

relationships concurrently across the levels of interaction. However, most studies have been confined to one level, and this simplification facilitates an understanding of the dynamics of peer relationships.

Background: Structure and Personal History

Adolescent peer relationships comprise a dynamic social system, an evolving set of relationships organized into different levels of interaction. An individual's success in negotiating this dynamic system is influenced by one's history of peer relationships and the social skills that one brings to relationships in adolescence. It is also influenced by features of both proximal and distal social contexts. Proximal social contexts are those that relate directly to peer interaction. They include the neighborhood or school, in which a substantial portion of peer interaction takes place, and the family, which is often charged with responsibility for oversight of peer interaction. Many investigators have examined connection between peer relationships and these proximal contexts, in what Bronfenbrenner (1999) would refer to as a *mesosystems* analysis. Less common are analyses that include more distal contexts (e.g., the juvenile justice system or work settings) in which peer interaction is less frequent and oversight less direct. A broader, *macrosystems* analysis – examining how cultural norms shape the quality and content of peer interaction – is rarer still, although becoming more significant as young people engage in peer interaction within the context of a multicultural society.

The structure of peer relationships

As individuals move into adolescence, the peer social system becomes more elaborate. New relationships and new levels of interaction emerge (for a more comprehensive discussion, see Brown, 1999). Throughout childhood individuals grow accustomed to *dyadic* peer relationships, with friends as well as siblings and cousins. These constitute the most immediate and concrete level of peer interaction, which is expanded to include new forms of relationships in adolescence – most notably, romantic and sexual relationships (see Part IV of this volume). Children also amass considerable experience negotiating interactions with small groups of peers. Some of these are formal relationships (organized and supervised by adults) that result from participation on sports teams, religious or community groups, youth organizations, or other structured activities. Others involve informal collectives (organized by youth with only indirect supervision from adults) that comprise a circle of friends or a neighborhood playgroup. A small group with circumscribed membership that shares a friendship orientation is often referred to as a *clique*. Whether formal or informal, peer associations at this level share the characteristic that they are *interaction-based*, identified by the fact that group members do things together.

Typically, adolescents participate in a variety of groups at this level, which vary in their duration and the stability of group membership. Overlap in membership among a person's small groups also varies. The friendship group of one teenager may be a subset of the

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Friendships, Cliques, and Crowds

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Introduction

In the United States and Canada, adolescence is commonly viewed as a time to step away from the family and step more decisively into the world of peers. Young people are expected to spend more time with friends (and less with family), to build a social life around peer relationships, and to look to peers for emotional and instrumental support. Although the importance of age-mates is often overstated, peer relationships do become a major preoccupation for most adolescents. On average, they spend approximately one-third of their waking hours with friends (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Yet, the salience of peers should not be taken for granted. There is considerable individual and cultural variability in both the quality and features of peer relationships during this stage of life (Hartup & Laursen, 1999; Larson et al., 2002).

This chapter will focus on two components of the adolescent peer system, namely, dyadic friendships and affiliations with groups of peers. Our primary concern is sketching normative patterns within these components and their consequences for adolescent adjustment. We confine our analysis to North American youth because a majority of research is concentrated on this population. As a comparison point, we will occasionally refer to youth in other nations. We will be more attentive to variability among North American adolescents with regard to ethnic or socioeconomic background.

Because of space limitations our review is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, we articulate major themes in the research literature and major issues that are yet to be resolved. To put the study of friendships and peer groups in proper perspective, we begin with an overview of the organization of the peer social system and its transformations during adolescence. We then examine, in turn, research on friendships, small-group relationships (cliques), and the broader group system (crowds). This division among types – or more accurately, levels – of relationships is artificial because adolescents negotiate peer

members of one formal group such as a sports team, whereas another teen's circle of friends may be drawn from two or three formal groups, and yet another person's clique may feature no peers who are part of formal groups in which the person participates.

Based on sociological work on the advantages of diverse networks (Granovetter, 1983), one would expect that this variability in the composition of an adolescent's small groups would affect their function as a support network and reveal something about the adolescent's personality or social skills, but little attention has been paid to these issues.

Complementing dyads and cliques, which are defined by interaction patterns, a third level of peer-group association emerges at adolescence that is based more on the individual's reputation among peers. Adolescents in many schools and communities are associated with larger collectives called *crowds* or *sets*. These groups cluster together individuals who have established the same basic image or identity among peers. Crowd labels reflect a particularly prominent feature of group members, such as residential location (north-siders, project people), ethnic or socioeconomic background (Mexicans, richies), peer status (nobodies, snobs), or individual abilities and interests (jocks, skaters, brains, gang-bangers). Most crowds feature a set of stereotypic norms that, collectively, define a distinctive lifestyle (Larkin, 1979; Stone & Brown, 1999). As with cliques, adolescents may be associated with more than one crowd, but this constitutes a dilution of their image among peers. Some adolescents are not clearly or consistently associated by peers with any crowd. Moreover, there are social contexts in which crowds are not easily discernible.

