

H A N D B O O K O F

ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

EDITED BY

RICHARD M. LERNER
LAURENCE STEINBERG



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Chapter 12

ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

B. Bradford Brown

Ever since G. Stanley Hall's (1904) seminal work a century ago, peer relationships have been regarded as a central feature of American adolescence. From the early years through the present, researchers have remained decidedly ambivalent about the effects of peers on American adolescents (Berndt, 1999), but few deny the significance of peer relationships and interactions during this stage of life. Do peers comprise a supportive social context that fosters identity and helps to socialize youth into adult roles, or do they form an arena for frivolous and delinquent activity, with patterns of interaction that undermine autonomy and self-esteem? In this chapter I overview some of the major features of peer relations that have occupied researchers' attention over the past 10 or 15 years. Insights emerging from their studies underscore the complexity of adolescent peer relations and clarify the conditions under which peer interactions foster healthy or unhealthy development.

Like other major social arenas for adolescents, the peer context is multifaceted. In fact, one of the hallmarks of adolescent peer relationships is that they increase markedly in intensity and complexity. This is reflected in the diversity of topics that have occupied researchers' attention. Most investigations concentrate on one of four aspects of peer relations. The first involves characteristics of the individual that are expected to affect peer interaction. In addition to demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background), researchers have examined general measures of social skills as well as specific traits or behaviors, such as aggression, shyness, or rejection sensitivity. They have also employed sociometric techniques to assign adolescents to sociometric categories as popular among their peers, rejected, neglected, or controversial (both well liked and highly disliked by peers). One interesting finding, for example, is that youth rated high in aggression by peers tend to be regarded either as very popular or very unpopular during early adolescence—a contrast to the elementary school years, when aggression is more clearly associated with rejected peer status.

Characteristics of relationship partners constitute a second focus of study. This includes the age of friends or romantic partners, as well as their attitudes and behaviors. A common assumption is that the attitudes and activities of close associates rub off on adolescents, prompting parents to be concerned that their child will fall into bad company and be misled into misbehavior. For example, Brendgen, Vitaro, and Bukowski (2000a) reported that friends' level of deviance was significantly associated with rates of internalizing and externalizing behavior among early adolescents. Such findings are com-

mostly taken as evidence of friends' capacity to foster deviant behavior among youth, but as the authors of this study note, there are other explanations for the association.

A third, less common focus of study involves characteristics of relationships (rather than individuals in relationships). Several scholars have proposed a list of characteristics by which friendship can be defined, or features that reflect its quality (see Berndt, 1996; Hartup, 1993). Others have derived measures of these features in order to evaluate how healthy an adolescent's relationships are (e.g., Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994) or how friendship features are associated with the young person's social and psychological characteristics (reviewed by Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). One intriguing question in this area is whether deviant youth display more inadequate friendships (in terms of intimacy, support, trust, conflict, etc.) than do nondeviant youth. The preponderance of evidence suggests that delinquents manifest many positive features in their friendships, but that they also display more negative features than nondelinquents do (Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Houtzager & Baerveldt, 1999). Another aspect of relationships to which scholars have paid considerable attention is stability, how frequently and easily adolescents change relationship partners. Investigators have become interested not only in simple rates of stability but also in factors that affect it.

A final area, also receiving increasing attention, involves relationship dynamics: what goes on during friendship interactions. Brown, Way, and Duff (1999), for example, offered insights on power dynamics in adolescent girls' relationships, based on conversations with a small sample of urban females. Conflict resolution styles have become an issue of increasing interest (Laursen, 1996, 2001). Classic studies of peer pressure based on laboratory experiments (e.g., Costanzo & Shaw, 1966) or self-report questionnaires (Clasen & Brown, 1985) have given way to more sophisticated analyses of attitude and behavior cuing in observations of interactions among close friends or small groups (Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996; Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995).

These four aspects of peer relations, or similar categorical schemes, have been used to organize a review of empirical work on child or adolescent peer relations (Hartup, 1996; Rubin et al., 1998). Likewise, many reviews have focused on a single type of peer relationship or have featured separate sections for each type of relationship. In designing more sophisticated studies, however, investigators are beginning to cut across these categories or consider more than one type of relationship. Berndt (1999), for example, proposed a theory of friend influence based on the combination of the second and third aspects: characteristics of friends and characteristics of friendships. Furman (1999), among many others, assessed the connections between young people's relationships with friends and romantic partners. Considering this, it seems more sensible to focus this review on themes in recent research that cut across traditional categories of study or types of relationships.

There is emerging evidence of substantial variability in adolescent peer relationships across cultural contexts. Some cultures severely restrict adolescent interaction with age mates, whereas others are organized to emphasize peer relationships (see Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002). Peer interaction is extensive in most Western European and European American contexts. So, too, is the literature about peers, and it is the focus of attention in this chapter. Also, like the research itself, I concentrate on informal relationships—those that are organized by adolescents themselves, rather than by adults or social institutions. I have little to say about kin-based peer relationships (with siblings

and cousins) because variability in partners' age and family position make it difficult to discern which of these can be legitimately classified as peer relationships. I also have little to say about sexual relationships and behavior. These topics are addressed in detail in other chapters in this volume.

I begin by sketching the organization of peer relationships during adolescence in order to give readers a sense of the full scope of this social context. This is followed by brief comments about theory and methodology employed in empirical investigations. Then, after overviewing rates of participation in various types of peer relationships, I assess research concerning five major themes apparent in recent research. These themes cut across the categories of investigation already mentioned, as well as the various types and levels of peer interaction that are presented in the next section. Rather than presenting an exhaustive review of research, my intention is to highlight emerging insights and identify important issues to be addressed in subsequent research.

ORGANIZATION OF PEER RELATIONS IN ADOLESCENCE

The world of peers is a challenging social context, especially at adolescence because it grows more complex and layered. Scholars have noted at least three different levels of peer interaction (Brown, 1999a; Furman & Simon, 1998; Rubin et al., 1998). First is the dyadic level, dominated by individual friendships, which individuals negotiate practically from the moment they begin interacting with peers in toddlerhood. Friendships still are the focus of most research on adolescent peer relations. Recently, however, investigators have made us aware of two other important dyadic relationships in this stage: romantic partners and mutual enemies (including bully-victim pairs).

A second level, also apparent prior to adolescence, is comprised of small groups of peers who regularly interact with each other. Sometimes referred to as cliques, these groups involve an interweave of relationships that vary in closeness, duration, and mutual regard or affection. Freed from the close supervision of adults, adolescent groups can congeal around antisocial as well as prosocial behavior patterns. Thus, in adolescence, one can see the emergence of delinquent gangs, along with friendship cliques or special interest groups that are not as oriented toward violating social norms.

A third level of peer interaction is not readily apparent before adolescence. It involves what are frequently referred to as crowds and is contingent on adolescents gathering in such large numbers that it is no longer feasible for everyone to know each other personally. The move from self-contained classrooms in elementary schools to larger secondary schools with a constantly shifting set of peers (from class to class) fosters the emergence of peer crowds in North America and some European nations (see, e.g., Thurlow, 2001). So does the expansion of adolescents' social space beyond the neighborhood to the broader community. Peer groups at this level are more cognitive than behavioral, more symbolic than concrete and interactional (Foley, 1990). They involve identification of adolescents who share a similar image or reputation among peers or who have a common feature such as ethnicity or neighborhood, even if they do not consider each other friends or spend much time interacting with each other. This level is deftly illustrated in a series of popular motion pictures (e.g., *The Breakfast Club*, *Finding Forrester*, *Heathers*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*) that, often in their opening scenes,

catalog the different crowds into which adolescents are categorized in a particular school or neighborhood.

At each of these levels, adolescents encounter formal relationships (organized and supervised by adults) as well as informal ones. Formal dyads, for example, would include lab partners or a peer tutor and tutee. These are rarely studied because they tend to be short-lived relationships in which adolescents do not have a strong investment (but see Karcher & Lindwall, in press, for an exception). Formal small groups are best illustrated by sports teams, but they would also include other school- or community-based extracurricular activities, as well as youth groups sponsored by religious or community organizations. Formal relationships at the more abstract level of peer crowds are more difficult to discern. Sometimes, an entire school will earn a reputation that is nurtured by the adults in charge, but such instances are rarely the subject of systematic investigation.

The preponderance of research has been directed at informal peer relations, especially friendships, romantic attachments, cliques, and crowds. Adolescents are accorded much more freedom in initiating and pursuing these affiliations than they encounter in formal relationships. Thus, they may be regarded as a truer manifestation of peer interaction and influence. For this reason, they comprise the focus of attention in this chapter.

