

## Chapter 11

### The Adolescent Peer Culture

In contrast to the various negative effects of status deprivation elaborated in the previous chapter, the adolescent peer culture has largely a positive, adaptive function. Besides providing compensatory status, it plays a major role in facilitating emancipation from the home, in transmitting social-class values, and in focalizing resistance against adult standards and authority. It also serves as the principal training institution of the adolescent period.

For all of these reasons, the social experience and groupings of adolescents acquire significance and structural characteristics that set them off qualitatively from analogous social phenomena during childhood. It is certainly safe to say that in our society "wherever children or youth are together for any length of time and free to pursue their own purposes there will be a subculture operating." It is surely not unreasonable to expect one type of

peer group to develop when the aim is to provide more or less casually a subsidiary form of status, and quite a different type of peer group when the major status needs of a prolonged period of sub-adulthood must be satisfied.

Thus, we can anticipate that group life will become a more serious and crucial matter for the adolescent than for the child. The adolescent is more intensely concerned with his relationship to the group, more conscious of his relative hierarchical standing in group structure, and more highly motivated by considerations of status in dealing with his fellows. And since the adolescent peer group is the chief instrumentality of a distinctive and semi-independent sub-culture that provides both derived and earned status for its members, we can also expect greater differentiation, stability, and cohesiveness of structural organization, and more striking manifestations of group solidarity.

The prepotency of group interests in the extracurricular whirl of adolescent activities is reflected in the exaggerated attention to nuances of interpersonal relationships, in spontaneous conversation, and in the dearth of references to school subjects or situations. The increased frequency, length, and gossipy flavor of telephone conversations during adolescence

adds further testimony to the adolescent's passionate absorption with interpersonal relationships. There is also increased interest in parties, dancing, and in the use of the automobile for social purposes.

The reasons for this intense preoccupation with social experience are apparent. It is true, of course, that group activity is facilitated by the adolescent's greater mobility and newly won emancipation from the home. Group activity also provides an opportunity for gratifying newly acquired heterosexual needs and interests. Much more important, however, is the adolescent's increasing concern with acquiring earned status as an independent social entity. And since there can be no status apart from a system of relationships to a constituted social unit, adolescent peer groups are "formed spontaneously to serve the functions of a social institution, to secure a status and a social identity for youngsters not genuinely provided with such an identity by society at large" (Sherif & Cantril, 1947). Denied membership in the adult community that dispenses status roles in the central stratum of social interaction, he must create a substantive albeit peripheral status-giving instrumentality of his own.

Hence, more out of necessity than out of inclination,

adolescents progressively turn to the closer company of age-mates in their transition from childhood to adulthood....in an adverse adult-made world in which they are marginal in varying degrees. They interact in their own adolescent circles, limited and influenced, of course, by their particular social setting at large....[Their] most intense strivings for status and approval take place within such groups....This gives rise to certain norms of behavior, to fashions and fads of dress and amusement peculiar to various adolescent groups. During these years of transition, adolescents achieve immediate status through conformity to the norms of their age-mate groups. For the time being these peculiar norms of experience and behavior become the adolescent's own values, determining his personal relationships and attitudes to an important degree.

(Sherif & Cantril, 1947)

And since the peer group is almost the exclusive source of his extrinsic adequacy based on the earned status that he so desperately seeks, it is hardly surprising that he immerses himself so intensely in group experience, becomes so conscious of

his own and others' status in the group, and seems so willing to undergo personal sacrifices to render it loyalty and preserve its integrity.

### **The Adolescent Peer Group in Relation to the Wider Community**

Like the child, therefore, the adolescent continues to enjoy a buffered relationship to the culture at large. He is anchored in a peripheral subculture of his own making that cherishes values and established criteria for status distinct from those of the adult community. But here the resemblance ends, and several important distinctions arise. First, although many of the adolescent's characteristic interim goals are discontinuous with those of adults, they more nearly approximate adult standards and levels of behavior than do the child's. Also, the adolescent is more aware of their interim and substitutive nature, and is simultaneously making plans for his own inclusion in the adult world. Second, although isolated from the main currents of adult society, the adolescent has a more lively interest in and keener insight into its inner workings than does his younger

contemporary. Last, the adolescent peer culture conforms more closely to the adult model of socialization: a group of nonrelatives outside the home determines and controls the individual's major source of current status.

It is clear, therefore, that the social goals of adolescents are basically oriented toward the adult world and that the chief function of the adolescent peer group is to provide an interim status. This much becomes evident from the fact that it dissolves as soon as adolescents achieve anchorage and status roles in the wider community. It can also be inferred from the fact that the social experience of the peer group is hardly discontinuous with the types of social skills and attitudes necessary for adult socialization. In fact, some of the chief functions that both adolescents and their culture attribute to the peer group is the apprenticeship it provides for adult living. During the enforced period of waiting, the adolescent develops the social skills he believes will aid him when he enters the adult arena. His elders are grateful for the opportunity to reassure themselves that he has internalized sufficiently well the appropriate attitudinal patterns of his social class reference group to be entrusted later with equal membership in it.

Finally, it is important to realize that the adolescent peer

group is related to the wider community in the very important sense that its nature, structure, norms, and purposes are largely conditioned by the characteristics of the **particular** adult culture or subculture in which it is embedded. As a survey of various types of adolescent peer groups shows, such

group formations [fail] in the larger sense [to enjoy] any existence independent of the social milieu in which they are formed. For these groups are obviously, in turn, products of economic, ethnic, and other major social situations in the society at large....The very factors that give rise to spontaneous groups are inevitably found as features of the larger social system. And by the same token, the particular activities, standards, and the like that provide individuals with social standing, status, and popularity in the larger society, or in a particular stratum or locality of that larger society, loom as important in the activities of these more or less well-structured subgroups....

In the last analysis even the major established standards of success or failure of the gang or the

gangster world are derived from the competitive, individualistic and financially hoarding standards of the society at large,,,,,The major patterns of the gang world are derived from the social system in which it functions. (Sherif & Cantril, 1947)

### **General Characteristics of Adolescent Group Life**

#### **Greater Emphasis on Subjective Experience**

In contrast to the essentially more extroverted preadolescent who is typically content merely to participate in group activities, the adolescent is much more interested in the subjective analysis of group experience. He is vitally concerned with subtle overtones and elusive undercurrents in interpersonal relations and attempts through introspection to conceptualize them more precisely. To be accepted formally as an impersonal social entity is no longer sufficient. He craves intimate acceptance as a person and is much more sensitive to the feelings of acceptance and rejection directed both toward himself and toward his fellow group members (Ausubel et al., 1952; Gordon, 1972).

It is at first glance difficult to reconcile this greater emphasis on subjective experience with the adolescent's more



fervent and overt participation in group experience and diminished expression of individuality. Why as a more introspective and introverted personality should he manifest so strikingly the characteristics of extroversion? The most plausible suggestion is that despite his greater proclivities toward introversion he is obliged to surrender himself more completely to group interests and to forego his individuality because the group and not the home is the major source of his status. The marginality of the adolescent's status, his dependence on peer group acceptance, and the greater structural need of the adolescent peer group for conformity to its standards all produce an apparent but spurious increase in extroversion. Nevertheless, although the adolescent is required to participate more intensively in group activities and to place greater restraints on his individuality, there are no external restrictions on his introverted tendency to subjectivize experience.

This greater need for more subjective and personal group experience is reflected in the adolescent's disposition to abandon the larger "gang" for the smaller and more intense "crowd" or clique. Except in disorganized urban areas where gangs fulfill a special compensatory function in response to the unique deprivations of the boys and girls who live there, gang interests

are more typically representative of the preadolescent era (Hartup, 1970). Although preadolescent gangs were typically unisexual until recently, contemporary American society is showing a trend away from the severe sex cleavage which was heretofore characteristic of our culture, and in this respect facilitates the adolescent's transition to the more typically heterosexual intimate "crowd" or clique.

### **More Group Consciousness**

In distinguishing the peer groups of childhood from those of adolescence, one can easily observe that the adolescent gang or club is characterized by a solidarity and feeling of group consciousness that in most instances the social groups formed by young children lack.

The factors responsible for this enhancement of group consciousness are threefold, First, both structurally and functionally the adolescent peer group is a more definite, cohesive, and perceptible social entity than the group formations of childhood. It is by far a more organized, stable, and distinctive institution than the loosely knit and casual groupings of children, and also serves far more important functions for status needs, training, emancipation, and resistance. If only

because of the tremendous power it wields over their lives, adolescents have reason to be acutely aware of its existence. Second, group solidarity becomes a more important and meaningful concept during adolescence. The ability of the peer group to gain status and privileges for its members is clearly dependent on the extent to which it can maintain its unity and integrity as a distinctive organization. Thus, every adolescent has a personal stake in enhancing and safeguarding the cohesiveness and influence of the group. Self-interest imposes group-mindedness on him. Third, the greater concern with power and status that adolescents characteristically manifest in and of itself makes them more self-consciously aware of the status-giving and "pressure group" functions of their group formations.

### **Greater Stratification along Social Class Lines**

During adolescence there is greater selectivity in the organization and composition of peer groups than during childhood. Douvan and Gold (1966) point out that studies of cliques demonstrate that "the game of **inclusion** and **exclusion** is both more fevered and deadly at adolescence. Younger children form groups and practice exclusion, but at adolescence the force of the identity quest invests these ritual forms with greater significance." Adolescents are considerably more conscious than

children of such factors as social-class status, ethnic and racial origin, and religious affiliation (Ausubel, 1970). A number of studies (e.g., Havighurst et al, 1962) have brought out the force of social classes in establishing clique lines in particular (Havighurst, 1962; Hollingshead, 1949).