Unlike dyads and cliques, crowds are cognitive abstractions. Membership is determined by reputation rather than interaction. Nevertheless, affiliation with a particular crowd does tend to facilitate relationships with certain peers and constrain relationships with others. These constraints are well documented in American films (e.g., "The Breakfast Club," "Can't Buy Me Love," "American Pie") and novels about teenagers – such as *That Was Then, This Is Now* (S. E. Hinton, 1971). They are also the subject of some social scientific research that is examined in a later section of this chapter.

Personal history

Of course, young people do not move into this elaborated peer system at adolescence totally naive to its demands and expectations. They arrive with a history of relationships – with peers and others – and social skills (Sameroff, 1975). In most cases, prior to adolescence young people have initiated, nurtured, and abandoned friendships; established a certain level of popularity and social status within the social world of their elementary classroom or neighborhood; and fashioned a set of social skills to be used in pursuing peer interactions (for reviews of these topics, see Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Parker & Asher, 1987; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). They have been guided by parents and other adults in developing these relationships and relationship skills (Parke & O'Neil, 1999). Older siblings and the mass media (especially, television shows, movies, and popular songs) have given them opportunities to witness and study adolescent peer relationships. Their behavior in various social settings has laid the foundation for a rep-
utation that will channel them toward certain peer crowds. Moreover, many of the peer

relationships that they engage in during early adolescence are continuations of childhood affiliations, especially in the realm of close friendships and formal group interactions (such as sports teams).

All of these become a repository of experiences that adolescents can draw upon as they negotiate the novel features of peer interactions in this new stage of life. They also form a trajectory that can vault young people toward a certain type or array of peer relationships and away from others. Unfortunately, investigators rarely have access to reliable information on experiences with peers prior to adolescence, so that we still have limited understanding of how these preadolescent experiences affect the course of peer relationships during adolescence. There is, however, a growing body of evidence that young people with limited success in peer relationships during childhood continue to struggle with relationships throughout adolescence. Hodges et al. (1999) show how youngsters without friends become more attractive targets for bullying, and being the victim of bullying, in turn, diminishes the chances of securing friendships. As these individuals enter adolescence their status as a victim becomes reified through their association with a rejected crowd. Such a label encourages a broader array of peers to join in the harassment, and would-be friends shy away for fear that they, too, will become the victims of peer derision (Merten, 1996). It is difficult for an adolescent to break out of this pattern of loneliness and peer rejection.

Summary

The experiences that adolescents have in interpersonal relationships prior to adolescence form the basis of their entry into the expanded world of peer interaction during adolescence. Most adolescents are called upon to engage in new types of relationships and new levels of interaction with peers. This would be bewildering if there was not some preparation during childhood, or if relationship experiences in childhood are inadequate. Unfortunately, investigators rarely take experiences prior to adolescence into account when studying adolescents' peer relationships.

Friendships in Adolescence

Of the many types and levels of peer associations in which adolescents are involved, investigators have concentrated most of their attention on friendship. Not only are friendships the easiest peer relationship to study; they are also generally regarded as the most important. It is difficult, however, to differentiate the literature on friendship *dyads* from studies of friendship *cliques*, because many investigators ask adolescents to report on "your closest friends" without clarifying whether they want respondents to generalize across several dyadic relationships or describe characteristics of the friendship group. Unless studies refer explicitly to group behavior or group dynamics, we will assume that they are intended to describe individual friendships, thus including their findings in this section.

The vast majority of adolescents report having at least one close friend, although the specific people nominated as closest friends can change considerably even over brief periods of time (six months or less). Erwin (1993) points out that friendships grow more stable during adolescence, largely because of advances in cognitive development and relationship management skills (especially the negotiation of conflict). As in childhood, adolescent friendships depend upon propinquity, but because teenagers have more mobility than younger children, they are less likely to confine close friendship choices to peers in the same immediate neighborhood or school classroom. Still, the importance of proximity should not be underestimated. Dubois and Hirsch (1990) found that urban African American boys were more likely than European American boys to maintain separate friendship networks in school and the neighborhood, largely because the African American youth were less likely to have neighborhood associates attending their school.

General truths about friendship

A succession of studies over a period of 30 years has confirmed several general truths about adolescent friendship. First, equality and reciprocity are considered normative mandates in friendship. Second, the individuals most likely to be selected as friends are peers who are similar to the self. Third, adolescents are especially likely to select same-gender peers as close friends; in multiethnic environments there is also a strong preference for same-race peers. Fourth, girls display more intimacy in their friendship than boys (at least in the frequency, if not the depth of intimate exchanges).