Four features of this social system must be emphasized. First, the organization just outlined is contingent on the broader cultural and social context in which adolescents live. Even within the United States there is considerable variability, from community to community, in the degree to which the peer system is fully articulated. Adolescents in small, residentially stable communities may find that crowds never emerge because the peer group remains small enough for everyone to know each other personally. Youth whose families discourage dating may not experience meaningful romantic alliances until late adolescence or emerging adulthood. Traditionally oriented Mexican-American families expect their youth to associate primarily with kin (Falicov, 1996), making it much less likely that they will experience the intense friendships and extensive interaction in (non-kin) friendship groups that are characteristic of most European American adolescents.

Second, within this general organization is a very dynamic peer system. At every level, relationships are constantly changing. Fewer than half of reciprocated best friendships survive over a period of one year, although the two partners may remain close friends (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Degirmencioglu, Utberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1998). Most romantic relationships in early adolescence last a matter of weeks or months (Feiring, 1999). Their average duration does grow across the rest of adolescence, but when teenagers dissolve one romantic tie, it is often months before they begin a new one (Connolly et al., 2000). According to social network researchers (with the exception of Ennett & Bauman, 1996), it is quite unusual for a friendship group to remain completely intact over the space of one year or less. Even using liberal criteria of stability (e.g., at least 50% of the initial group members remain linked to each other, at second testing, in social network analyses), studies indicate that between one third and one half of groups dissolve over the course of an academic year (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Degirmencioglu et al., 1998; Ryan, 2001). Over the course of 6 months or 1 year, one out of two adolescents experience a change in group status—whether one is a core member of a clique, a peripheral member of two or more groups (liaison), or unconnected to any friendship group (isolate); the liaison status is especially unstable (Ennett & Bauman, 1996).

Crowd types may be somewhat more enduring in that certain prototypic crowds—popular youth, athletically oriented groups, loners or nerds, drug-using or deviantly oriented groups, academically focused youth—are usually found across communities and even historical periods (Brown, 1990). However, other crowd types are more school- or era-specific, and within one community the constellation of groups may shift substantially between middle school and high school (see, e.g., Kinney, 1993). The limited evidence available also suggests that most youth alter their crowd affiliations or orientations across adolescence (Kinney, 1993; Strouse, 1999).

Third, a tacit assumption among researchers is that adolescents form coherent, integrated social networks with peers. This assumption makes it legitimate to ask youth to provide a general assessment of their friends or the group they hang out with on a given dimension. It also justifies the construction of sociograms in which adolescents are assigned a single position within a social network. From my observations working with teenagers, I sense that many have multiple, discrete groups of friends. One group may share an activity interest with the young person, another may serve as the basis for socializing, and yet another can be comprised of teammates in a school sport. Adolescents sometimes resist attempts to integrate these groups. When asked why he did not invite his friends to come to church youth group activities, one teenager whom I know replied, "I don't want my worlds colliding. When I'm here [at youth group] I don't have to be the same person that I am with my school friends; I don't want to mess that up." Indeed, one of the tasks of adolescence is to learn how to manage these disparate spheres of social interaction and influence. This is good preparation for adulthood, when individuals routinely maintain separate networks of relationships with coworkers, neighbors, parents of their children's friends, and so on. Researchers do not yet seem to appreciate this facet of adolescent (and adult) peer relationships.

A final important feature of the peer social system is the degree to which relationships at one level are embedded in or affected by interactions at other levels. Dyadic relationships exist within the context of a larger network of associates, who have the capacity to influence the course of a friendship or romantic tie. Macleod (1995) observed a markedly different tone of conversation between two close friends when they were alone (just with the ethnographer) as opposed to surrounded by other members of their friendship clique. Connolly et al. (2000) discovered that adolescents initiated romantic relationships earlier if their friendship network contained a mix of boys and girls rather than just members of their own gender. Stone and Brown (1998) reported that the characteristics an adolescent associated with a particular crowd varied as a function of the adolescent's own crowd affiliation.

At a broader level, the peer system itself is embedded within other social contexts, such as the school or neighborhood. Tracking systems and the organization of extracurricular activities affect the types of peers to which adolescents are exposed (Schofield, 1981). Drawing students from a broad geographical area, as opposed to the immediate neighborhood, affects the ease with which adolescents maintain school-based peer relationships once the school day is over (DuBois & Hirsch, 1990).

Some of these features and their effects on individuals' peer relationships are reflected in emerging themes that I discuss. First, however, some features of the theory and methodology underlying the research should be considered.

A WORD ABOUT THEORY AND METHOD

In the early portion of the 20th century, following the lead of G. Stanley Hall, most research on adolescence was based on psychoanalytic theory. Freud had little to say about peer relationships. At midcentury, however, one of his followers, Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), offered an elaboration of psychoanalytic theory with much more of a peer focus. According to Sullivan, the intense, emotionally charged, same-sex "chumships" that dominated preadolescence were forerunners of sexually charged, other-sex, romantic relationships in adolescence. This directed researchers to pay most attention to friendships in early adolescence and to sexual liaisons in the later stages of this period. Jean Piaget (1958) added a cognitive perspective on how friendships promoted young people's capacity for social perspective taking. Later, Youniss and Smollar (1985) provided a synthesis of these two theories, illustrating the advantages that equality-based peer relationships offered over the hierarchically organized "relationships of constraint" that young people had with parents and other adults. These theoretical perspectives, especially Sullivan's, dominated the work on peer relations throughout the later 1900s.

In the early 1990s, Wyndol Furman (1993) urged the derivation of a more comprehensive theory to guide research on adolescent peer relations (especially research on friendship). None has yet emerged, but this does not imply a lack of progress in understanding peer relations. In fact, it seems doubtful that a context as diverse and complicated as the world of peers at adolescence can be captured effectively under a single theoretical umbrella. In recent years, investigators have drawn effectively on a variety of conceptual models from various academic disciplines to guide their research in this area. Theories from sociology, social psychology, cognitive psychology, and developmental psychology are readily apparent, underscoring the multidisciplinary approach that is needed to capture the multifaceted features of adolescent peer relationships.

Something similar can be observed with regard to methodological approaches to the topic. Certain methodologies have been especially prominent. Research on popularity and peer status has relied primarily on sociometric techniques of peer nominations or ratings (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000). These techniques are well suited to studying children in closed peer systems such as self-contained school classrooms, but they are not as effective in the larger and more open system encountered by North American adolescents—especially in large, comprehensive high schools. This is one reason why studies of popularity and peer rejection in adolescence tend to focus on youth in the early phases of this life stage.

Most studies of friendship and romantic relationships are based on self-report data. Because much of the significant interaction in these relationships occurs outside of public view—or at least away from the eyes of adults—it seems necessary to rely on adolescents to tell us what goes on with friends and lovers. Unfortunately, adolescents are not reliable reporters of their experiences in dyadic or group relationships. Often, they distort reports about friends to exaggerate similarity with themselves (Kandel & Andrews, 1987) and portray their status in peer groups in self-aggrandizing ways (Stone & Brown, 1999). Investigators of friendship groups and peer crowds have relied either on ethnographic approaches or social network data. Social network analysis offers a more reliable approach to identifying the full range of groups and individuals' positions

within them, but ethnography provides richer detail about the dynamic features of group interaction and changes in membership.

Each of these techniques is still widely used, but they have been supplemented by other approaches. An increasing number of investigators conduct longitudinal studies that can chart more effectively the transformations in group membership and the causal associations among variables of interest. Some laboratory studies, with careful analyses of videotaped interactions, have provided important new insights about interaction processes, especially within dyads (e.g., Dishion et al., 1996). The laboratory can only simulate real-world interaction contexts, however, and it can simulate only a circumscribed range of such contexts. Nonetheless, the laboratory offers opportunities to catch nonverbal cues and other subtleties that cannot be measured effectively through other methodologies.

Studies of group dynamics (cliques or crowds) have been conducted most effectively through ethnographic observation. This approach allows investigators to study groups in situ but features shortcomings as well. It is a time-consuming process that yields information on only a small portion of the peer network in any location. There is no guarantee that youth will act the same way when the ethnographer is around as they do when they are not being observed. Ethnographers often have to face ethical dilemmas, such as passively allowing youth to participate in risky or illegal behavior (or perhaps even contributing to such behavior) in order to build and maintain a trusting bond with the group. One alternative is to have youth nominate friends or name peer groups in order to construct social maps of the group structure (e.g., Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Ennett & Bauman, 1996; Gest & Fletcher, 1996; Stone & Brown, 1999). Multidimensional scaling techniques also occasionally have been applied (Lease & Axelrod, 2001; Stone & Brown, 1999). These alternatives require arbitrary decisions about the boundaries of cliques or crowds that may not be affirmed through observation. However, they are more efficient at capturing the structure within the network as a whole, rather than concentrating on a limited set of groups as most ethnographers do.

