

Exclusion in Girls' Peer Groups: Ethnographic Analysis of Language Practices on the Playground

Marjorie Harness Goodwin

Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif., USA

Key Words

Conversation analysis • Gender and language • Moral development • Peer victimization • Social exclusion • Sociology of childhood

Abstract

Many of our models of female behavior are the legacy of a 'two cultures' perspective on moral development and have investigated children's reasoning about moral situations rather than moral action itself. By examining the practices that make up the life world of a particular social group we can investigate how morality is lodged within the actions and stances that children take up in interaction with their peers. Forms of social exclusion in girls' groups call into question the notion that girls are fundamentally interested in cooperative interaction and a morality based on principles of relatedness, care, and equity. The argument is based on ethnographic study of a girls' peer group of mixed ethnicities and social classes in an elementary school in Southern California carried out over a three-year period.

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Morality is lodged in the choices made by people regarding how to treat group members in the midst of interaction. These are largely social choices that are intimately part of the context and the socio-political processes that constitute

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Prof. Marjorie Harness Goodwin
Department of Anthropology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553 (USA)
Tel. +1 310 825 2055, Fax +1 310 206 7833
E-Mail mgoodwin@anthro.ucla.edu

the life worlds of groups. Through his early descriptions of the ‘presentation of self in everyday life’ Goffman [1959] outlined a field of endeavor within sociology which focused precisely on ‘the concerns of mundane actors with moral identity and the maintenance of face’ [Bergmann, 1998, pp. 185–186]. As argued by Bergmann [1998, p. 286], ‘Morality is constructed in and through social interaction, and the analysis of morality has to focus, accordingly, on the intricacies of everyday discourse.’

Despite the fact that morality deals with decision making concerning what is appropriate, fair, and right to do in a particular situation [Harré, 1964, p. 1], for the past thirty-five years the psychological study of morality has focused attention on *reasoning about* moral situations rather than on moral *action* itself. Most studies of moral development have relied on interviews, either asking subjects to discuss their own real-life moral dilemmas [Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988; Lyons, 1988] or respond to hypothetical moral dilemmas [Langdale, 1986; Rothbart, Hanley, & Albert, 1986]. We have little sense of the temporal organization of social episodes; and as Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller [1987, p. 16] have cautioned, the exclusive use of interviews in studies of moral development research reduces ‘the study of moral concepts to the study of verbal justification of moral ideas’ – what people can ‘propositionalize’. That is inappropriate because what people can state is but a small part of what they know; moreover, responses to questioning about moral issues, as argued by Packer [1985, p. 1], are not always directly related to what people do.

A second issue, with respect to gendered studies of moral development, is that many of these studies have perpetuated a ‘Two Cultures’ or ‘Separate Worlds’ view of girls’ and boys’ experiences, arguing that girls are more ‘prosocial’ than boys. For example, Brown, Gilligan, and Tappan [1995, p. 314], using interview narratives of real-life moral conflict and choice of girls of primarily White middle class or upper middle class background, compare two approaches to moral decision making: a male ‘justice’ perspective and a female ‘care’ perspective. While the justice orientation reflects ‘an ideal of equality, reciprocity, and fairness between persons’, the care orientation reflects ‘an ideal of attachment, loving and being loved, listening and being listened to, and responding and being responded to’. Though neither voice is ‘gender-specific’, the two voices tend to be ‘gender-related’ [ibid., p. 323].

While linguistic anthropologists such as Keenan [1974], Kulick [1993], Goodwin [1980], Brown [1990, p. 138], and Morgan [1999] have for several decades documented forms of confrontational behavior in the female linguistic repertoire, for the most part linguists, who like psychologists investigate the behavior of the White middle class, have supported the notion that male speakers are socialized into a competitive style of discourse, while women are socialized into a more cooperative style of speech [Coates, 1994, p. 72]. This style emphasizes solidarity and positive politeness [Holmes, 1995], intimacy rather than status [Tannen, 1990, p. 47]. Maltz and Borker [1982] propose that the gender segregation that girls and boys experience results not only in differing activities which are the focus of their worlds, but also alternative ways of speaking; girls’ collaborative talk is said to contrast with boys’ competitive talk.