During adolescence, caste and class lines are drawn much more sharply, and only rarely is there any serious overlapping of social strata in the organization of the adolescent peer group. As already pointed out, the reason for this development is the decreasing tolerance that the adult world shows for deviation from the approved pattern of class values as children advance in age. Once they stand at the threshold of the wider community, "playing is for keeps" and sentimental notions of "equality" can no longer be indulged. This is not to say that individual differences in personality are no longer important in determining relative status among a heterogeneous group of adolescents. Such differences continue to operate, but only intraclique-wise, after differential factors of social-class origin have selectively organized individuals into relatively homogeneous subgroups. With his and their increasing age it becomes decreasingly possible for a child with a winning personality to gain acceptance from his economically more favored contemporaries if he happens to come

from the "wrong side of the tracks."

### **Heterosexual Basis of Organization**

The organization of the adolescent peer group differs strikingly from that of its preadolescent precursor. It is predicated on heterosexual attraction and joint participation in activities suitable for both boys and girls. Sociometric studies indicate a fair amount of cross-sex choices in the primary grades, an almost complete dearth of such choices during preadolescence, and a rapidly increasing choice of members of the opposite sex during the junior high-school and high-school periods (Bradley & Newhouse, 1975). One of the important implicit functions of the adolescent peer group is to provide suitable opportunities for gratifying new interests in persons of the opposite sex.

Their earlier sexual maturation directs girls' interest to such heterosexual social activities as dancing and parties before boys. During the junior high-school period girls take the initiative in converting uninterested and somewhat reluctant boys into dancing partners, and in "dragging" them to parties of their own contrivance. Were it not for this pressure from girls the difference between the sexes in the emergence of these interests would undoubtedly be even greater than it is.

**Other Social Changes During Adolescence**

In addition to the above trends in adolescent socialization, several characteristic social developments take place from early to late adolescence. Structurally, adolescent groups undergo increasing differentiation into more selective and intimate subgroups; choices of "best friends" become more stable; and the concept of mutuality becomes the focal point of friendship in which interaction replaces the preadolescent notion of parallel partnership (Douvan & Gold, 1966). Dating and "going steady" increase in frequency (Douvan & Gold, 1966), and social activities show greater formality and sophistication. Older adolescents are more susceptible than younger adolescents to the influence of the standards and values of the peer group.

Toward the close of adolescence, closer identification with adult patterns of values develops. The outward behavior of adolescents becomes more sedate, restrained, and dignified. Marriage and family life are contemplated as more imminent possibilities. However, steady dating for social reasons is probably as important and as common as steady dating that is marriage-oriented. This seems to apply to both high school and college students. Thus, heterosexual attachments are no longer

commonly perceived to be related to problems of long-term affectional needs and mating. Serious attention is also given to vocational choice and preparation.

### **Structural Characteristics of Adolescent Peer Groups**

Adolescent peer groups use most of the organizational principles of adult societies. These groups resemble adult formations more closely than childhood groupings in formality, stability, complexity and differentiation of roles, and self-consciousness of hierarchical distinction and interpersonal attitudes. Like adult groups, "they have group purposes, standards of values, and rules of behavior....Such groups also have methods of securing conformity....[Although] the individuals in any such group may remain constant over a long period of time, many changes [occur] in its objectives...its values...and its relation to the adult society" (Tryon, 1944).

But despite the general similarity of the adolescent peer group culture to adult groupings, the structural properties of the former are to a certain extent uniquely derived from the special needs of the youth group and are especially influenced through imitation of and initiation by members of the next older

developmental level (Ausubel, 1950).

Although various adolescent groups have many functions in common, a fact which makes for generality in such structural characteristics as differentiation into subgroups, conformity requirements, and effectiveness of sanctions, it is clear that the structural properties of different groups will vary according to (1) the specific aspirations of individual group members; (2) their relative feelings of belongingness in the community as a whole; and (3) the particular or specialized goals and functions of a given peer group. These factors are demonstrably related to social-class values, ethnic and regional traditions, degree of social mobility, and specific kinds of deprivations (Sherif & Sherif, 1964).

It is estimated that 90% of adolescents belong to a peer group, formal or informal (Palmonari et al., 1989), more often the latter. The nature of the group they join is only of secondary importance; more crucial by far are the peer relationships that are formed (Pomberri et al., 1990).

The popular concept of "peer pressure" seems to imply that the influence of peer groups on adolescents is either independent to that of parents or merely antagonistic to it. Actually it is mainly interactive or interdependent with parents' influence,



depending on the peer group context (Brown et al., 1993). Even if it is largely indirect it is still notable and identifiable (Brown & Huang, 1995). The various functional types of adolescents that make up a representative peer group may include the following popular types: jocks, brains, druggies, normals, loners, and toughs (Youniso et al., 1994), the meaning and significance of whose nicknames are self-evident. The distress level of the members (in male peer groups, but not in female) tends to approximate the prevailing level of the group as a whole (Hogue & Steinberg, 1995).

### **Origins of the Adolescent Peer Group**

According to psychoanalytic theory, the adolescent peer group (and, indeed, the major portion of the adolescent's preoccupation with group experience) is a simple derivative of the mechanism of sublimation. It is assumed that the energy of the culturally frustrated sex drive is directly and compensatorily channeled into group activities and, as a result, sex needs are vicariously satisfied. We have presented evidence that psychophysiological sex drives cannot be successfully repressed or satisfied by indirect means; that premarital intercourse in lower-class groups and more prevalent petting and masturbation (and, more recently, sexual

intercourse) in middle-class segments of our culture gratify these drives. The origins of the adolescent peer group can be more parsimoniously traced to (1) the practice, established earlier in childhood and preadolescence, of spontaneously forming age-mate groupings for play purposes; (2) the catalytic effect of the urgent need for achieving anchorage and earned status; and (3) the impossibility of realizing these goals in adult society. Peer-group activities undeniably reduce the total load of frustrations; however, they do this not by vicariously gratifying blocked sex impulses, but by improving the adjustment picture in other important areas of ego needs.

### **Differentiation into Cliques**

Of the adolescent's greater need for more intimate and subjective social experience we can say that "the age-mate reference group...defines identification and personal preferences only in broad outlines and only for standards and fads common to all who relate themselves to these groups" (Sherif & Cantril, 1947).

The adolescent clique is a more or less permanent, closely knit, selective, and highly intimate small group of individuals who share common secrets (sexual and otherwise), desires,

attitudes, problems, interests, and aspirations such as those based on family background, school activities, and the like (Good & Good, 1974; Sherif & Cantril, 1947). Shared purposes, interests, and social class values, although prerequisite, are not sufficient for clique formation. More important are personal compatibility, congeniality, and bonds of mutual admiration and affection. A crowd is a larger social aggregation in which interpersonal feelings are less important and more impersonality prevails. A **crowd** need only be homogeneous in background, goals, interests, and ideals, and does not require unvarying homogeneity of social distance between members. An adolescent gang is similar in all of these ways to a crowd, but it is usually unisexual, places greater emphasis on achieving a specific group goal (sexual, athletic, delinquent, aggressive), requires more solidarity and loyalty from its members, maintains a more hostile, rebellious, and conspiratorial attitude toward organized adult society, and resembles the preadolescent gang in its preoccupation with excitement, adventure, and the formal trappings of organizational secrecy.

The reference group concept permits specification of the particular group or set of people on whom the individual

depends in appraising himself and others. In complex and changing societies, these people may not be readily identified by socioeconomic classification or group of people. The relative status of this group in the social organization and his own position within it serve as standards [anchors] for his appraisal of performance by himself and others. (Sherif, 1958)

Studies of adolescent cliques continue to show that social class has at least some influence on clique differentiation. Other factors influencing clique differentiation are sex (Collins & Thomas, 1974; Hollingshead, 1949), attitudes toward school, IQ, and favorable or unfavorable perceptions of teachers toward children in a class. This is true both in the primary school and in the secondary school.

In addition, other more personal criteria are applied. An important factor during early adolescence is degree of social maturity, which is usually a function of pubescent status. Retarded sexual development prevents an individual from being accepted in a clique of normally mature adolescents. Appropriateness of interests is a more important criterion for membership in a crowd than in a clique; in a clique it is a

necessary rather than a sufficient condition. At the clique level, the most crucial selective factors are personality characteristics.

Although the personality characteristics that promote compatibility in a given clique vary, obviously, from one clique to the next, it is reasonable to suppose that an individual who enjoys high sociometric status in a particular "crowd" probably possesses the attributes of personality that would also make him acceptable to most of its component cliques. The personality factors associated with high sociometric status at various stages of adolescence will be discussed subsequently.

Snobbiness and exclusiveness in adolescent cliques cannot be interpreted as wholly a result of increased need for more intimate and congenial interpersonal relationships. There are at least two other motivations. First, by derogating other groups of individuals, perceiving them as inferior or undesirable, and treating them with contempt and scorn, it is clearly possible to relatively enhance one's own marginal status without expending the effort or ingenuity required for positive self-enhancement. This mechanism undoubtedly accounts in part for the strong prejudices of college students toward minority group members, for the condescending attitudes of high-prestige cliques (Junior League,

fraternity and sorority members) toward the nonelite majority, and for some of the general intolerance shown by adolescents for any kind of deviancy or alleged inadequacy. Second, through snobbiness and cliqueness, it is possible to both "corner" and limit the availability of status. By making status a scarcer commodity, one makes its achievement a more signal accomplishment; by creating a deprived and to-be-pitied out-group, one enhances considerably the advantages and enjoyment of in-group status. Furthermore, by adroit political maneuvering, cliques (e.g., fraternities) are able to acquire a monopoly on all important extracurricular posts and offices in high school and college.