As with theories, the key to advances is not settling on one methodology but looking for convergence in findings across approaches. More sophisticated studies will incorporate more than one methodology to foster this sort of convergence of results. A more conscientious effort to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches is sorely needed. Researchers also need to continue working with samples from a variety of cultures and social addresses. Increased sensitivity to sample diversity has helped investigators move away from the White, middle-class bias so obvious in research prior to the 1980s.

ADOLESCENTS' PARTICIPATION IN PEER RELATIONS: SOME BASIC FACTS

The most widely repeated assertions about peer relations during adolescence are that they become increasingly important and occupy an increasing amount of an individual's time. Some teenagers shy away from interactions with peers in favor of relationships with individuals much older or younger than themselves—or with no one at all.

EMERGING THEMES IN RECENT RESEARCH

The array of types of relationships and levels of interaction within the peer system at adolescence creates a rich domain for scientific study. Within the extensive research in this domain I have selected six themes on which to comment. These themes reflect some of the most prominent questions or ideas that investigators have pursued in recent years. Findings from their work have moved the field well beyond the rather idyllic or generic depictions of friendship that were common in research prior to the 1980s, as well as the simplistic notions embedded in studies of peer influence during the same time frame. They give us a sense of the challenges that adolescents confront in attempting to negotiate peer relations successfully during this stage of life.

Instability of Peer Relations

Because investigators have emphasized adolescents' increased capacity for stable and intimate relationships with peers, people may be surprised by just how *unstable* peer relations are during adolescence. Recent research has shed some light on the causes and consequences of instability throughout the peer system, in sociometric status (level of acceptance or rejection by peers), dyadic relationships, and group affiliations.

Sociometric Status

Peer nominations of most liked and least liked classmates or grade mates or peer ratings of the likability of each peer are usually the basis for determining an adolescent's sociometric status. With such data, individuals can be classified as popular (well liked by classmates and not often disliked), rejected (the opposite), neglected (rarely mentioned as liked or disliked), controversial (frequently mentioned as liked *and* disliked), or average. Studies of sociometric status in childhood indicate that category assignment is reasonably stable over very short periods (a month or so) but not stable over long periods (6 months or more; see Rubin et al., 1998). However, some categories (especially rejected status) are more stable than others (especially neglected and controversial status). Moreover, those who are consistently rated as popular display better social and psychological adjustment over the long term than do other youth, especially those who consistently fall into the rejected category (Cillessen, Bukowski, & Hase-lager, 2000; Coie, Terry, Zakrinski, & Lochman, 1995).

During adolescence, both situational and interpersonal characteristics help determine the direction of change in one's sociometric status. Bukowski and his colleagues examined the stability of sociometric status among early-adolescent youth in Canada. They discovered that transitioning from elementary to middle school can disrupt the consistency of peer acceptance, although youth who were socially rejected prior to the transition tended to remain that status through the transition (Hardy, Bukowski, & Sipola, 2002). As children adjust to the new set of peers and larger peer group that they normally encounter in secondary school, it may take a while for the most widely admired youth to emerge, whereas disliked peers make themselves known quickly through their aversive interactions with others. Sociometric status can be enhanced by friendship patterns. In assessing sociometric status in the fall and spring of 6th grade, Sabongui

At any point in adolescence, however, about 90 percent of youth can name a peer who is a close friend, and given the opportunity to list an unrestricted number of close friends, the majority of adolescents name at least one person who reciprocates the nomination. In recent years, reciprocated nomination has become the primary criterion for identifying a friendship.

Oddly enough, this criterion of reciprocated nomination is almost never applied to studies of romantic relationships. Because the question is posed in different ways (e.g., "Are you dating someone?" "Do you have a steady romantic partner?" "Do you have a boy/girlfriend?"), it is difficult to establish the rate of participation in romantic relationships. The consensus across studies, however, seems to be that only one quarter to one third of 13- to 15-year-olds claim to have been involved in a romantic relationship, compared to 40% or 50% of 15- to 17-year-olds, and 70% or more of 18- to 20-year-olds (Connolly et al., 2000; Davies & Windle, 2000; Laursen & Williams, 1997). Higher percentages participate in dating or casual cross-gender relationships (Davies & Windle, 2000; Montgomery & Sorell, 1998). At all ages, but less so with advancing age, more girls than boys claim to have (or recently have had) a romantic partner. These numbers could be expected to drop by requiring reciprocal acknowledgment of a romantic tie, but it is difficult to estimate how low they would go.

Analyses of membership in friendship groups require participation of the vast majority of network members to be reliable, so such studies are less common than are assessments of dyadic relations. Using social network analysis, several investigators have charted the cliques that exist within a social system and partitioned adolescents into clique members, liaisons (with ties to two or more cliques but lacking central membership in any one group), and isolates (not tied to any clique, but possibly involved in a reciprocated, dyadic friendship). Ryan (2001) reported that 75% of her multieethnic sample of 7th graders were members of cliques, 15% were classified as isolates, and few were liaisons or tied to just one peer in a dyad.

Rates of peer crowd affiliation are more challenging to specify because, in essence, they assess the degree to which an adolescent's reputation among peers matches the image of a particular crowd. Often, the adolescent's attitudes, activities, and demeanor are not a perfect match to any crowd, just more like one group than another. Nevertheless, peer and self-ratings of crowd affiliation typically require assignment of the target adolescent to just one crowd and do not examine the target's relative affinity for various crowds. Using this approach, investigators assert that 40% to 50% of adolescents are clearly associated with one crowd, one third are associated with two or more crowds, and the rest do not clearly fit into any crowd. There is at present too little evidence to comment on age, gender, or ethnic differences in these figures.

By concentrating on just one level of peer interaction or one type of relationship, most investigations fail to provide a more holistic perspective on a given young person's breadth of participation in the peer system. The numbers just cited imply that whereas most young people participate in peer relationships in each level of the peer system at some point in adolescence, they may not be consistently involved in a given level or type of relationship across adolescence. The degree and consistency of participation across time may, themselves, be important but neglected variables related to social and psychological outcomes for youth.

Bukowski, and Newcomb (1998) found that children who associated with (sociometrically) popular classmates tended to increase in popularity more than those who befriended average or rejected classmates.

A word of caution is in order about applying the term *popular* to studies of adolescents because it often has a different meaning among youth than among researchers. Sociometric popularity refers to likability ratings or the frequency with which someone is nominated as a desired friend or playmate. Among teenagers, the term usually refers to one's prestige or status in the peer system (Younis, McLellan, & Strouse, 1994). Popular youth often have the power to set styles and determine what activities will be undertaken and who will be included. For this, they earn others' envy, but not always their admiration. Eder (1985) deftly illustrated this in her ethnographic study of social dynamics among middle school girls. In this school, there was a basic division between the relatively small, elite group of popular boys and girls (labeled trendies) and the masses of normal or unpopular students (dweebs). Being a cheerleader or friend of a cheerleader was the surest route into the popular clique, and most girls aspired to become members. Once accepted into this inner circle, however, girls discovered that outsiders were especially eager to be their friends. The rest of the trendies looked down on close relationships with outsiders, and the new initiates found it impossible to maintain close relationships with all who wished to become their trusted allies. When trendies ignored or rebuffed others' attempts to become friends, they were regarded as snobs, and their likability ratings fell dramatically—except, of course, among fellow trendies, who regarded this as proof of their allegiance to the trendy clique. Eder labeled this the “cycle of popularity,” in which likability ratings rose dramatically on initiation into the popular clique, only to fall as outsiders watched the new members ignore old friends and aspiring new ones.

Cliques and Crowds

Of course, as already mentioned, cliques themselves are unstable over the course of adolescence. One curious feature of the reformulation of cliques that has implications for interventions with deviant youth is that although the specific memberships of cliques may change routinely, there is more stability in the types of individuals who are members. Cairns and Cairns (1994) observed that cliques of deviant youth tended to draw new members from other delinquent youth, so that whereas the specific people who belonged to a clique might rotate, the group retained its deviant orientation. Ennett and Bauman (1994) observed a similar but more complicated pattern with reference to tobacco use in cliques. At both measurement points (one year apart), the majority of cliques were comprised exclusively of nonsmokers or smokers. Nonsmokers tended to depart from cliques in which most members smoked, but smokers did not abandon nonsmoking cliques as readily. The implication of these studies is that even though youth change friendship groups frequently, they seem to remain in contact with peers who share their attitudes and behavior patterns. This has implications for patterns of peer influence, which is addressed in a later section.