Despite extensive evidence in support of these general truths, they are not unequivocal. We can illustrate this with reference to the inclination to select similar peers as friends. Clark (1989) argues that similarity between friends is less pronounced among black adolescents than white youth because black teens may have less opportunity to select friends with similar characteristics. If they attend predominantly white schools and/or live in predominantly white neighborhoods, black adolescents may have to choose between selecting a same-race friend who is not particularly similar in interests or values, or choosing someone with similar interests and attitudes who is from a different racial background. There is also some evidence suggesting that African American youth are more tolerant of differences than European American youth, making similarity a less significant basis for close friendship.

A second limitation to the general truth of similarity concerns the consistency of similarities across friends. In asking about close friends in general, rather than assessing each close friend in turn, investigators have ignored the possibility that adolescents construct a network of friendships that feature disparate similarities. For example, adolescents may have one close friend who shares their musical tastes, another who is pursuing similar extracurricular activities, a third who espouses the same religious beliefs, and so on. Each friend is similar to the self, but in distinctive ways.

Of the many issues that investigators have examined in relation to adolescent friendships, we will highlight two that have been closely pursued and/or hotly debated in recent years: the degree to which friends influence adolescents' behavior (especially their misbehavior), and the significance of having high quality friendships.

Patterns of influence in friendships

One of the strongest correlates of an adolescent's behavior is the behavior of close friends. This has been observed with regard to both prosocial and antisocial activities. In the past, such correlations were commonly taken as evidence of the influence friends have over the individual. Yet, 25 years ago some investigators recognized that several factors could account for similarity among friends. Cohen (1977) pointed to three specific processes: *selection*, or the tendency of adolescents to become friends with peers who share their attitudes and activities; *deselection*, or the inclination to abandon a friendship if a peer changed attitudes or activities in a way that weakened similarity; or *influence* (also referred to as socialization), persuasion from the friend to alter opinions or behavior to be more similar to the friend. In reanalyses of data that Coleman (1961) collected for his classic portrait of the "adolescent society," Cohen found little evidence of a deselection process, but both selection and influence clearly contributed to the level of similarity between friends.

Denise Kandell (1978) conducted a now classic longitudinal study on a sample of New York teenagers, concluding that both selection and influence were factors in the similarity of drug-use attitudes and behaviors of friends. At the outset of the study, friendship pairs manifested more similarity in drug use than randomly generated pairs (based on comparison of self-reported behavior of each member of the pair). Nine months later, pairs who remained friends increased in similarity to a significantly greater extent than pairs whose friendship dissolved or randomly assigned pairs. Kandell also demonstrated that *perceived* similarity (based on adolescents' reports of their own and their friends' behavior) was higher than *actual* similarity (based on independent reports of each friend), and that similarity was stronger in reciprocated friendship dyads (in which both members nominated each other as a close friend) than non-reciprocated dyads. These findings cast doubts on results from a host of other studies that had assessed friend influence by asking adolescents to report their own and their closest friends' behavior at a single measurement point. Kandell's research became the standard by which to judge more recent studies of friend influence.

One intriguing finding of more recent investigations is that friends seem to have more influence over the initiation of a behavior than the cessation of the behavior. For example, drawing upon Latane's (1981) social impact theory, Ennett and Bauman (1994) examined the composition of friendship groups and changes in smoking behavior of adolescents over a one-year period. They found that nonsmokers who belonged to groups containing smokers were more likely to initiate cigarette use than nonsmokers in groups without any smokers. Interestingly, however, the number of group members who stopped smoking over the one-year period of the study did not predict whether or not an adolescent would also stop smoking.

Two intriguing and controversial findings about the initiation of heterosexual intercourse emerged from Bearman and Brückner's (1999) analyses of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The investigators identified the risk for "sexual debut" of all female participants who reported being virgins at the outset of the study, based on self-reports of characteristics that have been associated with the initiation of

sexual activity in previous studies. The investigators found, first, that the individual's own risk status was *not* as influential in sexual debut (over a one-year period) as the risk status of members of their friendship group. Second, they reported that the risk status of the friendship group, collectively, was more influential than that of the respondent's best friend. In other words, membership in a low-risk peer group could protect adolescent girls at high risk for sexual debut from actually initiating sexual activity – and do so more effectively than one close relationship with a low-risk peer.

Thus, friends do, indeed, influence adolescents, particularly in the initiation of risky or problem behavior. It is easy to overestimate that influence, however, by simply looking at the degree of similarity between friends and ignoring the effects of friendship selection processes. Moreover, a comprehensive assessment of the degree of friend influence must be mindful of the structure of adolescent peer relationships, paying attention to the multiple, nested levels of peer relationships that adolescents negotiate, rather than assuming that all influence emerges from dyadic relationships with close friends.

