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Popularity, Socialization, and Parents' Role within Children's Peer System

When I was in my fourth grade I had a close friend, Michael. Michael regarded me as his closest friend. I was the head of our small circle of friends. Bryan was the head of the bigger one and controlled even our own behavior and decision making. Because of this Bryan and I had been uncomfortable friends for a long time, fighting over allegiance and authority within the bigger circle. Our teachers and school administrators had warily putting us in the same advisory class for years. But in sixth grade, Bryan, Michael, and I were placed in the same class. Unsurprisingly, the new situation renewed conflict and tension within the clique. During a confrontation, Bryan snubbed me and forcibly threw me out of the clique. Michael and Roger (my other close friend) afterward renounced their membership from the clique to back me up. After several days a new change in peer dynamics took place, and I and my group were reaccepted.

This conflict in the clique forced Bryan to use a new technique. Instead of fighting me, he tried to collaborate with me, gaining my compliance and allegiance by winning my goodwill. To strengthen this relationship, Bryan had to remove the competition. Bryan approached me and spoke with me about Michael, trying to draw out unpleasant remarks. He afterward conveyed

these unpleasant comments to Michael, asking what Michael felt about these distasteful remarks and about me. Bryan tried to estrange me and Michael from each other by creating a sense of shared suspicion and anger. At the start we would not suggest any unpleasant sentiments, but after listening to a continuous flow of unpleasant remarks about ourselves, we began to believe the stories and condemn each other. We did not confront each other because we felt uncomfortable and astonished. While Bryan was breaking me and Michael apart, he was also currying favor from me and Michael, depicting himself as the genuinely dependable and honest friend. In time, conflict between me and Michael became intense.

The snapping point arrived on a Thursday. The preceding weekend, Michael and Bryan had been talking to each other every day. In between conversations, Michael had mustered the guts to talk to Alicia, a girl he was fond of, and invited her to go with him. Alicia consented, but specified that if anyone learned about it, she would end the relationship. Bryan approached Michael, learned about the good news, and called me right away. We agreed to talk to girls and invite them to go out with us, even though we agreed that our purpose was to experience some intimacy. Thursday, at school, I and Bryan spread the rumor about Michael. Alicia learned about it, ditched Michael, and hurt his feelings. He tried to avenge himself by telling our girls about our scheming plan, but our girls ignored it. They even looked pleased to be related with the two most well-liked and popular boys in the class. Bryan took advantage of the situation. He charged Michael of being disloyal to him, broke my friendship with Michael, and forcibly threw Michael out of the popular group. Bryan became my new closest friend.

When I read Antonius Cillessen and colleagues' (2011) *Popularity in the Peer System* I was immediately reminded of this early chapter in my life. This volume is about peer culture and

socialization. I was particularly interested in Part II: Development of Popularity. The section is about the way children experience and approach their lives when they are unfettered by the supervision of their parents and their other significant adults. It puts emphasis on the values children assign to social experiences, attitudes, and objects that are valuable in their lives. These values are situated in the subculture they build that rests in and encompasses adult culture, but which survives mainly for them. According to Fine (1987), peer culture "consists of a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction. Members recognize that they share experiences, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation they will be understood by other members" (p. 125). The peer culture during my childhood emerges out of our own worlds, molding and steering our understanding of what takes place within us. We, as adults, try to correct this situation by depicting children's world from their perspective. We put emphasis on those factors, trends, and events that children said that we must understand, or, those aspects that they regarded as the most valuable. Under these children's supervision we explored how they build friendships and what types of friends they have; time allocation, or how children distribute their time, and the forms of experiences these tasks produce; social position and popularity, or how children attain popularity and what are the outcomes of being unpopular and popular; and ultimately, the connections between girls and boys.

Popularity is an ever-present sociological concept. For a lot of individuals, maybe particularly early adolescents, popularity is a fragment of everyday life within the peer system. During early adolescence, the peer system becomes more and more valuable. Due to the vital function that peer culture serves in the lives of adolescents, mainly in the shape of cliques and

gangs, the level to which parents can stay important during this stage is, and has been, a focus of scientific research and discourse. I myself agree to this argument. Adolescents who maintain a constant communication with their parents about subject matters that are valuable to them and who receive emotional attachment and strength from their parents are less prone to consult their peers for guidance on vital issues. Because I was able to sustain a positive, open, flexible, truthful, and emotionally healthy relationship with my parents I became the decent and honest individual I am today.

<div style="text-align:center">References</div>

Cillessen, Antonius, David Schwartz, & Lara Mayeux. Popularity in the Peer System. New York: The Guilford Press, 2011.

Fine, Gary. With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.