To date, there has been little examination of the stability of peer crowd affiliation. In measuring orientations toward crowds (essentially, the match between an individual's attitudes and self-perceived reputation among peers and the prototypical characteristics of major crowd types), Strouse (1999) found that two thirds of a national sample shifted orientations between 10th and 12th grade. Some orientations (all-around and studious)

were more stable than others, and shifts between certain types were more common than others, especially among girls. This supports the contention of Brown, Mory, and Kinney (1994) that certain features of the crowd system should make it difficult for youth to achieve radical changes in their reputation among peers. It is more likely, they reasoned, that adolescents will move between crowds with fairly similar reputations—for example, from brains to nerds or from druggies to punks rather than from brains to druggies.

According to one ethnographic study, some youth may find it difficult to change crowds. Merten (1996) traced the efforts of a small set of nonaggressive, socially rejected boys to cope with their reputation as “mels” (short for “Melvins”). The boys were widely derided by classmates from a variety of other crowds and, understandably, sought to escape this derision. Only with great effort, however, was one boy successful in this venture. By persistently violating normative expectations of the mels, the young man was able to force associates to reconsider their opinion of him, leaving him open to pursue friendships with less socially rejected peers and move away from the mel crowd. The move was from the mels to the normals, rather than to a high status crowd, which affirmed Brown et al.'s (1994) contentions about restricted mobility among crowds.

Dyadic Relationships

Romantic relationships are inherently short-lived, especially in early adolescence (Feiring, 1999), so it is not surprising that youth are frequently shifting from having a boyfriend or girlfriend to being without such a relationship (Connolly et al., 2000). Because investigators do not ascertain the reciprocity of romantic affiliations, it is not easy to discern whether a youth who reports being romantically involved at two time points is referring to one long-term relationship or to multiple relationships. This important gap in the literature needs to be addressed so that investigators can identify factors other than age that affect stability of romantic liaisons.

Investigators have paid more attention to the causes and consequences of instability in friendships. A school transition increases the likelihood of disruptions in the friendship network. Even if all of one's friends accompany an adolescent to a new school, the influx of new peers and, possibly, a new structural organization (e.g., moving from self-contained classrooms to a constantly shifting set of peers from class to class) can make it difficult to retain existing friendships. Hardy et al. (2002) found that across the transition to middle school, girls' friendships were less stable than were boys', but girls were also better at forming new friendships with unfamiliar peers (those who had not attended their elementary school). Disruption of the friendship network can be debilitating. Keefe and Berndt (1996) discerned a drop in certain dimensions of self-concept among students who reported a lot of positive features to their fall friendships or reported frequent interactions with friends in the fall and then experienced dissolution of those friendships by the following spring. However, rearranging friendships can also be beneficial. Berndt, Hawkins, and Jiao (1999) found an increase in behavior problems across the transition to middle school for youth who maintained friendships with problem oriented peers; this was not true for peers who ended such affiliations.

Way, Cowal, Gingold, Pahl, and Bissessar (2001) provided an intriguing example of instability in friendship orientations among low-income, urban, ethnic minority youth. They submitted respondents' ratings of their friendships on the seven dimensions of the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI) to a cluster analysis, deriving four distinct

types of friendships. When the procedure was repeated a year later, half of the sample changed friendship types, but shifts were much more common (64%) among those initially in the engaged cluster (displaying high scores on most NRI dimensions) than those in the disengaged cluster (30%), who had markedly low scores on the positive dimensions of the NRI.

It is common to attribute instability in peer relations to features of the person or characteristics of the broader social context (e.g., the different organization of middle schools, as compared to elementary schools), so, naturally, these have been the focus of study. Other factors should be considered, however. For example, especially in middle adolescence when romantic relationships become more common, many cliques appear to be comprised of a core set of members and their "associates of the moment." As core members initiate romantic relationships, they may bring their romantic partners into the clique, and their romantic partner may sharply curtail interactions with members of her or his former clique. Once the romantic relationship ends, however, the partner may be subtly or summarily dismissed from the clique and left to rejoin the former clique or find a new set of friends. Individuals who see each other during the course of a time-limited extracurricular activity (e.g., a team sport) may coalesce into a clique, only to see the clique dissipate once the activity is over. These examples illustrate the dynamic nature of social activity and social relationships in adolescence. Given a constantly shifting set of relationship partners, it becomes important to document what goes on within relationships, rather than concentrating strictly on characteristics of an adolescent's peer associates. Relationship processes constitute a second important theme of recent investigations.

Relationship Processes

The accumulation of evidence linking features of relationships or relationship partners to adolescent outcomes has prompted more interest in *how* peer affiliations affect adolescents. What interaction processes are commonly discerned in peer relationships, and how do they affect the individual?

Managing Conflict

For example, what might account for the fact that youth labeled aggressive by their peers also tend to be rejected as candidates for friendship? One explanation concerns attribution processes in peer interactions. Van Oostrum and Horvath (1997) demonstrated that aggressive adolescents are more likely to read negative intent into the behavior of peers. If someone bumps into them, they are more likely to perceive this as a deliberate act than are nonaggressive youth, and they are more likely to retaliate in turn. The negative interactions that ensue serve to reinforce the adolescent's reputation as unlikable and aggressive. Bowker, Bukowski, Hymel, and Sippola (2000) examined the way that youth from different sociometric statuses responded to social stress. Youth regarded by peers as aggressive tended to use more negative-to-others coping strategies in response to social stressors, whereas youth regarded as withdrawn resorted to more emotion-focused coping (i.e., less provocative and more passive coping responses). Aggressive and socially rejected youth were especially prone to employ negative-to-others strategies, especially if they sensed a high degree of control in the situation. Pro-social

youth, on the other hand, are less inclined to infer hostile intent to aggressive behavior and thus are motivated to respond with more conciliatory actions that avoid rifts in relationships (Nelson & Crick, 1999).

Shulman and colleagues have explored interaction processes in two different kinds of dyadic relationships, which they labeled environment-sensitive, or interdependent, and distance-sensitive, or disengaged (Shulman & Laursen, 2002; Shulman, Levy-Shiff, Kedem, & Alon, 1997). Individuals in the former type of bond emphasize mutuality and the best interests of the relationship; those in the latter are more self-oriented, intent on maximizing personal gains from the relationship. Older (but not early) adolescents in interdependent friendships were more likely to take responsibility for initiating the conflict, whereas those in disengaged friendships reported more anger about the conflict. Regardless of age, individuals in interdependent friendships tended to employ compromise and withdrawal to settle the conflict, whereas those in disengaged relationships tended to resort to power assertion and third-party resolution. Strategies more common among youth in disengaged friendships do not heal the wounds of conflict as readily, diminishing the long-term viability of the relationship.

Applying the same classification system to romantic partners, Shulman and Knafo (1997) found that those in interdependent relationships were better able to adopt a spirit of cooperation in their relationships, whereas youth in disengaged relationships tended to adopt more competitive stances with their partners. It is certainly possible that distinctive attributional processes underlie these different approaches to interaction in friendships and romantic relationships, but Shulman and colleagues have not yet investigated this linkage.

Corumination

An intriguing example of how positive relationship features can contribute to unhealthy interaction processes is evident in Rose's (2002) work on corumination. Early adolescents in her sample who displayed comparatively intimate and healthy friendships also tended to ruminate more about these relationships. The intimacy exacerbated corumination, in which both partners obsessed about the relationship, which in turn was associated with internalizing symptoms. This process was more apparent among girls than boys, and stronger among preadolescents than early adolescents.

Peer Pressure or Influence

The relationship process that has spawned the most persistent interest among adults is peer pressure or, more generally, peer influence. What are the specific mechanisms by which peers affect an adolescent's attitudes and activities? The extensive literature on social influence processes in social psychology has not been applied very effectively to studies of adolescent peer relations. In fact, for a considerable period of time, rates of peer influence were overstated by crude and inaccurate measurement strategies. Investigators used to consider the correlation between self-reports of behavior and self-appraisals of the behavior of peers as a valid indicator of peer influence. This approach ignores adolescents' inclination to choose friends or romantic partners who are already similar to themselves, as well as their tendency to inflate similarity between self and close associates. Happily, few recent studies manifest these inferential errors, but accurately measuring influence remains a major challenge.

Modes of Influence

First of all, peers exert influence in multiple ways. *Peer pressure*, or direct, overt, and expressed efforts to prescribe certain attitudes or activities and proscribe others, has generated the most concern among educators and practitioners. A number of drug and delinquency prevention programs are organized around teaching youth how to resist such pressures. To my knowledge, however, there is no evidence that this is the most common or most effective mode of peer influence. At least three others must be considered. Without necessarily intending to effect changes in others, peers *model* behavior (e.g., Hundleby & Mercier, 1987; Kandel & Andrews, 1987). A more intentional strategy is *normative regulation*. Usually accomplished through gossip or teasing, this involves conversations that reinforce the normative expectations of a group (e.g., Eder et al., 1995; Macleod, 1995). The least recognized and studied mode of influence is *structuring of opportunities*, in which peers provide occasions or contexts for the pursuit of certain behaviors. A common example is throwing a party when parents are away, providing the opportunity for adolescents to engage in drug use, sexual activity, or other behaviors that probably would be restricted under adult supervision.