Documenting the degree and locus of friends' influence is an important step toward building more effective intervention programs for youth (Bearman & Brückner, 1999). However, researchers also need to be attentive to the *mechanisms* of influence, how peers promote changes in adolescents' attitudes and behavior. Our understanding of these mechanisms remains remarkably weak. Most intervention programs that deal with peer influence are organized around the assumption that peers exert direct pressure on adolescents to engage in undesirable behavior. The programs offer peer-resistance training and practice in refusal strategies. Investigators have developed self-report measures of adolescents' perceptions of peer pressure (Clasen & Brown, 1985; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000), which have been used to document significant variation in the strength and direction of peer pressure in various domains; age trajectories and gender differences also vary across domains. Generally, speaking, however, adolescents claim that they encounter relatively little direct pressure from peers to engage in prosocial or antisocial behavior (Clasen & Brown, 1985).

This does not imply that peer influence is minimal. Adolescents may be unreliable reporters of peer pressure (little information exists on the validity of self-report measures). Moreover, Brown and Theobald (1999) argued that, in addition to peer pressure, there are three other major modes by which friends can exert influence. One is through normative regulation. Through interaction with peers, adolescents recognize that there are commonly accepted attitudes or behavior patterns that are expected within the friendship group. Although there is no overt pressure for an adolescent to conform to norms, the expectation is quite clear. Eder (1993) reported on conversations among early adolescent girls that set boundaries for interactions with boys. Macleod (1987) provides a similar illustration in a study of older, lower-class boys. In both instances, strident assertions were mixed with gentle teasing or mockery of specific group members in order to articulate and reinforce group norms. A particularly fascinating illustration of normative regulation comes from Dishion, Poulin, and Burraston's (2001) careful analysis of conversations among friendship pairs. They found that conversational cues such as laughter and attentiveness, or follow-up comments that signaled approval of the adolescent's stories about misbehavior served to strengthen the adolescent's acceptance of deviant activity.

Another mode of peer influence is through *modeling*. A classic illustration is found in Dunphy's (1963) depiction of how the leaders of early adolescent male and female cliques make a public display of their romantic relationship in order to illustrate to fellow group members how to conduct such a liaison. Modeling is not confined to close friends or admitted peers, however. Eckert (1989) describes how members of one peer crowd in a Midwestern high school carefully observed the dress and grooming strategies, activity preferences, and behavior patterns of the other major crowd, then scrupulously adopted the antithesis of their rival crowd's characteristics as the norms of their own group.

Finally, peers can influence adolescents through *structuring opportunities*. In an update of Dunphy's (1963) classic work, Connolly, Furman, and Konarski (2000) examined how certain friendship groups encourage romantic relationships among members simply by exposing group members to the other sex. In this particular study, members of mixed-sex peer groups in middle school were more likely to move into dating relationships than adolescents whose friends were all the same gender as they were.

Even from this cursory review it is apparent that peer-influence processes are more complex than researchers and practitioners often recognize. They are not focused exclusively (or primarily) around overt pressure tactics, nor are they located strictly within dyadic relationships. A systematic examination of influence processes across several levels of peer interaction is needed in order to account for the changes over time in the degree of similarity that investigators have noticed between an adolescent and close friends.

Quality of friendships

A second area of significant progress in the study of friendship over the past several years concerns the quality of these relationships. Individuals enter adolescence with varying degrees of social skills, which ought to affect their capacity to form meaningful, lasting friendships. Criteria by which the quality of friendships are judged vary among studies, but the advent of reliable measures such as the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) has made it easier to engage in comparative research about this topic.

Investigators have been especially concerned with three questions in this area: Which adolescents are most likely to display high quality friendships? Is the quality of adolescent friendships associated with features of relationships prior to adolescence? Do adolescents with high-quality friendships display better behavioral and emotional adjustment? With regard to the first question, Brendgen et al. (2001) reported that adolescent girls attribute higher quality to their friendships than boys do; the sex difference was confirmed in observations of friendship pairs. Smith and Schneider (2000) discovered that both male and female adolescents tended to attribute more quality to their relationships with girls than with boys. In this particular study, ethnic differences were nominal, but ethnic or cultural differences are more difficult to ascertain because most measures of friendship quality are derived from a European American perspective, thus potentially biased against other cultural groups.

Not surprisingly, investigators also have found significant associations between the quality of preadolescent relationships and friendship quality in adolescence. For example,

Mankiewicz, Doyle, and Bregden (2001) found that adolescents who perceived a strong relational bond between their parents tended to report stronger attachment to parents, and this in turn was associated with higher self-perceived quality of their friendship relationships. Shulman and Scharf (2000) also found a correlation between the strength of bonds to parents and emotional involvement with friends and romantic partners. The implication is that, in negotiating friendships (and romantic relationships) during adolescence, individuals build upon the experiences they have had in family relationships. This is precisely what would be expected from attachment and social learning theories.