It is interesting to note that "while the individual is highly dependent on his same-sex peers during adolescence, the awakening of heterosexual interests is not accompanied by a corresponding increase in sensitivity to unlike-sex peer pressure" (Collins & Thomas, 1974).

That girls are more status conscious and disdainful of subgroup members than boys is probably related to the fact that they traditionally enjoy less social mobility and fewer opportunities for acquiring earned status, and, therefore, seek to protect more jealously whatever status they do have. That is, even as adults, women depend more than men on derived status (the

status that accrues from husband, family, or social group) instead of an earned status that results from individual accomplishment and which is capable of transcending the limitations of family and class origin. Women today, however, increasingly play the role of traditional mothers and at the same time conceive of themselves as independent persons equal with men, form ego attitudes relative to different reference groups simultaneously, and experience uncertainty, conflict, and "confused search for resolution" (Sherif, 1968).

### **Conformity Aspects of the Peer Culture**

From the preadolescent to the adolescent period of development, as the child's dependence on, and stake in the effectiveness of, the peer group increase, the latter's power to exact conformity is concomitantly enhanced (Constanzo & Shaw, 1966; Schmuck, 1969).

This conformity assumes exaggerated patterns, particularly relative to conspicuous aspects of behavior, such as musical tastes, fashions, and fads (Mussen et al., 1974), to such an extent that for the adolescent there can be no stronger argument for having or doing a thing than that "all the others are doing

it." Opinions, prejudices, beliefs, likes, and dislikes are also determined by the group; and the boy or girl who differs is made to feel the force of group ostracism unless he or she has sufficient strength to gather his peers around him (Stone & Church, 1973). The adolescent turns increasingly toward age-mate groups and sets. "Even though his parents are loved and valued, the result is reduced emphasis on parental capability and overestimation of the worth of age-mate capacities" (Sherif, 1950).

#### **Why the Peer Group Emphasizes Conformity**

Despite the apparent self-evidentness of the proposition, it is still necessary to inquire why such exaggerated emphasis is placed on conformity in adolescent peer groups. Two different kinds of explanations may be plausibly advanced: (1) those relating to the structural requirements of peer groups and (2) those relating to the characteristics of adolescents.

No institution, especially if it has status-giving functions, can exist for any length of time without due regard by its members for uniform, regular, and predictable adherence to a set of avowed rules and traditions. Hence, in its efforts to establish a new and distinctive subculture and to evolve a unique set of criteria for



the determination of status and prestige, the peer society must do everything in its power to set itself off as recognizably distinct and separate from the adult society which refuses it membership. If this distinctiveness is to be actually attained, it cannot admit the possibility of widespread nonconformity; since obviously if every adolescent were permitted to exercise his newly acquired craving for individuality, an unrecognizable medley of behavior patterns would ensue. Under such conditions, there would be no peer culture, and hence no compensatory source of status (Ausubel, 1950).

Conformity is also essential to maintain the group solidarity that is necessary to offer effective and organized resistance to the encroachments of adult authority. Obviously, if an appeal to precedent or to a prevailing standard of adolescent behavior is to be the basis for exacting privileges and concessions from adults, a solid and united front with a minimum of deviancy must be presented to the world. Once a precedent is established as the result of widespread and uniform acceptance of a given practice, each individual stands to profit from it. Johnny can now say, "I want to stay out until midnight on Saturdays; all the other boys do."

The principle of group conformity, therefore, is a self-

protective device which arises from the needs of the peer culture to establish and maintain its identity as the chief adolescent status-giving institution in our society; and he who dares to defy its authority and thereby expose the group to possible extinction becomes an arch-villain, an enemy of peer society, worthy of receiving the supreme penalty in its arsenal of retribution—complete and unequivocal ostracism (Ausubel, 1950).

Apart from the structural needs of the peer group, various developmental characteristics of adolescents make them prone to overvalue the importance of conformity. First, any person with marginal status is excessively sensitive to the threat of forfeiting what little status he enjoys as a result of incurring the disapproval of those on whom he is dependent. To allay the anxiety from the threat of disapproval, he conforms more than is objectively necessary to retain group acceptance or to avoid censure and reprisal. Thus, many perfectly safe opportunities for the expression of individuality are lost (Ausubel, 1950).

Second, as already pointed out, adolescents are partly motivated to perceive age mates as deviants, nonconformists, and out-groupers because by so doing they can enhance the value of their own conformity and in-group status. The larger the number of persons who can be perceived as outside the charmed circle, the

more individuals they can perceive as inferior to themselves, the greater their own self-esteem becomes by comparison, and the more status value their in-group membership acquires. These ends can be most expeditiously effected by (1) elevating by fiat certain esoteric practices or characteristics into unique virtues, values, and symbols of status, (2) imposing these standards on others by having them accept them at face value, and (3) acquiring a very low threshold for the perception of deviancy from these standards so that only few individuals can qualify for admission to the select circle of the originators and only "true" exemplifiers of the hallowed norms (Ausubel, 1950).

**Why the Peer Group Can Compel Conformity.** Pressures for conformity to peer group standards originate both from the group and from within the individual. The group implicitly and explicitly makes clear to the individual that it expects and demands conformity for the moral support, the feeling of belongingness, the anchorage, the derived status, and the opportunities for earned status that it extends to him. These pressures become evident when the adolescent finds that he must win a place for himself in the group by conforming to its values and standards and by faithfully participating in its interests and activities (Packard, 1961;

Phelps & Horrocks, 1958; Segel, 1951; Thompson, 1965). Conformity becomes the acknowledged price of acceptance, and full membership is carefully withheld until the group feels reasonably assured of the candidate's willingness to assume the obligations he incurs in return for the patent advantages he acquires.

The adolescent really has little choice but to accept the proposition that is offered him. He is dependent on the peer group for status, security, and anchorage during these hectic years of transition. Sherif and Cantril (1947) hypothesized that the degree of influence of the agemate membership group varies directly with the degree of psychological weaning from grown-ups and the intensity of adult-youth conflict; and that the need for conformity to peer-group standards is also in direct proportion to the increasing marginality of the adolescent's status. Hartup's (1970) review of research on peer influences reveals among other things the extent to which the peer group serves a reference function, and points to the adequacy of family adjustment as a key factor in determining peer influence. Devereux (1970) states that there is "clear evidence that the most peer-oriented and gang-involved children tend to come either from highly permissive or highly punitive homes, and that adult-conforming children tend to come from homes with optimum combinations of adequate but not

smothering support, firm but not rigid control, and moderate but not excessive punishment...There was also evidence that these intermediate, moderate ranges of parental behavior are related to autonomy in children."

After the adolescent wins an assured place for himself in the group, still other factors reinforce conforming tendencies. He learns that group approval brings a welcome "reprieve" from his transitional anxiety, uncertainty, and disorientation. If his group approves, he can feel absolutely certain of the correctness of his position. No longer need he be tortured by ambiguity or conflicting standards. With experience he also gains insight into the group's structural need for conformity if it is to survive and maintain its identity. It then becomes easier for him to accept the burden of conformity when he perceives that his status and his privileges depend on it.

Last, the adolescent comes eventually to render conformity automatically as a voluntarily assumed obligation growing out of the feelings of loyalty, belongingness, gratitude, and indebtedness generated in the very process of interaction.

In closely knit groups individuals will undergo much personal sacrifice to render each other mutual help or to prosecute group goals. For the sake of the group an adolescent may incur risks and

face dangers that he would never dream of undertaking for his own benefit. Sherif and Sherif (1964), in their peer-group experiments confirm what they have repeatedly observed in the field, and state that proportionate to the stability of a group, its norms are binding on members even when they are not face-to-face. As one experiment suggests so clearly, "this adherence is not blind conformity but a product of interaction with high affect for people who rally count for one another. Unless this emotional nexus is clearly understood, there is little chance for adequate analysis of the phenomenon of conformity-deviation during adolescence" (Pollis, 1964).

Allegiance to group norms may under certain circumstances be carried to the point of participation in delinquent activities of which an individual adolescent might personally disapprove on moral grounds (Ausubel, 1950).

If the implicit pressures of the group, the internalized restraints, and endogenously derived dispositions of the individual are insufficient to keep him in line, explicit sanctions are imposed. Depending on the seriousness of the offense and the nature and functions of the group, the punishment may vary from ridicule, censure, and rebuff to complete ostracism and even death. Shaming and ridicule are the most frequent and widespread

forms of penalty used by peer groups. In addition to the privately-felt self-depreciation before the group, experienced in any feeling of shame (including the shame of guilt), such shaming practices involve pointed public attention to the infraction, publicly-administered scorn or rebuke, and the exposure of the culprit to general ridicule, humiliation, and "loss of face." The mere fact that public shaming is resorted to does not necessarily eliminate the possibility that the offender experiences guilt feelings whether before and subsequent to his offense or with and following his public humiliation.

**Individual Differences in the Need to Conform.** The prevalence and strength of conforming tendencies during adolescence do not mean that there are no individual differences in the extent and quality of this trait. The highly assertive person, for example, can only restrain his individuality to a point; and the extreme introvert inevitably draws a line beyond which he refuses to participate in boisterous and exhibitionistic activities. The adolescent who has a highly developed set of moral or religious convictions may refuse to condone the illegal or immoral practices of his group. Other individuals may have overwhelming interests that are regarded with scorn by their age-mates. Finally, the

nonsatellizer's need for ego aggrandizement and his lack of loyalty and "we-feeling" may cause him to betray group interests for personal advantage. If any of these personality traits are unusually strong they may lead to sufficient deviancy either to make the individual unacceptable for peer-group membership or to induce him to reject the desirability of identifying himself with his agemates.