Some of the best examples of modeling are quite dated (e.g., Costanzo & Shaw, 1966; Dunphy, 1969). More recently, Eckert (1989) recounted how members of one peer crowd, the burnouts, would carefully observe the grooming styles, speech patterns, and activities of another crowd, the jocks, and then strive to do precisely the opposite of that crowd. Her work illustrates how peer models may instigate oppositional rather than conforming behavior (although one could argue that the burnouts were actually conforming to jock norms, just in an oppositional fashion).

Normative regulation is observed most readily in conversations among adolescents, especially friendship groups (see Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, & Muir, 1999). Eder et al. (1995) described lunchroom exchanges among a group of middle school girls and the peers who happened their way. Through comments about a boy they liked and plans to engage him in a relationship, teasing each other about their opinions and activities, and character assaults on other peers, the girls clarified and reinforced normative behaviors within the group. These mechanisms were so subtle and such routine pieces of daily conversation that it is unlikely any of the girls would have labeled them as peer pressure or influence. According to the investigators, however, they had a profound effect on the young people's attitudes and orientations toward school, gender roles, social interactions, and many other features of their lives.

An equally fascinating but even subtler form of normative regulation was witnessed by Dishion et al. (1996). Over a series of years, the investigators observed members of their target sample (boys at risk for deviant behavior) conversing with peers on a variety of subjects in a laboratory setting. Friends of delinquent youth tended to be more responsive when the conversation focused on deviant behavior: smiling or laughing more, making better eye contact, offering more affirming utterances, and continuing the strain of conversation. These conversation cues in turn predicted rates of deviant behavior among target youths in the ensuing year. Such work underscores just how subtle peer influence can be and how difficult it may be to obtain reliable assessments of such influence through self-report strategies.

Issues Deserving Attention

Despite these advances in our understanding of peer influence processes, a number of facets of peer influence remain to be explored. One of these is identifying the peers who are the strongest sources of influence. A common assumption is that peers will be influenced most by their closest associates or by their most intimate and stable relationships. There is some evidence to support this contention. Urberg (1992), for example, found that smoking behavior was predicted by smoking patterns of best friends much better than patterns within the adolescents' peer group. Kiesner, Cadinu, Poulin, and Buccini (2002) cautioned that adolescents' attention to the norms of peer groups depend on their level of identification with the group. They obtained measures of general problem behavior (based on multiple informants) and more specific and serious delinquent activity (based strictly on self-report) from a sample of Italian youth. Group affiliations were established through sociometric data; the average level of delinquent and problem behavior for each group was calculated by averaging the scores of group members. Respondents also indicated how strongly they identified with their group. Although the group identification score did not moderate the association between group level and individual level of problem behavior, the relation between group and individual scores on delinquency was higher when adolescents identified strongly with their group.

Others, however, argue that adolescents are influenced most by those with whom they *want* to be friends, or groups to which they *aspire* for membership, rather than individuals and groups with whom they have well established relationships. Harter (1999) discerned that self-esteem was affected more by approval or disapproval from classmates in general rather than by close friends. Laursen and Williams (1997) discovered that adolescents rated a romantic partner as the strongest source of influence on their activities (among 12 different types of adult and peer relationships). This was true even for respondents not currently in a romantic relationship. Although this could be attributable to the emotional intensity of such relationships, it might also spring from the short-term nature of romantic ties.

A related question is whether there are specific periods in the course of a relationship when adolescents are most amenable to peer influence. Are peers more persuasive in the formative stages of a relationship, when ties are tenuous and efforts to impress are more concerted, or after a trusting bond has been established? Likewise, is peer influence stronger at certain points in a pattern of behavior? Hartup (1999) speculated that influence is likely to be strongest when base rates of a behavior are near zero (e.g., when individuals are initiating activities such as drug use or sexuality, rather than when they have progressed to higher rates of the behavior). Proper answers to these questions require investigators to assess influence repeatedly at several points in a relationship. As yet, there has been little effort to do so.

Complicating Factors

In fact, the evanescent nature of adolescent peer relations makes this a difficult task. In Dishion et al.'s (1996) laboratory observations of friend interactions, target adolescents tended to bring a different peer to the session each year. One must wonder how strong a source of influence specific friends, romantic partners, or friendship groups can be if

they are relatively unstable relationships. A partial answer comes from a longitudinal study by Brendgen, Vitaro, and Bukowski (2000b). The investigators assessed levels of delinquency in a sample of early adolescents at base line, then at follow-ups two and three years later. At each time point respondents also named their best friends, many of whom were also study participants. The level of delinquency reported by an adolescent's friends at base line did not predict the adolescent's own delinquency in the final follow-up (net initial levels of delinquency), but delinquency of friends at the first follow-up *was* predictive of the adolescent's final level of delinquent behavior (one year later). This suggests that friend influences are more immediate than long-term. Because it is likely that many, if not most, respondents nominated different peers as close friends over the course of the study, investigators were probably comparing their target respondents' delinquency to the behavior of different peers at the two time points (base line and follow-up). They did not check or control for this contingency, but their findings suggest that influences of one peer can be washed out by the influences of more recent relationships.

Two other factors complicate assessments of peer influence. First, peer influence is a reciprocal process. Adolescents are at once the recipients and producers of peer influence. To some degree, they influence a friend or friendship group at the same time that they are influenced by their peers. Hartup (1999) cautioned that influence in friendship pairs (or larger groups) can be reciprocal without being equal; some youth are more influential than others. Savin-Williams (1980) deftly demonstrated this years ago in studies of early adolescent peer groups in summer camp, but investigators rarely take these dynamics into account. Another approach to assessing influence—applicable, unfortunately, in stable relationships only—is to treat the dyad or group as a unit of analysis, assessing the degree to which each member's attitudes or behavior moves toward the other's (or the group mean).

A second complicating factor is that at any given time and over any time period, most adolescents confront multiple peer influences from different components of their social networks. Some associates may model a behavior that other associates discourage or deride. It is simply unclear how discrepant the pressures and expectations from peers are for most adolescents. Certainly, however, the degree of discrepancy should be a factor in how closely a teenager will accede to the influence emanating from any one source. To consider or control for multiple sources of influence would be a daunting task, but one that is vital to understanding the dynamics of peer influence among adolescents.

There is one final issue to consider with regard to peer influence. Hartup and Laursen (1999) pointed out that many years ago, Robert Sears depicted a model of relationship interdependence based on reinforcement theory, in which situations that change one individual effect changes in another. It is certainly possible that incidental events in the lives of peer associates constitute one of the most profound sources of peer influence on teenagers. When a close friend has a run-in with a parent or teacher over a certain issue, or when a member of one's friendship group endures an abusive romantic relationship, there may be changes in the way the parents or teachers involved interact with other youth or changes in the friendship group's norms about romantic relationships. Simply by being connected to others, adolescents can be affected by their actions and experiences. The four influence processes that I have stipulated fail to cover the full range of ways that young people can be affected by their peers.

Antagonistic Relations

Most informal peer relationships are voluntary, so it is sensible that youth will choose to initiate and continue relationships only if they are positive experiences. Characteristics considered essential to friendship—reciprocity, mutuality, companionship, security, and intimacy—reflect this positive bias (Bukowski et al., 1994; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Nevertheless, as researchers explore peer relationships more closely, they discover dyadic and group-level affiliations defined by precisely the opposite of these characteristics.

Antagonistic Dyads

In dyads, research on antagonistic relations has focused on bully-victim pairs (see Juvonen & Graham, 2001). Both members of these pairs tend to be rejected by peers, but unlike victims, bullies are regarded as high in aggression as well. Both individuals contribute to this curious alliance, in that bullies seek out particular peers as victims, and victims make themselves desirable targets. Most studies about bullying and victimization concentrate on young people in childhood or early adolescence; longitudinal studies are rare (but are becoming more common). Being either a bully or victim is associated with numerous internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Long-term effects observed in longitudinal studies do not match concurrent effects reported in cross-sectional studies (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000), suggesting that cross-sectional studies may confuse factors that contribute to victimization with consequences of being a victim. Moreover, the consequences are contingent on other characteristics of the individual. For example, Graham and Juvonen (2002) studied aggression and victimization in a multiethnic middle school. They found that African American youth were underrepresented among victims; this ethnic group was also perceived by classmates as relatively more aggressive. However, African American adolescents who *were* victims displayed greater loneliness and lower self-esteem than did victims from other ethnic groups. One possible explanation is that when victimization runs counter to the norms of one's group, the consequences of being a victim are more severe.