A more controversial set of findings emerges from studies of the relation between friendship quality and adjustment. Ordinarily, one would predict that adolescents with high-quality friendships would be better adjusted, and those manifesting behavior problems would also display difficulties with interpersonal relationships. As expected, adolescents with high-quality friendships do display higher emotional adjustment, but results related to behavioral outcomes are more complicated. Several investigators have found that teenagers who have high-quality relationships with deviant peers tend to display higher, not lower levels of behavioral problems such as drug use or delinquency (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Hussong, 2000). Moreover, deviant adolescents are just as likely as nondeviant youth to display positive features in their friendships, but deviant youth are likely to manifest a higher number of negative features (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Pugh, 1986; Hussong, 2000). In other words, high-quality friendships may actually *promote* problem behavior if an adolescent is associating with deviant peers.

One important caveat to add is that high quality in friendship is not necessarily synonymous with the absence of any problematic features. Laursen (1993), for example, found that conflict is not uncommon in adolescent friendships. It tends to be handled differently, however, from conflict in other close relationships. Teenagers recognize that conflict is more of a threat to voluntary relationships such as friendships or romantic attachments, so there is more of an effort to resolve it.

Summary

In this section we have highlighted only a few themes within the extensive literature on adolescent friendships. Rather consistently, they display the complexity that investigators are beginning to discover in this type of adolescent peer relationship. The "general truths" about adolescent friendships are beginning to be qualified as investigators place the study of friendship in a more multicultural perspective. In moving beyond these general truths, investigators have focused more attention on the character and dynamics of this interpersonal relationship. Friend influence extends beyond simple notions about peer pressure; friendship quality can be a blessing as well as a problem, depending upon the behavior patterns of the person who is befriended. To build on insights derived from recent research, investigators will need to pay more attention to the friendship *dyad* rather than the perceptions of just one member. The most informative studies include both members of a friendship and follow the partners closely over time.

Adolescent Cliques

Particularly in adolescence, individual friendships do not exist in a social vacuum. They are nested within a network of peer relationships and are responsive to the norms and dynamics of that network. As we have already described, this network includes a variety of formal and informal groups of peers. In this chapter we will focus attention on just one type of group, the friendship clique, because it is likely to be the most significant part of the network for most adolescents. Certainly, it has received comparatively more attention from researchers. In comparison to studies of friendship, however, research on adolescent cliques is quite limited. Investigators have examined the structure as well as the dynamics of cliques. Research on clique dynamics has included more qualitative work and has concentrated on preadolescent and early adolescent age groups.

Cliques vary in size from three to ten members, with most having about five members (Ennett, Bauman, & Koch, 1994). They are more challenging to study than friendships because they are more difficult to identify. There are three major ways of defining and assessing cliques: social network analyses that employ nominations of friends from all participants in a social context to identify the major clusters of individuals that comprise each friendship group; information from selected informants about who interacts with whom (e.g., the social-cognitive mapping procedure of Cairns & Cairns, 1994); or systematic, direct observations of adolescents in their natural context, using ethnographic methods. We will draw upon studies using all three of these methods.

Clique structure

Although cliques seem synonymous with adolescence, not all people in this life stage actually belong to a clique. Most investigations of cliques have used a school as the social context for analyses, drawing data from the entire school population (or an entire grade level). Using social network analysis programs, several researchers have identified three different positions that adolescents can occupy within a clique structure: member (someone whose affiliations lie almost exclusively within one friendship group), isolate (someone with virtually no ties to a recognized clique), and liaison, who has ties to members of two disparate cliques and serves as a link between the two groups (Ennett & Bauman, 1996; Shrum & Cheek, 1987). The term, isolate, is a slight misnomer because many youth in this category actually have one or two friendships, but they do not have a sufficient number of ties to members of any one group to be considered part of that group.

The division of adolescents into distinctive cliques is most pronounced in early adolescence; with advancing age the number of isolates and, especially, liaisons increases (Shrum & Cheek, 1987). Thus, the group system is transformed from a set of disparate cliques to a more loose-knit collection of groups tied together by liaisons. Group membership is also fluid; it is rare for the membership of a clique to remain unchanged over the course of a school year. In one longitudinal study of high school youth, less than 10 percent of respondents reported that their clique had not experienced any changes over

a three-year period (Engles et al., 1997). Rather than dissolving, most cliques seem to replace old members with new ones. Allowing for no more than 50 percent turnover in group membership, Ennett and Bauman (1996) reported that between 55 percent and 80 percent of the cliques they observed remain discernible over a one-year period (the percentage varied among schools participating in the study).