#### **Impact of Group Structural Needs on Adolescent Values**

It is hardly surprising that some of these unique structural characteristics of adolescent peer groups inevitably influence the value systems of adolescents. The need for conformity places a premium on loyalty and moral expediency, encourages snobbishness and intolerance, and de-emphasizes the importance of moral courage and consistency. Devereux (1970) reports that in the Cornell studies, subjects "who reported frequent association with peers consistently pictured themselves as more ready and willing to yield to temptation and go along with the crowd." He points to the "sobering set of findings" which indicate that the hold of the peer group increases from middle childhood to adolescence for peer-oriented children at the expense of the family.



That adolescents evolve extreme, unique, and esoteric values largely reflects the structural need to establish a distinctive subculture, recognizably different from those of adults and children. Respect for this structural need confines competition between groups and between individuals within a group to a struggle to outdo others in esotericism. From this arises a bewildering array of fads which change swiftly and capriciously; but while each is in vogue, woe unto him who dares to challenge its axiomatic superiority over all other possible alternatives with which it is compared.

Last, the undercurrent of stereotyped hostility and resistiveness to adults, that accounts for much of the peer group's solidarity, gives rise to an emphasis on norms of behavior that are deliberately perverse and shocking by adult standards. One manifestation of this rebellious attitude is an insistence on exemplifying, both prematurely and in extreme fashion, all of the external symbols of adult privilege and sophistication that under ordinary circumstances would be perceived as immoderate and in poor taste.

### **Interpersonal Relationships within the**

### **Peer Group**

Up to this point, we have focused on the general characteristics of group experience during adolescence and on the structural properties of the adolescent peer group. But what about interpersonal relations among individual adolescents? Why do some individuals achieve high status and others low status within the group? Why are some rejected whereas others become leaders? Why do certain individuals choose each other as friends?

All of the above issues are really questions about the relationship between individual differences in personality, ability, and intelligence, on the one hand, and the relative standing of the individual group member, on the other. Also crucial to this relationship are differences among individuals in their approach to group experience and in their relative needs for status and prestige. Nor should we overlook the fact that as a result of interaction between individual differences in personality or between conflicting needs for superior standing in the group, tensions are generated that exert a disruptive influence on intragroup cohesion, the very factor which accounts for the social effectiveness of the peer group. Because the adolescent has no alternative criterion by which to measure his

success, the greater success of someone whose status is similar to his may threaten to disrupt the solidarity of those on whom he depends, and thus, appear to him as a direct challenge to his own adequacy.

Because crowds, and especially cliques, by definition, are self-selected on the basis of mutual affinity and compatibility, interpersonal relationships in these settings tend to be particularly friendly and harmonious. This, however, by no means ruled out rivalries, malicious gossip, hostility, and aggression—both verbal and physical, in one Finnish peer group (Rauste-von Wright, 1989). Nor is bullying in Australian peer groups unknown (Rigby & Slee, 1991). Somewhat surprising, however, was the tendency for many of the onlookers to despise the victim and to admire the bully. As might easily be anticipated, the higher status, more popular students in a peer group have more close friends and participate more in peer and extracurricular activities (Franzoi et al., 1994). Boys generally acquire prestige through sports, grades, and intelligence, whereas girls acquire it merely through physical appearance (Suitor & Reavis, 1995).

### **Individual Approaches to Group Experience**

Although it is true that, in general, adolescents have

greater need than children to acquire earned status, the relative magnitude and urgency of this need is inversely proportional to the strength of the residual intrinsic self-esteem that a given adolescent brings with him from childhood. The relative urgency of the need for earned status also varies inversely with the degree of current derived status that an adolescent is able to extract from his relationship with others. It follows, therefore, that individual differences in the need for status in the adolescent peer group will depend, at least in part, on the extent to which satellization takes place during childhood. To the individual with a normal history of satellization, peer-group membership also provides derived status and constitutes an intrinsic ego support. He experiences a certain spontaneous joy and enthusiasm in group activity which follows from the "we-feeling" associated with group relatedness. To the nonsatellizer, on the other hand, the field of interpersonal relations is just another arena in which he contends for extrinsic (earned) status and additional ego aggrandizement. There is no identification with or self-subordination to group interests and no possibility of deriving spontaneous satisfaction from gregarious activity. Every social move is carefully deliberated for the possible advantages that may accrue from it; and the currency of social interchange is supplied by the

synthetic manufacture of attitudes, remarks, and behavior that can be construed as conventionally appropriate for the specifications of a given situation.

Surprising changes in introversion-extroversion and in general approach to group experience may occur at adolescence, when the individual is largely released from the influence of the home and enters the more autonomous, demanding, and status-conscious adolescent peer culture. The essentially "tender-skinned" individual, protected by a benevolent home, who had hitherto impressed others as extroverted, may now show greater introversion when his fate is more completely in the hands or less solicitous age-mates. Contrariwise, an intrinsically "thick-skinned" child, who appeared to recoil from interpersonal relations as a result of rejection or overdomination in the home, may become much more outgoing when his relatively more benevolent peer group plays the major role in his socialization.

### **Bases for Relative Status and Prestige in the Group**

**Evaluation of Peer Group Status.** The preceding analysis of individual differences in the need for earned status and in approach to group experience has important implications for the

evaluation of a given individual's measured hierarchical status in the group. First, the adolescent's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status he enjoys is a function not only of its absolute magnitude but also of his aspirations for status. Second, this status can lead to feelings of success or failure, of adequacy or inadequacy, only to the extent that he is ego-involved with the group. If the status that the group can bestow lies completely beyond the sphere of his ego interests, it matters little to him whether it is high or low.

Equally important for evaluating an individual's status in the group is the methodological problem of determining it. Traditionally, sociometric techniques measure such status in terms of weighted frequency with which an individual is chosen as first, second, or third choice by his age-mates for such roles as seat mate, friend, work mate, or fellow committee member. However, when the sociometric status scores of an adolescent group member obtained in this way were correlated against corresponding scores derived by averaging the ratings of acceptance-rejection given an individual by **all** of the group members, the resulting correlation was only 0.46 (Ausubel, 1952). Hence, it means one thing to achieve a relatively high level of popularity with most members of a group, and something quite different to be wanted frequently as

a best friend. Which type of status is more meaningful can be determined only in reference to the needs and desires of a particular individual. An ostensibly popular adolescent in a "formed group" of casual friends may, in terms of his deep needs for intimate personal relationships, be no more than a "successful isolate" or "stranger in his group" who is compensating for rejection at the hands of the clique he truly wishes to join by participating vigorously in lower priority social activities. On the other hand, it is also possible for some individuals with little status in the group to survive fairly well because of one or two close friends.

**Factors Associated with High Peer Group Status.** In general, popularity among peers depends on the willingness of the individual, child or adolescent, to accept the group, and to make necessary compromises toward the peaceful and efficient operation of the group with his needs, purposes, and objectives (Hartup, 1970; Tryon, 1944). Since different groups have different goals and values, since changes occur in the needs, purposes, and personnel of a single group, and since an individual enjoys membership in many different groups and is even valued for different qualities by special subgroups (e.g., boys and girls)

within a group, the factors associated with high peer-group status are extremely variable. Research findings on this question can have reference only to the mean prestige value of various characteristics among different representative or special groups of adolescents, and not to the factors that actually account for high or low status in any particular group.

Numerous factors of personal background in different areas of adjustment have been found to be significantly related to sociometric status at three contrasting economic levels and for adolescents generally. Of great significance is the fact that "a basic commonness" was discovered in the background experiences predictive of social acceptability among the economic levels. This indicates widespread agreement within the culture about desirable traits of personality. Hartup (1970) in his review of the literature states that peer acceptance is directly associated with such personality traits as friendliness, sociability, social visibility, and outgoingness. Moreover, the results of these studies show that these particular characteristics hold true across age levels—for preschool children as well as adolescents. Data for young adolescents also parallel those for younger children. Peer acceptance between the ages of 12 and 16 is positively associated with sociability; lack of desire to change



the behavior of other members of the peer group; being helpful, good natured, and the "life of the party"; friendliness and enthusiasm; and being "good company." Among older adolescents positive correlations between sociability and peer acceptance are reported. In fact, social participation and peer acceptance are positively related at all age levels, even though their reciprocal influence remains to be verified by other than the correlational techniques employed to date by studies on the subject (Devereux, 1970).

Adolescent studies (Devereux, 1970) indicate that social acceptance is positively related to conformity to peer-group mores; to moral judgment as perceived by peers (Devereux, 1970), and to sensitivity to the feelings of others. However, popularity with peers is more important for girls than for boys (Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975). For girls, sociability was correlated more highly with acceptance than with prestige. In both sexes, on the other hand, prestige was more highly correlated with marks, school effort, and other achievement-oriented characteristics than with peer acceptance. Peer acceptance, therefore, appears to have somewhat different correlates during adolescence than does prestige (Hartup, 1970).

**Age Trends in the Prestige Value of Different Traits.** Despite the general correspondence of preadolescent and adolescent evaluations of personality traits to those of adults, several noteworthy changes occur with increasing age. Between the sixth and twelfth grades, talkativeness, bossiness, and restlessness are increasingly associated with higher social acceptability, whereas the reverse is true of sophistication. At the age of twelve, the demure, sedate, docile, prim, ladylike, and nonaggressive girl who conforms to adult expectations, enjoys highest status in the groups; but at the age of fifteen, many of the criteria for the idealized boy such as extroversion, activity, and good sportsmanship are highly acceptable for the girl. Among other admired traits are competence and poise in heterosexual social activities and the quality of being fascinating or glamorous to the other sex. Among boys there is more continuity from ages twelve to fifteen in the pattern of traits associated with social prestige. Physical skill, aggressiveness, and daring are still important, but overt defiance of adult standards is regarded as immature. Superimposed on the preadolescent pattern is a new emphasis on tidiness, personal acceptability, and social poise in heterosexual situations.

