Peer Groups

Agents of Socialization
Peer groups

• A social group whose members have interests, social position, and age in common
  • By the time they enter school, kids have discovered the peer group
  • Will often change as individuals change

• Adolescents spend a lot of time with their peers

• Hierarchically unique relationship
  • Members have equal status within group
Changes with Peer Groups Over Time

• Increased time spent with peers
• Functioning with less adult supervision
  • Offers the opportunity to discuss interests and topics not done with adults
• Increasing contact with members of opposite-sex
• Emergence of crowds
Peer Groups vs. Family Groups

- Peers may affect short-term interests, but parents retain greater sway over long-term goals
  - Ex. Friends help change your taste in music, but parents will influence your decisions on college
- Peer groups are more easily changeable than blood ties of family
  - Family connections are much stronger
    - Most childhood friendships dissolve after High School. Strongest relationship will remain but, most will fall off
  - Families can be estranged from each other due to conflict
The School

• Schooling enlarges children’s social worlds to include people with backgrounds very different from their own.

• Teach a wide range of knowledge & skills

• Are most children’s first experience with bureaucracy
  • Runs on impersonal rules
  • A strict time schedule
  • “Just a number”
    • ex. Julia = #17
  • These being the hallmarks of many organizations that will employ them later in life.
Peer groups

• Any neighborhood or school is a combination of many peer groups.
• People are influenced by peer groups that they would like to join
  • Process called **anticipatory socialization**
    • Learning that helps a person achieve a desired position
      • Ex. Dressing the same as the school group you would like to join
      • Ex. Trying to fit in as part of a new job an individual begins wearing similar suits and hanging out at same bars/restaurants
Causes of Peer Groups

• Factor #1: Educational system
  • Age Grouping
    • Isolating children from adult population
    • Putting large numbers of children together
  • Exposure to diversity
    • Different ethnicities, different backgrounds

• Factor #2: Work/Family life
  • Tougher child labor laws
    • Children required to go to school
  • Both parents working
    • Longer hours means more free time for children

• Factor #3: Population shifts
  • 1 to 7 ratio of adolescents to adults
    • More kids starting in 1950s
Cliques and Crowds

• Cliques are small groups defined by common activities/friendship and form a regular social group

• Crowds are larger, more vaguely defined groups, based on reputation
  • Jocks, brains, nerds, druggies, toughs, punks, populars, socies, and so on
  • not necessarily friends and do not necessarily spend time together
Clique Composition

• Cliques typically are composed of people of:
  • same age
  • same race
  • same socioeconomic background
  • same sex – at least during early and middle adolescence
• Shared interests and activities
  • Orientation toward school
  • Orientation toward the teen culture
  • Involvement in antisocial activity
• Deviant peer groups
  • Aggressive adolescents gravitate toward each other
Analyzing Family Roles with Peers

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

- Antisocial peers reinforce antisocial traits
Understanding Crowds

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

• Popularity (Status): The degree to which children are liked or disliked by their peers as a group.

• Measuring popularity: Sociometric techniques
  • Nomination technique: “Tell me the names of 3 kids in class that you like…”
  • Rating scale technique: The child is asked to rate each child in the class on a 5 point scale
  • Paired comparison technique: The child is presented with the names of 2 children at a time and asked which they like more

Sociometric systems classify children into five groups:
• Popular
• Rejected
• Neglected
• Average
• Controversial.
Peer Conflicts

• Both boys and girls can be aggressive and popular at the same time
  • Aggression coupled with poor emotion regulation creates peer problems
    • Boys are more physically aggressive than girls
    • Girls also act aggressively toward peers, but often engage in relational aggression
      • Ruin a reputation
      • Disrupt a friendship
Victimization and Harassment

• Unpopular youngsters may lack the social skills and social understanding necessary to be popular with peers
  • Easy targets for bullying
  • Creates a cycle of teasing, feeling less socially adept, leading to more bullying
  • Blame themselves for their victimization

• Victimization can lead to lower earnings as an adult because of the cyclical nature of bullying
Impacts of Rejection

• Rejected children (especially if they are aggressive) are more likely than others to have lower grade-point averages and be viewed as poor students.
  • The tendency of rejected children to do more poorly in school worsens over time.
• Rejected children are more likely than popular children to be suspended, repeat a grade, or drop out of school.
  • They are more likely to get in trouble with the law.