Like friendships, cliques display a predilection for similarity among members. This is most pronounced with regard to age and gender, but in multiethnic settings cliques tend to be ethnically homogeneous as well. The more tight-knit the clique, the less likely it is to have members of multiple ethnic groups (Zisman & Wilson, 1992). In fact, in a study of several multiethnic schools, Urberg et al. (2000) found that African American students were less integrated into the friendship-group network than European American students. According to Cairns and Cairns (1994), groups also display marked homogeneity in aggressiveness or delinquent behavior. This predilection for similarity delimits the pool of prospective new members. Cairns and Cairns (1994) found a high turnover in the membership of socially aggressive groups, but new members were likely to display roughly the same level of aggressiveness as old members.

Qualitative researchers frequently comment on the status hierarchy that is evident in adolescent cliques, especially among groups of girls (Adler & Adler, 1995; Eder, 1985). As would be expected, group leaders have the most authority in determining group membership. Other members can bring forward candidates for membership, but unless they are accepted by group leaders they will not be integrated into the clique.

Most studies of the structural features of cliques have been conducted in small to medium-sized schools in predominantly European American, suburban or rural communities. In part this is a matter of expedience because it is more difficult to gather data from a sufficient percentage of respondents in larger schools, and the number of cases would tax the limits of the social network programs. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to know how cliques are structured – and how that structure evolves – in a school with a large and highly mobile population. Much also could be learned from closer study of youth who change statuses – from clique member to liaison or from isolate to clique member – over a short period of time. What prompts this change? How does it affect their susceptibility to peer influence or sense of well-being?

Clique dynamics

The studies of clique structure provide a useful backdrop to the more intriguing analyses of interaction between groups and among group members. These portray cliques as instruments of socialization and social control, sometimes providing social support and other times engaging in ostracism and ridicule. Since Dunphy's (1963) classic portrayal of how friendship groups prepare adolescents for the heterosocial world of adult society, there has been a succession of rich ethnographic analyses documenting adolescents' daily experiences in cliques. These provide clues to the evolution of the clique system from the circumscribed groups of early adolescence to the looser network of relationships observable in middle to late adolescence. We will highlight results from three

such studies, covering different portions of the adolescent period, in order to illustrate this evolution.

Over a seven-year period, Adler and Adler (1995) engaged in participant observations of the clique activities of (mostly middle-class, European American) youngsters in fourth through sixth grades at several public and private elementary schools. They noted the same pattern of extensive turnover in membership that quantitative researchers reported. They also found, however, that there was a highly structured process whereby new members were recruited into the clique. Membership shifts were carefully overseen by the highest status group members – clique leaders, whose position in the clique was far more stable than that of other members. The cliques also were arranged in a status hierarchy, with higher-status cliques manifesting tighter control over membership, but more appeal to outsiders. To enforce group norms, clique leaders ridiculed lower-status members of the group. They also tended to belittle outsiders and cajole group members to follow suit in this activity. Those who complained about their treatment to outsiders or adult authorities suffered even greater ridicule. Those who stuck up for a friend who was the object of ridicule were likely to get the same treatment themselves. These dynamics were much more apparent in high-status groups than lower-status groups.

In the face of these dynamics, it is little wonder that many adult women look back with dread on their early adolescence (Pipher, 1994). However, this organizational dynamic is very effective in redirecting young people's priorities from childhood to adolescent social norms. It sends a blunt message as to who is in charge of the peer social system (peers, rather than adults) and provides unequivocal information about how to proceed within that system. It also heightens the need for close and supportive friendships that can help young people negotiate the difficult dynamics of cliques without emotional upheaval.

The move into early adolescence and middle school seems to prompt some tempering of the rigid control of group members. In Eder's (1985) examination of a sample of Midwestern middle school girls, many elements of the preadolescent group system were still evident: a group-status hierarchy, envy of higher-status groups, normative regulation within the group, belittling of outsiders, and so on. Yet, the girls' behavior was not depicted in such stark terms. Ridicule and belittlement of group members gave way to teasing and, occasionally, cajoling. There seemed to be a shift in emphasis from social control to socialization, as much of the group's conversation centered upon building effective relationships with boys.

MacLeod's (1987) study of late adolescent boys from lower socioeconomic strata affirmed the broader agenda of cliques in this older age group. He focused on two groups: the Hallway Hangers, a set of white youth performing marginally in school and engaged in delinquent activities; and the Brothers, a primarily black group working hard to do well in school. Conversations between the author and group members emphasized much more of a balance between social support and social control than was evident in the other two studies. Teasing was still common to keep group members in line with group norms, but most ridicule was reserved for outsiders; members readily rose to each other's defense. Moreover, members routinely disappeared from the group to accommodate the needs of a part-time job or romantic relationship. The group was a comfortable home base from which one could venture out and safely return without fear of exclusion.