With the emergence of peer crowds in adolescence, victimization can become "reified" if victims are identified as a crowd type. In enumerating crowds in their school, it is quite common for American adolescents to include a group that is considered socially immature or inept. The dweebs in Eder's (1985) study, mentioned earlier, are one good example. Such groups, however, are more often pitied or ignored than openly derided. As mentioned earlier, Merten (1996) encountered a small group of boys in one middle school who were known as the mels. They became the target of bullying by a broad array of classmates, especially the more aggressive members of the high-status, popular crowd. Other youth were reluctant to associate with mels for fear that they, too, would be associated with the crowd and subjected to harassment. In fact, even fellow mels avoided each other in a desperate attempt to distance themselves from the crowd type. Merten's observations echo Bukowski and Sippola's (2001) warning that although most research has focused on bully-victim dyads, sometimes adolescents are victimized by a much broader set of peers. More work is needed to determine how victimization is transformed by the emergence of peer crowds in adolescence. If Merten's observations are not unique, then they suggest that bullying can expand in adolescence to include socially accepted as well as rejected youth.

Antagonistic interactions also occur in romantic relationships. In one sample of urban youth (Feiring, Deblinger, Hoch-Espada, & Haworth, 2002), one out of four respondents admitted to perpetrating mild forms of aggression with romantic partners; one in five claimed to be victims of such behavior. Over half said they had been the victim of emotional abuse. More girls than boys exercised physical aggression on partners; emotional abuse was more common among older respondents. Girls (but not boys) who felt little responsibility for actions that harmed others were more likely to report being aggressive with their boyfriends. For boys (but not girls), the tendency to blame others for harmful acts was associated with being physically or sexually aggressive with romantic partners. The incidence of date rape in adolescent relationships is also alarmingly high.

The peer system can feature mutual antipathies with a less clear-cut power differential than in bully-victim relations. Both members of these dyads dislike each other and define their relationship in terms of this antipathy, but one is not the clear and consistent aggressor. In a sample of Dutch youth, Abecassis, Hartup, Haselager, Scholte, and Van Lieshout (2002) found that one out of seven girls and one of five boys reported such relationships with a same-sex peer; about one in seven had a mutual antipathy with an other-sex peer. They were most likely to involve youth from rejected and controversial sociometric categories. Little is known about the basis of these relationships, their durations, or the dynamics of interaction between members. Some antipathies may arise from failed efforts at friendship or romantic ties. Two teens may come to dislike each other when one mistreats the other's best friend in a dating relationship or when a former friendship is ended when one member transitions to a new, higher status peer group. Certainly, the incidence of such relationships is high enough to warrant more research.

Group Antagonisms

More information is available about mutual antipathies at the group (clique or crowd) level. For years, scholars and practitioners have bemoaned the hostile character of interactions between friendship cliques, particularly in early adolescence. Adler and Adler (1998) observed the operations of peer cliques as their subjects transitioned from late childhood into early adolescence. Especially in higher status groups, they found extensive evidence of subjugation both within and between groups. Higher status members ridiculed lower status members, who were more likely to accept the harassment than to move to a different clique because of the status they enjoyed as a result of their membership. All group members tended to make fun of or obviously ignore outsiders—actions that Crick et al. (2001) would label relational aggression. The intent seemed to be to create fear and a sense of inferiority among those outside the group. New members of the high status group were socialized into acting toward outsiders in this fashion. Kinney's (1993) high school respondents recounted similar dynamics as they reflected back on their experience of cliques in middle school.

Sometimes, antagonisms among groups seem to fade as youth enter the more complex social world of high school (Kinney, 1993), but there are cases in which the high school social system is defined in terms of mutual antipathies between crowds. Eckert (1989) depicted the peer crowd system in the suburban, mixed-class American school that she studied as anchored by two groups, the jocks and burnouts. The jocks embraced an upper middle-class, competitive, corporate culture, whereas the burnouts

took an oppositional stance rooted in more working class, cooperative values. Each group staked out separate turf within the school, and each consciously avoided the other's turf. School activities that one group embraced were eschewed by the other; cross-group romantic relationships and friendships were avoided. Macleod (1995) offered a similar portrait of distancing and distrust between two crowds of youth (one African American, the other European American) in an inner city neighborhood. Deyhle (1986) described how a group of American Indian youth adopted break dancing as their symbol of opposition to the dominant Anglo culture of other groups (including some fellow Navajos or Utes) in their school in the southwestern United States. Their failure to dress, dance, or socialize like other crowds in the school (e.g., they attended football games but spent the time on the side lines break dancing instead of in the stands watching the game) clarified their distinctive lifestyle, but without the aggressive edge to social relations that Eckert and others described.

Are Antagonisms Unhealthy?

Although these dyadic and group antipathies sound unhealthy—and at least at the dyadic level appear to be associated with problematic behaviors or outcomes—they may possibly serve constructive ends for adolescents in terms of identity enhancement. A basic tenet of social identity theory is that group members will exaggerate the positive features of their in-group and the negative characteristics of out-group members in order to enhance their own social identity (see Stone & Brown, 1998). Conflict can serve constructive functions in dyadic relationships as well. Laursen (1996) discovered that conflict was a daily feature of close relationships among American adolescents. High school students in his study reported an average of nearly 8 conflicts a day with various interaction partners. Disagreements were most frequent with mothers, followed by friends, romantic partners, siblings, and fathers. Common sources or subjects of conflict differed among relationships. The incidence of conflicts diminished across adolescence within friendships but rose in romantic relationships, possibly because the relationships grew more intense and stable (Laursen & Collins, 1994). The impact of conflict on these relationships depended substantially on how it was resolved. In most cases, partners worked to settle disagreements in ways that would avoid disruption or dissolution of the relationship. Compromise and negotiation were employed more often in friendships and romantic alliances than in family relationships (with parents or peers). Curiously, conflicts generally had no effects—for better or worse—in friendships, whereas many adolescents felt that they tended to improve their relationship with romantic partners (Laursen, 1993).

Summary

Despite the voluntary nature of most adolescent peer relations, conflict and antagonism are common components of relationships in the peer system. In moderation, they can serve healthy functions for both relationships and individuals. In some cases, however, antagonism or aggressive behavior becomes the basis for the relationship and fosters or perpetuates undesirable outcomes. Increasing awareness of these distinctions should help investigators and practitioners to design more effective intervention programs for youth caught up in (or vulnerable to) antagonistic relations with peers.

Interconnections and Embeddedness

Although most studies tend to focus on just one facet of the peer social system—one type of relationship or one level of engagement with peers—most investigators appreciate the linkages that exist across relationships and levels. Efforts to understand these linkages have advanced to the point that, based on recent research, several assertions can be made about the interconnections and embeddedness of the peer system in adolescence.

The first assertion is that interpersonal characteristics or competencies predispose individuals to certain types of relationship experiences. This is apparent in the connections that several investigators have noted between sociometric status and affiliation patterns. For example, Bagwell, Coie, Terry, and Lochman (2000) found that preadolescents who were rejected by peers still belonged to peer groups but were less central members. They also tended to participate in smaller cliques populated by other rejected youth. Curiously, youth who were regarded as aggressive were just as likely to be involved in peer groups and just as likely to be central members as were nonaggressive youth, although they tended to coalesce with other, aggressively oriented peers. Hanna and Berndt (1995) examined patterns of interaction and affiliation among adolescents attending a summer camp. Campers who were regarded more positively by peers also reported more positive features in their camp friendships. Those who described their prior friendships (outside of camp) in negative terms were viewed as more antagonistic by fellow campers, even though their camp friendships did not display more negative features than did those of other campers. It is possible, of course, that the camp friendships were still in the formative stage and had not yet progressed to a point at which negative features would be apparent. The general implication is that youth who are not well liked by peers have fewer options for friendship and group associates, and those options are dominated by other rejected youth. This makes it more difficult for them to learn and practice effective social skills within peer relationships, so that their social standing within the larger peer group could improve. Perhaps this explains why rejected peer status is more stable than other sociometric categories. These findings also affirm Buhrmester's (1996) admonition that whereas interpersonal competencies influence the course of friendships, friendships also help to shape a young person's interpersonal competencies. It would be useful, in this regard, to examine how changes in sociometric ratings over time are tied to shifting fortunes in dyadic relationships (the adolescent's success or failure in initiating and in maintaining healthy friendships and romantic ties).