A more nuanced approach appears in the work of Sheldon [1992], who analyzes patterns of ‘double-voiced’ discourse among White middle class preschool girls. Whereas conflict talk among boys displays ‘a primary orientation to self-

interest', girls demonstrate their concerns for 'affiliation, reciprocity, and efforts to protect others' face' [Sheldon, 1992, p. 100] through modulating opposition. Sheldon's work is important because it demonstrated that middle class White girls as well as boys can engage in highly assertive exchanges. However, it has been used to support essentialist notions of boys and girls in association with Maltz and Borker's Two Cultures paradigm. Many dichotomous characterizations [see Thorne, 2002] depart little from the notion of Separate Worlds [see Kyratzis, 2001].

Ethnographic fieldwork, including videotaping and audiotaping of naturally occurring conversation, permits analysis of the practices children actively use to orchestrate their social organization. To elaborate my argument, I use observations from three years of ethnographic research at Hanley School¹, a private elementary school with roots in the progressive education movement, located in Southern California. I observed and videotaped third through sixth graders at lunch and recess (in all over fifty children). The focus of this paper is on a core group of six girls and their classmates, who are of various ethnicities and social classes, and who regularly ate lunch and played together. I investigate the cultural concerns as well as the language practices of the girls used to build their social organization. I followed the group from fourth through sixth grade.

I document the linguistic and nonverbal resources through which girls practice forms of social exclusion and ridicule in their spontaneous play, focusing on an age group (10–12-year-olds) whose practices of exclusion have to date received little attention. It provides among the first documentations of the language children use to execute the activity of peer victimization; with some exceptions [Cadigan, 2002] the few qualitative studies available rely on focus groups of interviews for data collection [Owens et al., 2001; Salmivalli, 2001]. By examining actual instances of negotiated interaction, we can avoid perpetuating essentialist generalizations [Bergvall, Bing, & Freed, 1996] about the nature of girls' groups. In addition, documentation of the interactions girls engage in causes us to seriously question the adequacy of dichotomous characterizations of gender role behavior.

I begin by considering the role of dispute and exclusion in children's groups, discussing three groups of 10–12-year-olds I have investigated ethnographically; my studies clearly contradict the model of female cooperative interaction that dominates most research on language and gender. I next review psychological studies of aggressive behavior that have attempted to differentiate female forms of 'relational aggression' from other forms. Play patterns of different gender groups are next discussed, in that they are crucial for understanding the criteria in terms of which girls and boys construct difference in their social groups. I explore how social class is made relevant in girls' everyday conversations by discussing forms of comparisons girls make. The final section of the article deals with forms of exclusion within a girls' group, both among status equals as well as with respect to a 'tagalong' girl, a person defined by her marginal status. Through attention to language practices, I demonstrate how girls articulate for each other their concern or disdain for one another, and position themselves relative to other girls.

¹The names of the school and the study participants have been changed to assure confidentiality.

Processes of Dispute and Exclusion in Children's Groups

During thirty years of ethnographic study of girls' peer groups, I have examined a range of speech activities, including directives used to organize activities, story-telling, gossip, and dispute. Dispute is very much a part of the social fabric of a children's peer group [Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Eder, 1995; Goodwin, 1990; Maynard, 1985; Shantz, 1987]. Neither an aberration nor something to be avoided at all costs, it is, rather, constitutive of children's dealings with one another [Hartup & Laursen, 1993] and establishes group cohesiveness [Maynard, 1985]. In fact according to psychologists Shantz and Hartup [1992, p. 11], 'No other single phenomenon plays as broad and significant rule in human development as conflict is thought to.'

Across three groups of 10–12-year-olds with whom I have conducted long term fieldwork – (a) African American working class girls in Philadelphia, (b) second generation Spanish/English-speaking Central American and Mexican girls in downtown Los Angeles, and (c) a group of children of various ethnicities and social classes in a private, progressive school in Southern California – I observed girls' ability to negotiate disputes in the midst of games [Goodwin, 1985, 1998, 2000, 2001]. Rather than seeking to avoid conflict [Lever, 1976], or having little concern with legal elaboration [Piaget, 1965 (1932); Brown, Gilligan, & Tappan, 1995, pp. 311–312], the ways in which girls construct extended opposition sequences demonstrate that they are actively seeking it out.

Other forms of dispute were evident as well. Among African American working class girls in Philadelphia, studied in 1970–71, processes of social exclusion through which girls manage their social relations and delineate the boundaries of their group were quite evident. While the actions of the boys made visible a hierarchy, within girls' groups there were continuous processes of coalition formation as girls vied with each other over who was friends with whom, and who was excluded from friendship arrangements. The girls talked extensively about other girls behind their backs, and sanctioned girls who attempted to act like they were superior to other girls (having better clothing, being in an accelerated class, enjoying privileges with other girls' moms, having boyfriends, etc.).