Crowds

Crowds are a social cognitive construct: they require young people to construct a set of labels that venture beyond the concrete and thoroughly observable features of peers, reach consensus on the meaning of these labels, then apply the labels to peers who may not conveniently interact with each other to affirm their similarity. In view of these social cognitive demands, it is not surprising that individuals are not able to articulate a crowd system in their school or community much before middle adolescence. Brown, Mory, and Kinney (1994) linked peer crowds to the process of adolescent identity development, whereas Eckert (1989) suggested they are instrumental in reaffirming socioeconomic divisions within society, and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) implied that crowds assist in maintaining allegiance to ethnic group norms. These are not mutually exclusive objectives, suggesting that crowds serve multiple purposes within the peer social system.

Barbara and Phillip Newman emphasize the importance of "group identity" in early adolescence, either as a stepping stone toward a more individuated, autonomous sense of identity (Newman & Newman, 1976), or as an enduring complement to the North American emphasis on individuality (Newman & Newman, 2001). Crowds seem to embody this sense of group identity, giving young people a vocabulary for describing the distinctive categories of identity that are visible among peers, or the basic alternative lifestyles available in a given social system (Eckert, 1989; Larkin, 1979). In many reports, however, there is a disturbing lack of consensus about the features of a given crowd. In Eckert's (1989) study of youth in a suburban Michigan school, both the jocks and the burnouts vigorously defended their crowd against the derisive depictions that out-group members often had for their group. Stone and Brown (1999) make sense of this with reference to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1984), explaining that as individuals develop an attachment to their own group there is an inclination to exaggerate the strengths of their own group and limitations of outgroups. This is, of course, reminiscent of the inclination of early adolescent cliques to ridicule outsiders (Adler & Adler, 1995).

Crowds are very much a product of the social context, however. As a result, the specific crowds that teenagers recognize may vary substantially from one community to the next (Thurlow, 2001). In predominantly European American contexts, crowd labels reflect individual abilities and interests or social standing: brains, skaters, populars, nerds, and so on (see, e.g., Larkin, 1979). In multiethnic contexts, crowd labels can reflect ethnic divisions instead of or in addition to more person-specific characteristics (e.g., Mature-Bianchi, 1986). This is not a foregone conclusion, however. Peshkin (1991) described a multiethnic community in which ethnic divisions were largely ignored in young people's social interaction patterns. Not surprisingly, ethnic labels were not apparent in the major crowds that adolescents mentioned, except in undercurrents among a small portion of the community.

Although peer crowds are abstractions, they do have more concrete consequences for individuals. Urberg et al. (2000) found evidence to support Brown et al.'s (1994) contention that peer-crowd affiliations channel adolescents toward friendships with certain peers and not others. Adolescents reported that a disproportionate share of their close friends came from their own crowd. Just as friends influence adolescents by structuring opportunities to engage in certain behaviors, peer-crowd affiliations can structure opportunities for certain social relationships.

It seems, however, that the capacity of crowd affiliation to facilitate certain relationships and constrain others may fade across adolescence. In a longitudinal ethnographic study of youth in one Midwestern, predominantly European American community, David Kinney charted a substantial transformation in the peer-crowd system (see Brown et al., 1994). The basic division between populars and everyone else in middle school gave way to a more elaborated system of crowds with fairly impermeable boundaries in the early high school years. By the later portion of high school, however, distinctions between crowds began to blur; students enumerated several hybrid crowds composed of members of two groups that formerly were quite distinct. The older students also described how individuals associated much more freely across crowd lines than they had earlier in adolescence. This ethnographic evidence corresponds to quantitative studies suggesting that the importance of crowd affiliation diminishes toward the end of adolescence (Brown, Eicher, & Perrie, 1986). Again, there is a discernible parallel between studies of peer crowds and friendship groups, which appear to grow more loose-knit across adolescence (Zisman & Wilson, 1992).

Much of the literature on peer crowds, however, assumes that adolescents fit squarely in one and only one group. Like systems of classifying individuals into sociometric status categories, categorization schemes for classifying individuals into peer crowds often ignore the variability that exists in adolescents' associations with various groups. Some adolescents develop a consistent image among peers as a member of one specific crowd, whereas others may be viewed as straddling two groups; or some peers may associate an individual with one crowd while other peers place the person in a different crowd. One option to categorical assignment is to calculate a series of scores representing the proportion of peer nominations that an adolescent receives to each major crowd (as an example, see Brown et al., 1993). Another methodological issue is whether self-reported crowd affiliation is as reliable a measure as peer ratings. Some reports suggest that the two measurement schemes are sufficiently correlated that they produce little substantive difference in data analyses (Urberg et al., 2000), whereas other reports indicate that, at least in early adolescence, there are substantial biases in self-reports (Brown, Clasen, & Neiss, 1987). More work is needed to resolve these methodological questions.