During the same age range, boys and girls both place less

emphasis on bravery, quickness, and the ability to be amusing and value more highly the more mature and adult qualities of broadmindedness, cooperativeness, and dependability. From high school to college there is a similar trend for the traits admired in the opposite sex.

**Sex Differences in the Basis of Peer Status.** The chief difference in the qualities admired in the opposite sex by adolescent boys and girls lies in the greater emphasis girls place on family social standing and in the greater emphasis boys place on physical attraction and "good looks" (Purdue Opinion Panel, 1961). More important, however, is the greater continuity from preadolescence to adolescence in the qualities that make for high peer status among boys. Unlike boys, girls have no core value—such as athletic prowess—that persists in the peer culture as a significant determinant of status. Heterosexual effectiveness becomes for adolescent boys just another component of previously defined masculinity; but in the case of girls it becomes an entirely new and almost solitary criterion for femininity and for feminine prestige in the adolescent peer society.

But if boys enjoy an advantage in this respect, girls are more fortunate in another. For a boy to be popular with girls he

must first achieve popularity with his own sex on the basis of superior masculine attributes. But "girls who are most attractive to boys can be liked or disliked or even regarded almost with indifference by their own sex." If a girl is not accepted by her own sex, another source of acceptance is always open to her; whereas rejection by the peer group is more complete and devastating for boys.

**Continuity of Peer Status during Adolescence.** Because of the continuity in (1) the personality traits that are valued in the culture at large and in a particular subculture, (2) the personnel of a given peer group, and (3) the personality structure of individuals, it would seem reasonable to expect that relative status in the peer group maintains considerable stability over the adolescent years. Between junior and senior high school, there is considerable continuity in the individuals who provide leadership to the group. Sherif and Sherif (1964) in their observations of several dozen existing groups of adolescents in natural field conditions found in their analysis of observers' ratings of status over a period of 6 months to a year greater status consistency for the highest and lowest status positions and greater variability in the intermediate ranks.

On the other hand, changes in the membership and purposes of the peer group and in the pattern of personality traits that are admired at different stages of adolescence<sup>i</sup> result in inevitable fluctuations in the relative status of individuals. Even in the highly structured street-corner gang, where positions in the group are relatively well-defined and stable, status should not be viewed in static terms. When the pattern of interaction changes, the customary way of interacting with other gang members associated with one's status is altered. Then a change in status position takes place. Some adolescents, therefore, have to cope with the problem of status deflation, whereas others have to learn how to handle new power that comes with higher status (Tryon, 1944).

In general, however, the status structure and the norms of the group "provide a remarkably accurate basis for predicting the behaviors of individual members" (Sherif & Sherif, 1964).

### **Perception of Status in the Group**

Realistic interpersonal relations and the smooth functioning of the group in terms of the differentiated status roles of its component members necessarily depend on the ability (socioempathy) of individuals to perceive to what extent they and others are

accepted or rejected by the group. We have noted that this ability improves with increasing age and accounts in part for the greater complexity and differentiation of older peer groups. At the adolescent level girls are significantly superior to boys in predicting the ratings of acceptance-rejection given them by their own but not by the opposite sex group. The sociometric attitudes (acceptance-rejection) of girls are also more accurately perceived by both sexes than those of boys. In perceiving the sociometric status of others, boys are more accurate for members of their own sex, whereas girls are equally well aware of the status hierarchies within each sex group (Ausubel & Schiff, 1955); their superiority to boys in this respect inheres in their ability to perceive more accurately the status of members of the opposite sex group.

The chief factor accounting for the relative accuracy of either an adolescent's perception of another's acceptance or rejection of himself or of the other's status in the group is his own degree of acceptance of that other person (Ausubel & Schiff, 1955). Acceptance of another results both in a more accurate perception and in an overestimate; rejection leads to precisely the opposite consequences. Surprisingly enough, there is no relationship whatsoever between ability to perceive own and

others' status in the group. But in accordance with the prevailing notion that women are more sensitive than men in perceiving interpersonal attitudes, and thereby in furthering their social effectiveness in group situations, adolescent girls (but not boys) who have superior socioempathic ability enjoy higher status in the group (Ausubel & Schiff, 1955). On the other hand, controlling for sex and for actual level of popularity, adolescents who perceive popularity as more valuable are more self-conscious and less stable in regard to self-awareness (Simmons, 1975).

### **Adolescent Friendships with Age Mates of the Same Sex**

Adolescent friendships are the ultimate consummation of a progressive selectivity and differentiation of interpersonal relations along a social distance scale that begins with crowd and clique formation. Although this final step generally occurs within the framework of crowd or clique membership, it may sometimes (as with deviants) be the sole form of positive social intercourse with age mates.

The purpose of adolescent friendships is not, as in preadolescence, merely to satisfy the need for a congenial but relatively impersonal playmate or companion in the prosecution of mutual interests, but rather to obtain intimate interpersonal

experience and mutual understanding and sympathy. With increasing age, children and adolescents turn more and more to their age mates in sharing confidences and seeking advice about problems that trouble them. Unlike preadolescents, who are intensely eager for a large number of friends, adolescents desire to form fewer but deeper, more intimate friendships. For similar reasons, "best friends" are almost invariably of the same sex, since it is practically impossible to overcome traditional barriers between the sexes in speaking freely about intimate personal problems, especially those concerning sex. Also, if a cross-sex relationship happens to become highly confidential, it is more than likely to lead eventually to affectional or marital ties.

**Bases for the Selection of Friends.** The selective factor in the determination of adolescent friendships can be inferred from two related lines of evidence: (1) from the ways in which pairs of friends are similar, as well as from the extent of this similarity;<sup>ii</sup> and (2) from the verbal statements of adolescents about the qualities they seek or desire in friends. It is clear that age, sex, and propinquity are determining factors in choice of friends among adolescents (Hartup, 1970; Makaric, 1971). Hartup (1970) in his review of the literature stresses the fact that the



role played by personality characteristics is far from being clear. Measuring devices currently available for ascertaining the resemblances between friends are too gross to give adequate insight into the subtle factors that obviously must be operative in generating mutual attraction between individuals.

The question of similarity or complementarity in friendship is not settled. Most studies dealing with this aspect of friendship have concentrated on adolescents but they are not extensive. Research results on similarities between friends are not in full agreement.

At any rate, the evidence we have indicates that friends are more similar than dissimilar to each other and that the degree of similarity in various traits differs widely. First, as one might reasonably anticipate, friends are similar in those traits that are necessary for adequate and equitable communication and for interaction between persons in chronological age, mental age, IQ, school grade, and socio-economic status. Propinquity is initially an important factor but becomes progressively less important as the increased physical mobility and expanding social horizon of children make it less of a limiting condition in the exercise of actual preferences. Girls' friendships are based more on congruencies in variables measuring labile, outgoing social

behavior. Thus, common sociobehavioral traits appear to be aspects of friendship choice in girls, whereas complementary qualities seem to be more salient in the friendship patterns of boys (Hartup, 1970).

**The stability of adolescent friendships.** The more serious and stable nature of adolescent interpersonal relations generally is reflected in friendships, which also exhibit increasing stability over the age range from eleven to eighteen. When the percentage of correspondence between the choices of best friend made on two occasions separated by a two-week interval is used as the criterion of stability, girls' friendships appear to be more stable than boys' after the age of fifteen. Long-term observation of relationships within the adolescent group, however, leads to the conclusion that the friendships of boys last longer.

Adolescent friendships break up for several reasons, the most self-evident of which is tension generated by disparity in age, ability, physical maturity, and socioeconomic status. But commonly, even when such differences do not exist, individuals simply "grow away from each other" in interests, ideals, goals, and social maturity. Other causes for disaffection include rivalry, group politics, and the innumerable factors that make for

friction in interpersonal relationships at any age level. Somewhat more specific to the adolescent period, perhaps, is the disintegration of "extension of the self" friendships. This tends to occur when dissatisfaction with the self-image is rampant.

**Sex Differences.** The basic differences between the friendships of adolescent boys and girls are related to the tendency for girls to be more snobbish, cliquish, and conscious of social-class distinctions. Girls establish more intimate and confidential relationships with each other, whereas boys are traditionally more reserved in revealing confidences and in exhibiting overt affection. In choosing friends, girls pay more attention than boys to social-class standing.

### **Leadership in Adolescence**

In contrast to friendship and popularity, which represent the outcome of the feelings (like-dislike, acceptance-rejection) that group members develop toward each other, leadership is more closely related to the functional properties of groups. This does not mean that the leader's personality and the group members' feelings toward him are irrelevant to the achievement and

maintenance of leadership. It means rather that those aspects of the leader's personality that affect the functional effectiveness of the group and those particular feelings of group members toward the leader that are related to his functional efficacy are most relevant to these problems.

The leader may be best described as the person who stimulates the group to action. Leadership status is a "hierarchical power dimension having to do with initiative and effective conduct of activities in the group and with control in **decision** processes" (Sherif & Sherif, 1964). Leadership, therefore, will be bestowed by the group on that individual who in its judgment has the personality attributes, the experience, and the skills to organize, mobilize, and represent the group best in achieving its paramount goals at a given stage of its development. It is significant that social insight is more of an attribute of the leader than of nonleaders. However, ability to judge group opinion is more effective in familiar and relevant issues; and the longer an individual has been a member of a group, the more likely he will be able to evaluate group opinion accurately (Creson & Blakeney, 1970).

