer Power: Preadolescent Culture and Identity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 56-69. Reprinted with permission.

are not intended to apply to all children's friendship groups, only those (populated by one-quarter to one-half of the children) that embody the exclusive and stratified character of cliques.

TECHNIQUES OF INCLUSION

The critical way that cliques maintained exclusivity was through careful membership screening. Not static entities, cliques irregularly shifted 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). Cliques had embedded, although often unarticulated, modes for considering and accepting (or rejecting) potential new members. These modes were linked to the critical power of leaders in making vital group decisions. Leaders derived power through their popularity and then 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 hierarchically ranked into levels of leaders, followers, and wannabes. Cliques embodied systems of dominance, whereby individuals with more status and power exerted control over others' lives.

Recruitment

Initial entry into cliques often occurred at the invitation or solicitation of clique members. . . . Those at the center of clique leadership were the most influential over this process, casting their votes for which individuals would be acceptable or unacceptable as members and then having other members of the group go along with them. If clique leaders decided they liked someone, the mere act of their friendship with that person would accord them group status and membership. . . .

Potential members could also 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 during which they could be informally evaluated. If the members liked them, the newcomers would be allowed to remain in the friendship circle, but if they rejected them, they would be forced to leave.

Tiffany, a popular, dominant girl, reflected on the boundary maintenance she and her best friend Diane, two clique leaders, had exercised in fifth grade:

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

TIFFANY: 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 fifth grade, there was Dawn Bolton and she was new. And the girls in her class that were in our clique liked her, but Diane and I didn't like her, so we kicked her out. So then she went to the other clique, the Emily clique. . . .

A second w
through the
hood that a
popular fou
like really h
doing [exasp
hard to get
they're nice.

Accordin
a central me
individuals
cliques: "It
something r
you just kin
and he says.
while and y
in. And ther
But you can
leave them b

Successf
popularity.
associational

Status and
remained m
wanted to b
to maintain

Like initi
their own f
clique by M
After joining
clique leade
abandonmen
friends with
my friends t
dumped me
up and left r

The hier
ships within
able than th
above them
individuals
easily drop t

Application

A second way for individuals to gain initial membership into a clique occurred through their actively seeking entry. . . . Several factors influenced the likelihood that a person would be accepted as a candidate for inclusion, as Darla, a popular fourth-grade girl described: "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 Rick, a fifth-grade boy who was in the popular clique but not a central member, application for clique entry was more easily accomplished by individuals than groups. He described the way 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, they gained associational status.

Friendship Realignment

Status and power in a clique were related to stratification, and people who remained more closely tied to the leaders were more popular. Individuals who wanted to be included in the clique's inner echelons 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. In fourth grade, Danny was brought into the clique by Mark, a longtime member, who went out of his way to befriend him. After joining the clique, however, Danny soon abandoned Mark when Brad, the clique leader, took an interest in him. Mark discussed the feelings of hurt and abandonment this experience left him with: "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 Brad 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 they. When courted by a higher-up, they could easily drop their less popular friends. . . .

Ingratiation

Currying favor with people in the group, like previous inclusionary endeavors, can be directed either upward (supplication) or downward (manipulation). . . . Note that children often begin their attempts at entry into groups with low-risk tactics; they first try to become accepted by more peripheral members, and only later do they direct their gaze and inclusion attempts toward those with higher status. The children we observed did this as well, making friendly overtures toward clique followers and hoping to be drawn by them into the center.

The more predominant behavior among group members, however, involved currying favor with the leader to enhance their popularity and attain greater respect from other group members. One way they did this was by imitating the style and interests of the group leader. Marcus and Adam, two fifth-grade boys, described the way borderline people would fawn 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."

ADAM: They're probably in a position then 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 groups, 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.

Fawning on more popular people not only was done by outsiders and peripherals but was common practice among regular clique members, even those with high standing. Darla, a second-tier fourth-grade girl, . . . 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 regular awareness of the leader's fads and fashions, so that they would accurately align their actions and opinions with the current trends in timely manner. . . .

TECHNIQUES OF EXCLUSION

Although inclusionary techniques reinforced individuals' popularity and prestige while maintaining the group's exclusivity and stratification, they 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 clique

leadership. T
and power.

When they
their realm
exclusion ar
uals. As one
on unpopul
this kind of
in the laugh
more lighth
by also joki
described th
to the peop
be friends w

Interacti
but manage
observe tha
way she tur
sider: "I was
they both
around it an
necklace of
all the guys
moved scho
her. They w

Picking on
nance. Mo
those with
ment of ou
Rick, a fif
downward
outside in
are in the g
group, they
back every
keep taking
but you do
You make
like, they li

The fir
might be a

leadership. These features are rooted, along with further sources of domination and power, in cliques' exclusionary dynamics.

Out-Group Subjugation

When they were not being nice to try to keep outsiders from straying too far from their realm of influence, clique members predominantly subjected outsiders to exclusion and rejection. They found sport in 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." [Sociologist] Eder . . . notes that this kind of ridicule, where the targets are excluded and not enjoined to participate in the laughter, contrasts with teasing, where friends make fun of each other in a more lighthearted manner but permit the targets to remain included in the group by also jokingly making fun of themselves. Diane, a clique leader in fourth grade, described the way 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 . . . observe that one of the ways people do this is through gossip. Diane recalled the way 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 Sally Jones; they both moved schools. . . . I had this gummy bear necklace, with pearls around it and gummy bears. . . . [Crystal] came up to me one day and pulled my necklace off. I'm like, '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.'" . . .