Conclusion

One of the major challenges for North American youth as they move into adolescence is to negotiate a much more complex and elaborate system of peer relationships. Likewise, a challenge for researchers is to make sense of this system and the relationships that adolescents contract within it. In particular, researchers must face four particular realities of the adolescent peer system.

First, this system comprises multiple relationships operating on multiple levels simultaneously. Dyadic friendships exist within the constraints of a friendship network and under the shadow of the peer-crowd affiliations of the pair of friends. The impact of a friendship clique is undoubtedly conditioned by members' dyadic relationships within and beyond the clique itself. As difficult as it is to take these various types and levels of relationship into consideration, researchers must strive to be more attentive to them

Qualitative research is helpful in this regard, although adolescents have a penchant for significant interactions with peers outside of adults' eyesight. Research designs will need to incorporate measures of various levels of peer interaction as moderators of the relationships that are the targets of a given inquiry.

Second, peer relationships are dynamic entities. Although friendships grow more stable during adolescence, it is not uncommon for young people to reorder their friendships or even abandon certain relationships in favor of new ones over the course of a year. In some cases, this means that even short-term longitudinal studies are essentially comparing apples and oranges. On the other hand, some friendships endure for long periods during adolescence, and it is unlikely that friendships of long duration operate the same way or provide the same benefits as less established relationships. Changes in clique composition, which are especially common in the early phases of adolescence, pose a similar challenge for longitudinal research. Studies need to be more attentive to these dynamic features of peer relationships by including assessments of the duration of relationships or consistency of peer-group composition over time.

Third, studies that make the relationship the unit of analysis are particularly useful in elucidating features of peer relationships and peer interaction. Because peer influence is a mutual phenomenon (an adolescent influences friends at the same time as being influenced by them), it doesn't make much sense to measure how much an adolescent moves toward a friend's attitudes and behavior over time without also considering how much the friend's attitudes and behavior have changed in the direction of the target adolescent. A final issue that we have largely ignored in this chapter – in part because of space constraints and in part because of a dearth of research – is that the adolescent peer system is strongly influenced by cultural context. An increasing proportion of research studies involve individuals beyond the European American middle class. The ethnic diversity of North American societies and the increasing exposure of young people to foreign cultures demand that researchers be more attentive to cultural influences on and cultural variability in the course of friendships and peer-group relations during adolescence. In many societies it is still the case that adolescents' interactions with peers are highly circumscribed or constrained to blood relatives (Larson et al., 2002).

Still, there has been remarkable progress since the mid-1980s in our appreciation of the complexities of adolescents' relationships with peers. This constitutes an exciting base on which researchers can build in the future.

Key Readings

- Bukowski, W. M., Hoza, B., & Boivin, M. (1993). Popularity, friendship, and emotional adjustment during early adolescence. In B. Laursen (Ed.), *Close friendships in adolescence. New directions for child development, No. 60* (pp. 23–37). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- The authors distinguish between adolescents' reputation among peers in general and their relationships with individual peers.
- Cairns, R., & Cairns, B. (1994). *Lifelines and risks: Pathways of youth in our time*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

The book is a comprehensive report of long-term longitudinal study of how social group relationships affect and are affected by deviant behavior patterns of youth.

Furman, W., Brown, B. B., & Feiring, C. (Eds.) (1999). *The development of romantic relationship in adolescence*. London: Cambridge University Press.

This edited volume presents current research and theory on all major facets of romantic relationships in adolescence.

Hartup, W. W. (1999). Peer experience and its developmental significance. In M. Bennett (Ed.) *Developmental psychology: Achievements and prospects* (pp. 106–125). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

This chapter is an insightful theoretical analysis of the unique role played by peer relations in psychological and social development of children and youth.

Parker, J., & Asher, S. (1987). Peer acceptance and later personal adjustment. Are low accepted children at risk? *Psychological Bulletin, 102*, 357–389.

This article is a classic analysis of sociometric studies of youth, focusing on the effects of peer acceptance and rejection on long-term adjustment of youth.

Rubin, K. H., Bukowski, W. M., & Parker, J. G. (1998). Peer interactions, relationships, and groups. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (pp. 619–700). New York: Wiley.

This chapter is a comprehensive overview of research on peer relations in childhood and adolescence, including most major facets of adolescents' peer relations.

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Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence

Edited by

Gerald R. Adams and Michael D. Berzonsky



Blackwell
Publishing

2003