A second assertion is that experiences in one type of peer relationship affect opportunities for and experiences with other types of peer relationships. This is the fundamental principle underlying Sullivan's (1953) hypothesis that intense, emotionally charged preadolescent same-sex chumships prepare young people for the intense, sexually charged romantic relationships of adolescence. Few have been able to connect friendship and romance in precisely the fashion that Sullivan described, but there are indicators of a similar association. Furman (1999), for example, questioned a common assumption from attachment theory that the quality of adolescents' romantic relationships would be best predicted by relationships with parents. Rather, he reasoned, because of the affiliative nature of early to midadolescent romantic relations, they may have more in common with friendships. In a small but ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of high school seniors, Furman, Simon, Shaffer, and Bouchev (2002)

found that qualities of respondents' friendships significantly predicted features of their romantic relationships, but features of the parent-child bond (especially the nature of attachment to parent) did not. In other words, the affective linkages between friendship and romance are stronger, in the early stages of adolescence, than those between romance and parental attachments.

Longitudinal studies following youth from childhood through middle adolescence indicate that having close, same-sex friendships in middle childhood predicts having romantic relationships in early or middle adolescence (Neeman, Hubbard, & Master, 1995; Stroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999), as well as healthier romantic affiliations in late adolescence (Collins, 2003; Collins, Hennighausen, & Ruh, 1999). Feiring (1999) found that youth are more likely to be involved with other-sex romantic partners in midadolescence if they have had other-sex friendships in early adolescence.

Connolly et al. (2000) provided a more elaborate analysis of how friendship networks launch adolescents into romantic relationships. Gathering data in three successive years (Grades 9–11) on the composition of friendship network and involvement in romantic relations, the investigators found that high school students were more likely to have a romantic relationship if in the previous year they had been involved in a more mixed-gender friendship group. This, in turn, was predicted by having an other-sex close friend even earlier in high school. In other words, a succession of experiences with other-sex friendships and then peer groups early in high school seemed to prepare youth for romantic relationships by the middle of high school. These findings corroborate Dumphy's (1969) observations of Australian youth half a century earlier, in which there was a metamorphosis from isolated, same-sex cliques to mixed-sex cliques to clusters of mixed-sex groups that aided in socializing members into heterosexual romantic relationships. The progression into romantic relationships is not always a smooth one, however. In Brendgen, Vitaro, Doyle, Markiewicz, and Bukowski's (2002) sample of 7th graders, having a romantic relationship was related to poorer psychological and behavior outcomes for socially rejected youth, whereas associations with outcomes were not significant for more socially accepted adolescents. A complicating issue in that study, however, is the timing of entry into romantic relationships, which is discussed in relation to my fifth and final theme.

Whereas friendships can facilitate the move into romantic relationships, they may also be the victims of an adolescent's success in this realm. Youth who are involved in romantic relationships confess that they spend less time with friends, as well as parents and other relationship partners (Laurson & Williams, 1997; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). Particularly for females, this can generate feelings of resentment and abandonment, which are difficult to articulate directly to the offending friend without appearing to be overprotective or perhaps sexually attracted to the friend (Roth & Parker, 2001).

A third, somewhat bolder assertion is that peer relations are embedded within a peer system and are affected by the norms and expectations of that system. Researchers have asserted unequivocally that not all adolescent friendships or romantic relationships are alike. Individual characteristics explain much of the variation, but group dynamics are an issue as well. Cliques and crowds shape the norms and arenas of activity for dyadic relationships. Eder (1985) observed how early adolescent girls' need to remain vigilant about their status in the popular clique forced them to approach friendships cautiously. Recognizing their cliquemates—as well as outsiders—as potential competitors for so-

cial status, they carefully censored the information they were willing to share with close associates. Eckert (1989) found sharp distinctions in orientations toward friendship between the two dominant groups in the school in which she conducted her ethnography. Jocks were strategic in choosing friends and cautious about self-disclosure, mindful that even close associates could be competitors for social and academic rewards. Their orientation toward friendship was reminiscent of Shulman and Knafo's (1997) disengaged type of relationship. From their position much further down in the school's status hierarchy, the burnouts felt a strong sense of loyalty to and camaraderie with their friends. Trust and reliability were essential in their associates—much more in keeping with Shulman's interdependent type. Eckert argued that these discrepant patterns emerged from the different socioeconomic circumstances of members of the two crowds but that they became normative features of the crowd regardless of members' social class background. Foley (1990) reported similar dynamics in a study of Texas youth.

It is very likely that the timetable for dating, expectations for sexual intimacy, tolerance for diversity (e.g., cross-race friendships or acceptance of homosexual as well as heterosexual romances), and essential features of friendship all vary considerably among friendship groups or reputational crowds. Researchers have yet to delve into this rich source of variance in adolescent peer relations in any systematic way. In fact, all evidence to date comes from ethnographic investigations; studies using other methodologies are needed to confirm and extend their inferences.

A final assertion is that the peer system itself is embedded in broader social contexts and an adolescent's larger network of social relationships. The extensive literature demonstrating connections between parent-child and peer relations needs to be acknowledged here, even though it cannot be examined in detail. Associations with deviant friends, often cited as one of the strongest correlates of delinquent behavior, seem to follow from problematic relationships with parents (Dishion, Patterson, & Griesler, 1994). Relationships with parents and friends both contribute to the quality and duration of romantic ties (Collins, 2003; Furman, 1999). Parenting styles can moderate the effects of friends on both adaptive and problem behavior (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995). Recent work, however, suggests that adolescents are more active in shaping parental input and parental influence on peer relationships during adolescence than scholars of previous decades have assumed. Parental awareness of adolescents' interactions and relationships with peers comes primarily from the information adolescents voluntarily provide, rather than from vigilant parental monitoring (Kerr & Stattin, 2000), and adolescents consciously screen what they share with parents (Darling, Hames, & Cumsille, 2000). Parents seem more likely to react to problems with peer relations than to try proactively to shape their adolescent child's associations with age-mates (Mounts, 2001; Tilton-Weaver & Galambos, in press).

School, family, neighborhood, and community all serve as broader contexts in which peer interactions occur for adolescents. Their capacity to shape the nature and effects of peer relationships can be quite profound. Peshkin (1991) described a community whose norms about racial tolerance promoted interaction across ethnic boundaries, helping to explain the unusual number of cross-ethnic friendships among adolescents and their ease in negotiating these relationships. Nevertheless, cross-ethnic romances were uncommon, partially, Peshkin discovered, because of pressures youth felt from parents to confine dating partners to ethnic peers. The number of peer crowds mentioned by British

youth varied considerably among the six schools participating in Thurlow's (2001) study. This may have been a function of both the demographic composition of the student bodies as well as the size or social climate in each school. Early-maturing girls attending single-sex, Australian schools manifested lower levels of delinquency than those in coeducational environments, possibly because of their restricted access to cliques containing older, deviantly oriented boys (Caspi, Lynam, Moffitt, & Silva, 1993).

Summary

These four assertions help to place more circumscribed investigations of adolescent peer relations in proper perspective. It is now common for investigators to be sensitive to the demographic background of their respondents. More attention must be paid, however, to respondents' *interpersonal* backgrounds and the social contexts in which the data are collected. Of course, to some extent adolescents are instrumental in selecting and shaping these contexts, just as they are proactive in censoring parents' awareness of their activities and associations with peers. Nonetheless, researchers should continue to be attentive to the linkages between different components of the peer system, as well as the opportunities and constraints that are imposed from a young person's broader network of social relationships.

Developmental Change in the Character of Peer Relationships

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized the dynamic nature of peer relations in adolescence. Individuals routinely change partners and change friendship groups; they move in and out of various types of relationships; and their reputations among peers can be altered by certain events or associations. The daily dynamics of relationship processes and intergroup interactions are essential components of the peer social context. There is one more dynamic that researchers are beginning to understand better: transformations in the nature of peer relationships or the organization of the peer system that are tied to normative processes of individual development. Adolescence spans a considerable time period in technologically advanced cultures, during which individuals undergo dramatic changes in physical characteristics, cognitive abilities, academic and cultural knowledge, and social maturity. To remain functional, the peer system has to grow with the individual. As Buhrmester (1996, p. 165) noted, "Developing needs and concerns dictate, to a sizable degree, the social provisions and relationship features that are sought in friendship." Research on developmental changes in peer relations is not yet well coordinated and systematic, but there is sufficient evidence to illustrate some of the effects that individual development can have.

Expectations about the basic features of friendship change as individuals progress from late childhood to middle adolescence (Berndt & Perry, 1986). Emphasis on sharing activities declines in favor of more concern with sharing secrets, worries, and ambitions; trust becomes as important as companionship. Later, good friends grow more aware of the full spectrum of relationships that each other is pursuing, thus feeling more comfortable allowing their partner to have social experiences outside of their own relationship. Consistent with these shifting expectations, Shulman, Laursen, Kalmann, and Karpovsky (1997) discovered that across adolescence in their sample of Israeli youth, emphasis on individuality increased, whereas control and conformity declined.