In friendship and popularity, however, affectional attitudes toward others operate more as ends in themselves. It is highly

possible for a very ineffectual person to be popular; in fact, many easygoing individuals are popular for this very reason. But although popularity does not necessarily guarantee leadership, leaders, by the nature of things, can seldom be unpopular for any length of time and retain their status. Although a leader is not obliged to form close friendships within the group, if he does he is more apt to "weather declining status" more satisfactorily.

#### **How Leadership is Achieved and Maintained**

In accordance with its functional nature, leadership is conferred by the group as the top rank in the group structure and

involves the shared expectations of other members for a particular individual occupying that position. These expectations vary markedly in terms of the kinds of activities the group engages in and qualities which count in their scheme of things. Invariably, however, they involve the supposition that what the leader approves of, what he suggests himself, or what he decides will be accomplished, will work out well. When his initiations to action and his decisions lead to failure in interteam competition, or result in social

gatherings that bore and distress members, or get his fellow members into unnecessary trouble with authorities (parents, police, school)—then his word ceases to be effective. A new leader takes the initiative or the membership drifts away to other centers of interest.

(Sherif & Sherif, 1964)

The popularly held belief that gangs are creatures of dynamic leaders is seldom true. Quite the contrary. The leader emerges out of the interaction of the existing gang.

The "group-given" nature of adolescent leadership is apparent from the fact that the leader cannot successfully disregard the established traditions of the group or the common purposes that he is chosen to advance. He cannot wield his power capriciously or abusively (Thrasher, 1927); and more than any other member of the group, he is required to honor his obligations scrupulously (Whyte, 1943). Nor can adult authorities impose a leader on the group by choosing a promising candidate and "training" him for leadership. If this is done, actual leadership power is withdrawn by the group, and the adult-imposed individual retains at best a nominal status out of deference to his sponsors.

The group-given nature of leadership can also be inferred

from its situational character. The personality attributes or competencies that make for successful leadership in one culture, subculture, peer group, or even in one temporal phase of activity of a single peer group may lead to failure in another. To a certain extent, of course, the prestige of leadership ability in one area carries over without any objective justification to an entirely unrelated area ("halo effect"). Human beings in general feel more secure if they assume that a leader personifies the virtues his office requires. But the more experienced and sophisticated individuals become in group activities, the more they choose leaders on the basis of situational requirements, and the less they confuse the criteria for leadership with popularity or personal loyalty to friends.

Once attained, leadership in adolescence is maintained in various ways. Control through fear of physical prowess is much less important than in preadolescence, but it remains a significant factor in most lower-class gangs. More important in adolescent "crowds" is the leader's ability to give or withdraw belongingness, to help the group achieve its aims by his special skills or general cleverness, to influence the group to place high value on the activities in which he excels, and to manipulate situations to gratify the special needs and allay the anxieties of

insecure persons in the group. If he can succeed with these insecure persons he earns their loyalty and support; but first he must be perceptive enough to sense their difficulties and skillful enough to extend sympathy without incurring the wrath of the group for befriending deviants. Sherif and Sherif (1964) referring to varying latitudes of acceptance and leadership conclude that "the more significant the activity for the identity and continued maintenance of the group and its central interests, the narrower the range of acceptable behaviors for all members, the latitude for the leader being narrowest. Conversely, the more incidental the activity to the foregoing concerns of the group, the broader the range of individual variation without the arousal of sanctions, the latitude for the leader being greatest."

The skillful leader also exercises control and influences his constituency through his lieutenants (Whyte, 1943). And when leadership changes, it generally passes on to one of these rather than to a peripheral member of the group (Whyte, 1943). One of the surest signs of the impending elevation of a person to leadership is his increasing degree of association with individuals of high status in the group (Tryon, 1944).

**Characteristics of Adolescent Leaders.** Although the



characteristics of effective leaders vary depending on the requirements of the specific subculture, peer group, and situation, certain traits obviously have more leadership value than others in the majority of adolescent peer-group situations within the general framework of the American culture. Research findings agree that the adolescent leader surpasses the nonleader in six broad areas of personality that are self-evidently related to leadership functions: (1) **physical appearance:** attractive although not necessarily beautiful or handsome; appropriately clothed, judged by the standards of the group; acceptable body build and poise; athletic prowess; physical strength; (2) **intelligence:** above average mental alertness and energy—how much above average depends on the nature of the activities; (3) **decision-making ability:** discriminating judgment; firmness of decision; low suggestibility; self-confidence; and imagination; (4) **interests:** maturity; breadth of interests; participation in social and leisure time activities; and conversation skills; (5) **socially relevant aspects of temperament:** extroversion, dominance, unselfishness, fairness, flexibility, and dependability; (6) **background factors:** better than average social status and income.

**Stability of Leadership** Leadership fluctuates with changes in the needs of the group as determined both by social maturation and by

various situational factors. Nevertheless, the basic pattern of personality traits associated with leadership ability remains fairly constant beginning with adolescence. This is shown by the fact that although there is little continuity of leadership from elementary to junior high school, there is considerable continuity from junior to senior high school and from senior high school to college (M.C. Jones, 1965). Furthermore, high school leaders of both sexes are more successful in life after school than nonleaders (Snyder, 1970).

### **The Socially Rejected or Deviant Adolescent**

In the adolescent peer group, deviancy and social rejection are functionally synonymous. Whether the basis for the deviancy is active or passive and whether the deviant role is voluntarily assumed by the individual or forcibly thrust upon him by the group does not alter the fact of social rejection, but it does have important implications for its interpretation, seriousness, and eventual outcome. At any rate, whatever the cause of the deviancy, because of the crucial role played by the peer group during adolescence, the deviant is placed at a terrible disadvantage in

the struggle to emerge mature and adjusted at the conclusion of this period of development. By their own admission, a sizable minority of adolescent boys both experience serious difficulty in making friends and are seriously concerned by bashfulness.

Socially rejected or deviant adolescents may be conveniently grouped into three main categories<sup>iii</sup>: (1) individuals who by virtue of group-inappropriate personality traits, physical characteristics, or interests are rejected by the group; (2) individuals who reject group experience because they find it traumatic or unrewarding as a result of their personality makeup or social incompetence; and (3) individuals who neither reject nor are rejected by the group because of socially inappropriate or inadequate aspects of personality, but who are willing to accept ostracism from the group, if need be, to pursue other interests and/or gratify other needs. In the third category are opportunists who are willing to flaunt group standards to gain adult approval, highly self-assertive adolescents who are too individualistic to conform to group expectations, individuals with strong moral convictions who spurn any form of moral compromise or expediency, and adolescents with all-consuming interests in esoteric activities that enjoy low status in the crowd.

**Characteristics of Socially Rejected Adolescents.** The second and third categories of deviants have been discussed elsewhere. In this section we shall, therefore, continue our attention to the characteristics of individuals who are socially unacceptable to their age-mates. Many such individuals (persons rejected or overdominated by parents) concomitantly reject the group because of asocial personality trends, social incompetence, strong nonsocial interests, or fear of rebuff. Others in this group also adjust to their outcast status by adopting a "sour grapes" attitude, by pretending that it is they who reject the group, that the group is beneath their notice, and that their isolation is voluntary, admirable, and indicative of special virtue.

Three main clusters of socially unacceptable personality traits have been found in adolescents who are rejected by their peer group. First are traits associated with the obnoxiously overbearing, aggressive, and egocentric individual who frequently gives a history of being underdominated or overvalued by his parents. Such adolescents are described by their associates as domineering (Mussen et al., 1974), interfering, bullying, conceited, exhibitionistic, attention-seeking and demanding, resentful of criticism, querulous, and irritable. Another group of socially unacceptable personality traits characterize the

adolescent who failed as a child to learn the give-and-take techniques of peer-group play and who failed to develop social poise, skills, and effective methods of self-assertion and self-defense. This type of socialization history is typical of the overdominated, overprotected, and rejected child. Others regard him as excessively overdependent, fearful of being misunderstood, abused, or taken advantage of, and given to whining, nagging, and complaining. The third cluster of seriously unacceptable personality traits reflects a degree of introversion sufficiently disabling to interfere with spontaneous and uninhibited participation in group activities and social events. Included in this group are such characteristics as timidity, shyness, withdrawing behavior, preoccupation with introspective experience and intellectual interests, preference for social isolation, a "wet blanket" approach to group activities, lack of social poise and skills, and an apparent apathy and listlessness which may indicate relative disinterest in the more immediate data of sensory and emotional experience.

Apart from these major personality configurations associated with social rejection in the peer group, individuals characterized as "nervous," noisy, or prone to fabricate alibis and carry grudges enjoy low sociometric status. The merciless law of group

conformity is also applied to the unfortunate somatic deviants-- the short, the fat, the ugly, the puny, the awkward, the oversized, and the late-maturer.

### **Evaluation of Social Rejection**

In evaluating a given instance of social rejection during adolescence, one must consider many factors. First, it should be realized that seldom indeed is either acceptance or rejection completely unanimous in any sizable group. Second, rejection is not as self-evidently obvious as it may seem. Frequently adolescents who perceive themselves as rejected are seriously in error. Teachers also are apt to be mistaken about the group's acceptance or rejection of an individual. The ability of teachers to perceive the sociometric status of their pupils diminishes rapidly with the increasing age of the pupils (Ausubel & Schiff, 1955), and it is quite low by the time pupils are of high-school age. Sometimes adolescents who are actually rejected are as unaware as their teachers of their status in the group.