In-Group Subjugation

Picking on people within the clique's confines was another way to exert dominance. More central clique members commonly harassed and were mean to those with weaker standing. Many of the same factors prompting the ill treatment of outsiders motivated high-level insiders to pick on less powerful insiders. Rick, a fifth-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 everyday, 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 finger of ridicule could be pointed at any individual but the leader. It might be a person who did something worthy of insult, it might be someone

who the clique leader felt had become an interpersonal threat, or it might be someone singled out for no apparent reason. . . . Darla, the second tier fourth grader discussed earlier, described the ridicule she encountered and her feelings of mortification when the clique leader derided her hair: "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."

Often, derision against insiders followed a pattern, where leaders started a trend and everyone followed it. This intensified the sting of the mockery by compounding it with multiple force. Rick analogized the way people in cliques behaved 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 et cetera, 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

Going along with the derisive behavior of leaders or other high-status clique members could entail either active or passive participation. Active participation occurred when instigators enticed other clique members to pick on their friends. For example, leaders would often come up with the idea of placing phony phone calls to others and would persuade their followers to do the dirty work. They might start the phone 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 distant from becoming implicated, should the victim's parents complain.

Passive participation involved going along when leaders were mean and manipulative, as when Trevor submissively acquiesced in Brad's scheme to convince Larry that Rick had stolen his money. Trevor knew that Brad was hiding the money the whole time, 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. It was only when Rick's mother came home, interrupting the bedlam, that she uncovered the money and stopped Larry's onslaught. The following day at school, Brad and Trevor could scarcely contain their glee. As noted earlier, Rick was demolished by the incident and cast out by the clique; Trevor was elevated to the status of Brad's best friend by his coconspiracy in the scheme. . . .

Stigmatization

Beyond individual incidents of derision, clique insiders were often made the focus of stigmatization for longer periods of time. Unlike outsiders who commanded less enduring interest, clique members were much more involved in picking on their friends, whose discomfort more readily held their attention.

Rick noted
"Usually at
they do som
or a day, or
you again."
Rick, they v
brating their
possible. The
play yard at
vidual's alone

Worse th
insults to pu
favored with
normally be
selves by join

The ultim
selves to ver
credence to
in which bo
When this h
on the schoo
homes or pe
eggs at their

While most
derision . . .
excommuni
undergoing
stratum of t
among peop

When D
sion could o
the bottom
ordinary dyn

Q: How

DAVEY:
making t
Nobody
rejected.
and we s
yeah," c
the lowe
something

Rick noted that the duration of this negative attention was highly variable: "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, they were rejected by all their friends. The entire clique rejoiced in celebrating their disempowerment. They would be made to feel alone whenever possible. Their former friends might join hands and walk past them through the play yard at recess, physically demonstrating their union and the discarded individual's aloneness.

Worse than being ignored was being taunted. Taunts ranged from verbal insults to put-downs to singsong chants. Anyone who could create a taunt was favored with attention and imitated by everyone. Even outsiders, who would not normally be privileged to pick on a clique member, were able to elevate themselves by joining in on such taunting. . . .

The ultimate degradation was physical. Although girls generally held themselves to verbal humiliation of their members, the culture of masculinity gave credence to boys' injuring each other. . . . Fights would occasionally break 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. But after hours or on the school bus boys could be hurt. Physical abuse was also heaped on people's homes or possessions. People spit on each other or others' books or toys, threw eggs at their family's cars, and smashed pumpkins in front of their house.

Expulsion

While most people returned to a state of acceptance following a period of severe derision . . . this was not always the case. Some people became permanently excommunicated from the clique. Others could be cast out directly, without undergoing a transitional phase of relative exclusion. Clique members from any stratum of the group could suffer such a fate, although it was more common among people with lower status.

When Davey, mentioned earlier, was in sixth grade, he described how expulsion could occur as a natural result of the hierarchical ranking, where a person at the bottom rung of the system of popularity was pushed off. He described the ordinary dynamics of clique behavior:

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

DAVEY: 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, because 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 lowercase people just follow the highcase people. If one person is doing something wrong, then they will say, "Oh yeah, get out, good-bye." . . .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Take a look at your own friendship group in school. Which of the processes of both inclusion and exclusion do you observe?
2. What forms of negative sanction, or punishment, do the more powerful high status clique members deliver to others? List some, noting how they differ in severity.

16

Fraternalities and Collegiate Rape Culture

Why Are Some Fraternities More Dangerous Places for Women?

A. AYRES BOSWELL
AND JOAN Z. SPADE

Boswell and Spade studied fraternity parties and bar settings as places where college women are at risk for rape. The authors point to the significance of the fraternity as a group that encourages the rape culture. The fraternity house is a setting that is ruled by the group norms of fraternity men.

Date rape and acquaintance rape on college campuses are topics of concern to both researchers and college administrators. Some estimate that 60 to 80 percent of rapes are date or acquaintance rape (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, and Cox 1988). Further, 1 out of 4 college women say they were raped or experienced an attempted rape, and 1 out of 12 college men say they forced a woman to have sexual intercourse against her will (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1985).

Although considerable attention focuses on the incidence of rape, we know relatively little about the context or the *rape culture* surrounding date

From: A. Ayres Boswell and Joan Z. Spade. "Fraternalities and Collegiate Rape Culture: Why Are Some Fraternities More Dangerous Places for Women?" *Gender & Society*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 1996: 133-47. © 1996 Sociologists for Women in Society. Reprinted with permission.

acquaintance
environmen
1984). The
the specific
settings also

Some h
on college
1990) and
ually aggre
higher dos
college (G
suggest tha
not part o
Akers 199
need to un
general tha
campuses.

Our ap
pus rape an
vide an env
women at
for women
where the
data for ou
ties as havi
These wom
woman co
nity men v
fied as hig
college stu
contexts th
men and w

The ab
within a g
Men are v
active res
McCormi
that men a
cent (Buck
an extensi
that exemp
1988; Kim

Where
using an i
social basi
and femin