No age differences were noted in emotional closeness and self-disclosure. Laursen (1996) cited a broader array of studies showing declines across this life stage in admiration, satisfaction, companionship, and reliable alliance of friends (although, consistent with Shulman et al., there was no evidence of a decline in intimacy). Laursen speculated that the pattern of changes reflected the decline of Sullivan's chumship as romantic relations assumed more importance.

Consistent with Laursen's (1996) inference, the percentage of youth reporting romantic affiliations increases with age, and these alliances last longer among older youth (Davies & Windle, 2000). Intimacy with romantic partners also increases with age, to the point that, in late adolescence, it equals self-disclosure to best friends and surpasses closeness to parents (Buhrmester, 1996). Several scholars have proposed stage theories of the development of romantic relationships, describing how they shift from more public relationships overseen by the friendship group to more private affiliations with a depth of feeling and commitment (Brown, 1999b; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). Consistent with these theories, Davies and Windle (2000) noted a tendency for adolescents to move forward, across a two-year period, along a trajectory from not dating to casual relationships to having a "steady" romantic partner. Individuals varied in their timing at entry into this sequence and the speed with which they progressed to steady relationships. Those who lingered in a stage featuring multiple casual relationships also displayed more problem behavior than those who moved on to more committed relationships. However, individuals who had intermittent casual relationships, broken by periods of no romantic involvement, were also low in problem behavior. Thus, whereas there was no optimal developmental timetable, some trajectories seemed more adaptive than others.

Developmental shifts in behavior patterns may be accompanied by changes in psychological investments in romantic relationships. Furman and Wehner (1997) outlined a behavioral systems perspective on close relationships in adolescence, describing how relationships can meet individuals' needs in four domains: affiliation, attachment, care giving, and sexual gratification. The transfer of attachment from parents to romantic partners was gradual and incomplete (parental attachments are transformed, not abandoned). Early adolescents were likely to look to dating partners to address affiliative needs. Not until late adolescence did romantic relationships typically deepen to address sexual and attachment issues. The nature of this progression was affected, however, by the quality of attachment to parents, with securely attached adolescents progressing somewhat earlier and more confidently toward integrating several behavioral systems, or views, into their romantic relationships.

Investigators have also seen dramatic transformations in the peer crowd system from early to later adolescence. Self-report data indicate that early adolescents' preoccupation with belonging to a popular crowd fades with age; along with this are declines in derogatory comments directed both within and outside a group (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Crowds grow more permeable as well, and less hierarchically ordered by status or influence. Kinney's (1993) longitudinal ethnography of one crowd system confirmed these trajectories, but Kinney also observed two profound shifts in crowd structure from middle school through late high school. With the transition to senior high school, the rigid authority structure separating the populars from the unpopulars broke down, as youth encountered a broader array of groups, each legitimized by the presence of upperclassmen. Youth shunned by the populars in middle school recovered a stronger

sense of identity as they were accepted into these groups and removed from the tight control of the popular elite. By late adolescence, the status ordering had almost collapsed, and youth more easily formed close relationships across crowd boundaries.

Even in the face of these changes, however, peer crowds retain some predictive utility relative to developmental trajectories for youth. Prinstein and La Greca (2002) traced changes in internalizing and externalizing behavior across childhood and adolescence of youth who ultimately associated with different crowds in adolescence. The most startling patterns were those of individuals who ultimately became brains. In childhood, they had the lowest average score of any crowd on depression and loneliness and the highest self-esteem. By midadolescence, all of these advantages had disappeared, apparently reflecting the broader peer group's devaluation of academic achievement across this age span.

Information on normative transitions in dyadic and group or crowd relations set the stage for investigations of nonnormative trajectories. For example, early-maturing youth are more likely than their "on-time" or late-maturing peers to have romantic relationships in early adolescence. Several studies indicate, however, that those who begin dating and romantic activity in early adolescence fare worse on a variety of psychological and behavioral measures. Magnusson's (1988) results from a Swedish study are especially illustrative. He found that early-maturing girls often associated with older boys (presumably because their age peers of the other sex, still far away from puberty, did not share their interest in other-sex relationships), but they tended to fall in with male or mixed-sex cliques that had a delinquent orientation. Although the boys offered an outlet for heterosexual interests, they also pulled the early maturers into deviant and sexual activity for which they may not have been emotionally prepared, threatening their psychological well-being as well as their reputation among adults.

Generally, then, there appears to be a synergy between individual's developmental needs and the organization and operation of the peer system. Across adolescence, the peer system transforms to accommodate shifts in individual's interests and relational capacities. Those who engage in relationships "ahead of schedule," however, may be frustrated by the lack of a supportive structure within the broader peer system. In any event, age or developmental stage is a crucial variable for researchers to consider in their investigations of teenage peer relationships and peer structures.

CONCLUSION

The extensive insights that scholars have gleaned from studies of adolescent peer relations since 1985 are at once fascinating and intimidating. Certainly, they have illuminated a number of features of this complex social context, but they have also underscored the need for continued study that is both conceptually and methodologically sophisticated. Five specific recommendations can be highlighted.

First, multiple approaches to a particular issue often can produce insights that a single methodology fails to reveal. Graham and Juvonen (1998) identified victims of peer abuse in a sample of 6th and 7th graders, relying on both self-attributions and peer nominations. Although the two methods were correlated, they tended to produce distinct lists of respondents high in victimization. Moreover, self-perceived victims were

distinctive from nonvictims in their tendency to blame their treatment by peers on their character, rather than their behavior. Self-perceived victimization was correlated with loneliness, anxiety, and low self-worth, but none of these variables correlated significantly with peer-rated victimization. Instead, it was related to sociometric ratings of acceptance and rejection. Gest and Fletcher (1996) derived maps of cliques from respondents' own lists of clique members and from a social-cognitive mapping (SCM) approach (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). Agreement between the two methods was well beyond chance, but self-generated lists tended to include just a subset of the cliques derived by SCM. Youth tended to omit (sociometrically) less popular youth from their lists of clique members. The authors of these studies emphasized that both techniques they used generated valid data, just differing in perspectives. But those differences revealed intriguing features of the phenomena under investigation.

Second, investigators should attend to distal as well as proximal associates. Most studies focus on *close* or *best* friends, *steady* romantic partners, or *fellow members* of one's clique or crowd. Giordano (1995) found a sharp distinction in what close friends as opposed to acquaintances wrote in adolescents' school yearbooks. The latter offered more blunt, "unfettered appraisals" of the book owner's personality, appearance, and behavior. Giordano speculated that such appraisals could be dismissed by the adolescent because they came from a lesser valued source, but they might also be taken to heart as more honest and trustworthy than comments from close friends. Eckert's (1989) study of the burnouts' preoccupation with the jocks (and vice versa) illustrated how adolescents may be affected just as strongly by disliked, out-group members as by members of their own crowd. There is still remarkably little attention given to adolescents' "wider circle of friends" and the ways that they influence psychological and social development.

Third, more attention must be paid to diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Researchers are to be commended for deriving more diverse samples for studies, but now they must look more systematically at variation between as well as variability within different groups. Hamm (2000) found substantial differences across ethnic groups in the characteristics on which best friends were similar; she also noticed that factors moderating similarity between friends differed among groups. For example, the degree of similarity in academic achievement among African American friends depended on their socioeconomic status; similarity on this variable among Asian Americans and their friends was contingent on the target student's own level of achievement. Way et al. (2001) documented a similar degree of variability within and across ethnic groups in their typology of adolescent friendships. The results raise questions about how widely shared certain values and orientations are in friendship, both within and across ethnic or cultural communities of adolescents.

A fourth, related suggestion is to continue to emphasize situated appraisals of adolescent peer relations. Hanna and Berndt (1995) reported that whereas friendship quality seemed to be consistent for youth in school and summer camp settings, sociometric status was not. Studies of friendship patterns across a general sample of adolescents may mask substantial differences occurring among individuals from different cliques or crowds. Having established many of these general patterns, investigators should pay more attention to the contexts—within and beyond the peer social system—that modify such patterns.

Finally, sufficient progress has been made in studying romantic relationships to move beyond the heterosexual bias of most studies in this area. Since Savin-Williams's (1994) fascinating appraisal of the issue, some progress has been made in assessing gay, lesbian, and transsexual youths' negotiation of the peer social system (e.g., Diamond, 2000), but researchers should make a more conscientious effort to include assessments of sexual-minority youth in their examinations of peer relationships at all levels of the peer social system.

The matter is settled, then: Peers are neither an entirely supportive and healthy set of associates for adolescents, nor a social force driving them fervently toward maladaptive outcomes. They have the capacity—if not the inclination—to do both, but this capacity is tempered by the adolescent's own background and behavior. Only by continuing to unravel the complexities of this social context will investigators help parents, educators, and practitioners appreciate the profound significance of peers in adolescents' personal and social development.

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