Further appraisal of the seriousness of an individual case of rejection requires knowledge of (1) how widely shared the attitude of rejection is in the group, (2) whether it reflects active dislike of or passive indifference toward the person involved, (3)

the modifiability of other compensatory attachments or interests. Finally, it is important to know whether the individual desires to be accepted by the group, and, if he does not, whether his expressed disdain for acceptance is genuine or the product of rationalization. Although unconcern with status in the group may, in rejection, be associated with relatively little immediate deflation of self-esteem, it may also be symptomatic of much graver defects in personality structure than the rejection of a deviant adolescent who craves acceptance by his age mates.

**Helping the Socially Rejected Individual.** Teachers, counselors, and group leaders can do much to help certain types of socially rejected adolescents. With the aid of group members (nondeviants) who reject such individuals least, they can assist the rejected in gaining insight into the reasons for their rejection and in acquiring the skills that enhance their status in the group. Smaller classroom subgroups and social gatherings of small groups can provide a social identity for persons who are unable to establish themselves in larger social units. Classroom and extracurricular situations can be manipulated to increase the social visibility of those particular competencies of the rejected individual that are compatible with the values of the group.

**Prognosis of Deviancy**

During adolescence deviants and socially rejected individuals are not in an enviable position. In varying degrees they all face social ridicule, abuse, and isolation. The fortunate ones achieve some measure of status and security by forming warm attachments to agemates of their own kind. Rarely, a sympathetic adult friend or teacher will offer them affection, direction, or encouragement. But more often they are left to flounder uncertainly, to drift farther and farther away from group living, to develop feelings of anxiety and inferiority, to withdraw deeper and deeper into themselves or into a compensatory world of unreality. The more seriously maladjusted may be claimed by suicide, schizophrenia, or depression.

With the coming of adulthood, the peer group begins to dissolve and adolescents are absorbed into the wider social community. And concomitantly, release comes to the majority of deviants. The recession of the demands for slavish conformity is one of the surest signs of approaching adulthood. Variability is then not only legitimized but, to a certain extent, also becomes desirable. Adolescents suddenly begin to notice the personal qualities of people. They evolve personal goals, personal tastes,



personal interests, and personal preferences. The "hideous" deviant is then, for the first time, seen for what he really is—just another different human being. And after years of harrowing isolation, he dares again to lift his head and take his rightful place among his peers.

### **Adolescent Gangs—Varieties of Deviant Peer Groups**

Thus far in our discussion of the structural and functional properties of adolescent peer groups, we have been concerned only with the developmental characteristics that distinguish the group formations of adolescents generally from those of children and adults in the American culture. But we are also committed to the proposition that peer-group behavior, like all other significant and value-laden activity of adolescence in our own or any culture, must inevitably reflect the distinctive influences of the subculture in which it is rooted. To avoid needless repetition, the preceding analysis of the adolescent peer culture has used as a model the peer groups sharing the typical middle-class values that dominate the high school and the official ideology of the community. Requiring further consideration of specific subcultural differences are only those peer groups that deviate markedly from this pattern, those originating from upper- and lower-class strata

in our society. And since detailed studies of upper-class peer formations (for example, the Junior League) are not presently available, this section will deal primarily with lower-class adolescent gangs found in disorganized urban areas.

For the purposes of this discussion, we can divide all adolescent peer groups into two main categories, deviant and nondeviant. Nondeviant groups (1) originate from and subscribe to the dominant middle-class ideology of the school and the community and (2) conform to the basic core of peer-group values that characterize the adolescent segment of the middle class. On an informal basis, nondeviant groups function as heterosexual cliques or crowds. More formally they are organized into unisexual societies (scouts, fraternities, sororities) or into bisexual extracurricular interest clubs.

Membership in a deviant group can no longer be relegated to particular neighborhoods, poorer classes (Kelly & Pink, 1975; Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1975), or big cities (Sherif & Sherif, 1964). Deviant behavior, juvenile misconduct and crime, Sherif and Sherif (1964) point out, need to be recognized, and

special categories for groups in different neighborhoods be dropped....It is sometimes thought that the crowded

neighborhoods of large cities are the only seats of juvenile misdeeds. In fact, two fifths of the court cases are contributed by suburban, small-town and rural areas, the noncity courts having the largest rate of increase in recent years....Nor is the problem just one or particular ethnic or racial groups, although the ratio for many of the less favored are often higher....If a city has a sizable population in poor and crowded neighborhoods composed of an ethnic minority, the probability of a high delinquency rate for the minority is greater.

The distinguishing characteristic of the unisexual, highly structured deviant adolescent gang is nonconformity to the special values of the dominant (socially acceptable) peer group following the official ideology of the community. The middle-class youth who does not conform to the standards of his peer group remains a free-lance outcast, teams up informally with other outgroupers, or joins a more formal organization with highly specialized interests (art) or idealistic (religious, social reform) aims. The lower-class adolescent who subscribes to the lower social-class ideology as well as to the adolescent values of the middle-class peer group

remains on the fringe of acceptance in nondeviant groups. Usually denied full membership in nondeviant cliques, he settles for a respectable position in an acceptable but more formal interest group.

### **Street-Corner Gangs**

Once a group is formed, the goals of its members—experienced by each with feelings of urgency—and the actions they impel are not isolated events. If the goals can only be realized through unacceptable activities, the knowledge that they are unacceptable need not prevent their performance. But if there are no protective adults to cover for the members in the event of detection, the members will face the wrath of hostile adults, even legal authorities. Thus, the facilities of the physical setting and adult resources combine to create conditions that Thrasher saw as conducive to the heightened solidarity and sense of loyalty among members, which characterize these groups, formed in less fortunate circumstances, that are called **gangs**. (Sherif & Sherif, 1964)

Unlike other adolescent group formations, the street-corner gang is more continuous with and resembles more closely preadolescent peer groups. It differs from the high-school "crowd" in having a more aggressive, predatory base, attributable to the need to compensate for deprivations other than those normally associated with adolescence in our culture. It is more of an action group functionally oriented toward the achievement of more concrete goals; as such it requires a more structured organization and greater group solidarity. Similarly, because of its special functions, it is usually unisexual, demands a higher standard of loyalty from its members, places greater emphasis on secrecy and physical prowess, comes into conflict with the law, and imposes more drastic penalties for disloyalty on its members.

The special deprivations confronting these adolescents consist of (1) material inadequacies associated with low socioeconomic status—lower standards of housing, food, clothing, recreation, economic security, and educational opportunity; (2) restricted social mobility—limited access to the more desirable vocational pursuits; (3) exclusion from the dominant peer groups of school and church, which provide other adolescents with a special identity and interim status (Sherif & Cantril, 1947); and

(4) exposure to the snobbishness and patronizing attitudes of respectable society. In the gang, an organization of his own kind, the street-corner boy not only gains all of the status and security advantages of peer-group membership, but also finds escape from the condescension of his "betters," a sense of brotherhood and power, and a measure of aggressive revenge against the society that rejects him.

**Origins and Outcomes.** Socioeconomic deprivation in itself is not sufficient for adolescent deviant gang formation in less fortunate circumstances. An additional indispensable condition seems to be the existence of a more or less segregated and deteriorating urban slum area providing sufficient isolation from the rest of the community for a separate subculture, adequate protection from the prying eyes of the law, and sufficiently close physical contact for the daily operations of the gang and the emergence of a communal sense of group solidarity (Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, 1943). The presence of unassimilated ethnic and racial groups in these areas further stimulates the formation of gangs since generation conflict is maximized in families of such groups. In addition to being excluded from nondeviant peer groups, these "second generation" adolescents are unable to identify with their parents

and community, and commonly seek to disassociate themselves from the social stigma connected with their family background. The necessity for creating an entirely new social organization as the only means of attaining status is even more urgent. And under the protracted stress of such extreme status deprivation, **adolescent gangs evolve quite spontaneously from the less structured play groups of preadolescents.**

Adolescent gangs disintegrate as their members approach adulthood and attain status in more conventional ways, through marriage, raising a family, and earning a livelihood (Sherif & Cantril, 1947). In proportion to his gradually increasing involvement in these new status-giving functions, the adolescent's participation in gang activities and loyalty to gang standards diminishes. The tapering off process may take several years. In the meantime, the street-corner boy continues to "hang out" on the corner with the boys, but not with the same single-mindedness as previously. Eventually, the vast majority of such adolescents become incorporated into the folds of conventional society and observe the norms of the community at large (Thrasher, 1927). Were it not for this latter shift in values, the typical slum boy's participation in delinquent gang activities would not merely constitute a characteristic transitory phenomenon of adolescent

development in disorganized urban areas, but would lead to a permanent career in crime. Fortunately, however, this outcome is relatively rare.

Under certain conditions, however, the delinquent adolescent gang member fails to be assimilated into conventional society, and is inducted into the ranks of the adult criminal gang. Whether or not this happens depends on many individual personality factors associated with moral development. Two sociological factors, however, have an important bearing on the eventual outcome. (1) If, by virtue of frequent residence in juvenile correctional institutions an adolescent fails to establish rapport with the law-abiding elements of the community or is denied opportunity to engage in legitimate status-giving activities because of his "record," reorientation of his value system understandably fails to occur. (2) A similar lack of reorientation may occur if status deprivation is based not only on age and socioeconomic status, but is also associated with discrimination based on such permanent factors as racial or national origin. The predatory attitude tends to become fixed since the gang then views the problem of acquiring status as not being limited to adolescence--as in the case of other youth--but as a permanent struggle against overwhelming odds.



## **Organization**

The special organizational features of the gang related to its unique functions have already been mentioned. The superficial appearance of aimlessness and disorganization that strikes a casual observer is completely misleading (Thrasher, 1927). It is probably the gang's appearance of informality that is erroneously equated with planelessness and lack of structure. Actually, few existing groups can rival it in degree of differentiation of relationships between members, in stability of roles and status hierarchy, and in the group solidarity that permeates the membership. Years of extremely close association and comradeship in dangerous exploits and in fights with adult authorities, police, and other gangs weld an amazingly cohesive ingroup incorporating a complex system of mutually recognized obligations and loyalties (Thrasher, 1927).

For the most part, criteria determining gang leadership conform to those outlined for adolescent leaders generally. To some extent, leadership in gangs is more despotically wielded and depends more on such factors as physical prowess, toughness, and fighting ability (Thrasher, 1927). However, these factors are more implicit than explicit in the leader's actual exercise of control; in daily operations, ingenuity and cleverness are more important

assets. The leader seldom has to resort to force; it usually suffices that he has earned a reputation for being able to take care of himself.

To some extent, also (probably because of the gang's functional orientation), the gang leader occupies a more central position in the group than most other adolescent leaders. Group members relate more to him than to each other, and no decisions of any consequence are ever made in his absence (Whyte, 1943). The leader assumes full initiative and responsibility for carrying out group actions, but legislative decisions are reached through group consensus; formal voting during meetings is a rarity (Whyte, 1943). Negotiations with other gangs and with adults and officials are also conducted by the leader, who thereby becomes more widely known than the ordinary gang member (Whyte, 1943).

However great his power, the leader cannot abuse it or use it capriciously (Thrasher, 1927). Power comes solely from the group, and the leader dares not ride roughshod over its acknowledged traditions, goals, and mores (Thrasher, 1927). In accordance with his higher status he is required to face hazards from which others shrink and to be more scrupulous in meeting his obligations than less exalted group members (Whyte, 1943). To a greater extent, also, he must be loyal, fair-minded, and generous. He is expected

to rise above personal vindictiveness and to settle amicably disputes between members (Whyte, 1943).

**Norms and Activities.** The norms, in adolescent gangs in such matters as honesty, aggression, and sexual gratification, reflect in part the value system of the lower socioeconomic groups from which they originate. But, in addition, as befits a more rebellious group enjoying no status whatsoever in the adult community, the norms of such youth are more extreme, unconventional, and closer to those of the adult criminal world than to the values professed by their parents. Through contact with the school, the church, the courts, and various social agencies, adolescent gang members have ample opportunity to learn that their way of life is not sanctioned by conventional society. But "mere knowledge of the norms of society" is a much less "potent determinant of behavior" than the status and other needs potentially satisfied by the peer group (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif & Sherif, 1964). At this point in their development, the norms of the gang easily hold the field against the opposing standards of the world. Identification with gang norms is also facilitated by the fact that home and family loyalties are a minor matter to the street-corner boy. Furthermore, not too far below

the surface of their official ideology, his parents are in substantial agreement with the norms of his gang.

Being aware of the outlawed status of their value system leads gang members to formulate justifications for their predatory activities. They evolve an ethical code based on the premise that all misbehavior and delinquency are justifiable as long as they are intended to retaliate for unjust and repressive treatment received at the hands of adult society. In this case, the entire body of criminal law is identified with the status-denying adult, and by lashing out at the former they are squaring accounts with the latter.

Despite the availability of such justifications, however, the gang boy frequently has serious doubts about the moral legitimacy of much of his behavior. These doubts added to his fear of the consequences of apprehension would ordinarily be strong enough to inhibit delinquent acts were he committing them alone. For this reason the overwhelming majority of juvenile offenses are committed by groups of boys. The tangible presence of others reinforces identification with group norms, sets aside moral reservations, strengthens feelings of loyalty to the group, and allays fear of personal consequences. All of these factors create potentialities for aggressive, daring, and delinquent group

behavior that do not exist when the gang member is operating as an individual.

The activities of adolescent gangs are extremely variable, running the gamut from nondelinquent athletic competition to various specialized forms of delinquent behavior (Thrasher, 1927). Within a given gang, a characteristic type of activity predominates, with a more or less fixed routine (Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, 1943). Geographically, also, to avoid conflicting interests, a gang restricts its operations to a carefully defined "sphere of influence," the violation of which leads to open warfare (Thrasher, 1927). Girls are customarily excluded from active membership in boys' gangs, but in late adolescence may acquire auxiliary status as lovers (Whyte, 1943). The number and proportion of cases of reported delinquency involving girls have been steadily increasing. "The percentage of cases involving girls...rose from 19% in the years 1958 through 1964 to 24% in 1970" (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1975). Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1975) also point out that although earlier studies regarded delinquent behavior in girls to be limited almost exclusively to sex, more recent self-report studies showed no significant **quantitative** differences between males and females.

"Proportionately, two of every three delinquencies of

ungovernability, thought to be largely a female delinquency problem, were male offenses" (Kratcoski & Kratcoski, 1975). In their study of 248 male and female students from the 11th and 12th grades of three public high schools, using the self-report questionnaire, Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1975) found that in male delinquency, an effort was made to prove masculinity since it involved breaking and entering, destruction of property, larceny, joy riding, drinking, drug use, and gambling. However, the distribution of criminal items reflecting deviant teenage cultural orientation (such as drinking, driving without a license or permit, drug use, and skipping school) was about equal for boys and girls. There was also little difference in the mean number of offenses committed by males and females from different socioeconomic classes.

### **Summary: Functions of Adolescent Peer Groups**

The significance of the peer group for adolescent development can be conveniently summarized by listing briefly the various functions it performs:

1. The most significant personality change during adolescence is a diminution in the importance of the status an individual

derives from a dependent relationship to parents and a corresponding increase in the importance of earned status which he acquires in his own right. Since the modern urban community is unable to provide the adolescent with earned status, peer groups are primarily constituted to meet this crucial need among others.

2. The peer group is also the major source of derived status during adolescence. By achieving acceptance in the group, by subordinating himself to group interests, and by making himself dependent on group approval, the adolescent gains a measure of intrinsic self-esteem that is independent of his achievements or relative status in the group. This "we-feeling" provides security and belongingness and is a powerful ego support and source of loyalty to group norms.

3. The peer group provides a new frame of reference for values and status to combat the disorientation and loss of anchorage stemming from abandonment of the childhood referential frame at the time when childhood biosocial status is surrendered. This disorientation is especially severe in early adolescence because of the adolescent's marginal position in the culture and his rejection by the adult community. The creation of peer group moral norms rescues him from this "no-man's-land" of orientation and provides release from uncertainty, indecision, guilt, and

anxiety about proper ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

4. In switching his primary allegiances to the peer group and in seeking a source of values outside the home, the adolescent makes great strides toward emancipation from parents. He finds a new source of basic security to supplant the emotional anchorage to parents that had heretofore kept him confined within the dependent walls of childhood. By vesting in his peers the authority to set standards, he affirms his own right to self-determination, since he is patently no different from them (Ausubel, 1950). No longer need he implicitly subscribe to the belief that **only** parents and adults can determine what is right. As a result of the emotional support he derives from his peer group, he gains the courage to break the bonds of parental domination.

5. The peer group also serves as "a bulwark of strength in combating authority....By pooling their resistance in groups and throwing up barriers of one kind and another against adult authority and interference," adolescents manage to "exclude adults and protect themselves from...the coercions that the latter are prone to use" (Tryon, 1944). By creating precedents and operating as a pressure group, the peer group gains important privileges and concessions for its members and emancipates itself from adult and



institutional controls.

Adolescents also use the peer group as an organized means of "rejecting completely the accepted standards of adult society" (Tryon, 1944) and of repudiating the necessity of growing up. Even apart from delinquency, practically all resistance to acculturation in our society (Tryon, 1944) comes not from individual adolescents but from peer groups.

6. The peer group is the major training institution for adolescents in our society. The high-school's influence on adolescent development inheres largely in its capacity for providing "many of the occasions for adolescent boys and girls to receive the inculcation of adolescent culture—that body of attitudes, beliefs, and practices which is transmitted not by parents and teachers to children but by older to younger adolescents" (Frank, 1944). It is in the peer group that "by doing they learn about the social processes of our culture. They clarify their sex roles by acting and being responded to, they learn competition, cooperation, social skills, values, and purposes by sharing the common life" (Tryon, 1944). All of this is accomplished in an integrated way without self-conscious or self-important pomposity; "for unlike the adult-controlled training institutions and agencies in our society, the peer group does not

regard itself as a training unit" (Tryon, 1944). And in its role as a training institution the peer group transmits and enforces social-class goals and values, since parents no longer enjoy sufficient control or rapport to carry out this function.

7. The peer group provides regularized media and occasions for adolescents to gratify their newly acquired desires for increased heterosexual contacts, as well as a set of norms governing adolescent sex behavior.

8. As the chief source of adolescent interim status, the peer group reduces the total load of frustration and stabilizes the entire transitional period. It can offer compensations not only for the deprivations associated with adolescence per se, but also for the special deprivations that confront certain adolescents by virtue of their class, ethnic, racial, or religious affiliations.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>A relatively frequent cause of loss in status lies in the fact that a particular role (e.g., clowning) successfully played at an earlier age may become inappropriate for the changing

standards of the group. If an individual who excels in a role fails to perceive the diminished esteem in which it is held, he may continue to play or overplay it and thereby progressively undermine his status in the group.

<sup>2</sup>Degree of similarity is customarily expressed as a coefficient or correlation between the paired scores of a sizeable number of mutual friends on a measure of a given trait.

<sup>3</sup>In many instances, of course, all three factors operate in the same individual. The overprotected child, for example, is rejected by the group because of negative personality traits, withdraws from group experience because of social incompetence, and may develop strong nonsocial interests as a compensation for his social isolation.

## **Chapter 11**

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