Forms of exclusion were also observed during my fieldwork among a group of second-generation Mexican and Central American girls in a downtown Los Angeles neighborhood, Pico Union. While studying fifth grade Latinas from 1997–98, I found girls were careful to delineate who their friendship group consisted of during recess. Artwork produced for me during free time read: 'Schedule. Hop-Scotch. Prescilla, Cynthia, Ana, Diane ONLY. No more girls.' The artwork was specifically designed to instruct me not to include a girl named Natalia in my filming of hopscotch. In this girls' group, Natalia, a Salvadoran-American girl whose mother was secretary to an important LA dignitary, bragged about the outings and privileges she enjoyed. Natalia made good grades in fifth grade, touted the fact that she was going to be bussed to a junior high school in an upscale neighborhood in sixth grade, and continually reminded the girls she was in a special after-school club for Gifted and Talented children. She wore fashionable clothing and often ridiculed a Chinese-American girl who wore second-hand dresses. In that Natalia frequently acted as if she were better than other girls, her classmates tried to prevent her from playing with them at recess, did not permit her to join an informal girls' after-

school Girl Power Club they organized, and avoided talking to her during the summer when she worked at the school.

Among the girls' groups I have studied, girls sanction members of their peer group who act in ways interpreted as putting on airs with respect to other girls. Boys participate in a continuous cycle of sports activities, which permits the opportunity for constructing different rankings [e.g., Goodwin, 1990, pp. 39–44]. Because girls evaluate themselves with reference to the relationships they maintain with others, rather than in terms of how they rank in a hierarchy of sports, social exclusion and ridicule constitute powerful ways of delineating the group and dealing with those who offend the social order. I agree with Brown and Gilligan [1992, p. 3] who state that 'an inner sense of connection with others is a central organizing feature of women's development'.

Brown, Gilligan, and Tappan [1995] maintain that while males are concerned with equality, reciprocity, justice, and rights, females are concerned with an ethic of care and response. However, as I have demonstrated elsewhere [Goodwin, 1985, 1998, 2000, 2001], girls are equally as concerned as boys with issues of rights and rules in the midst of spontaneous play. In this paper I explore forms of exclusion and ridicule that are clearly not oriented to an ethic of care. As argued by Simmons [2002, p. 9], while the desire for connection propels children into friendship, 'the need for recognition and power ignites competition and conflict'.

While some forms of exclusion constitute sanctions to acts interpreted as attempts to position oneself above others, other forms of exclusion and ridicule develop in line with a social group's strong feelings of differentiation of in-group and out-group membership. The offense generating some forms of exclusion may not be that someone puts herself above others, but that she attempts to affiliate with the group in the first place. Following a particular group of girls from fourth through sixth grade, I found that within the friendship group, practices of exclusion among the girls were accomplished not only in covert ways, but, in addition, through quite explicit and direct verbal speech activities as well – using resources such as insults, bald imperatives, and stories in which the target is portrayed in a negative way.

Differentiating Forms of Aggressive Behavior

Despite its omnipresence in children's everyday life, dispute is often downplayed in the accounts of female social organization. Girls are portrayed as inclusive [Maltz & Borker, 1982], collaborative [Leaper, 1991], or 'cooperative and reciprocal' [Maccoby, 1998, p. 46]. In sharp contrast to the paradigm that asserts that females are socialized to be non-confrontational, ethnographic work by Goodwin [1990], sociological studies of girls' friendships [Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1995; Eder & Halinan, 1978], recent studies of girls in psychological literature [Crick & Grotpeter, 1995] as well as recent accounts of girls' aggression for lay audiences [Chesler, 2001; Simmons, 2002; Talbot, 2001; Wiseman, 2002; White, 2002] have discussed forms of girls' 'alternative' or 'relational aggression'. This is defined as 'purposeful withdrawal of friendship or acceptance in order to hurt or control a child' [Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, p. 719]. Behaviors associated with relational aggression include 'ignoring someone to punish them or get one's own way, excluding someone socially for revenge, using negative body language or facial

expressions, sabotaging someone else's relationships, or threatening to end a relationship unless the friend agrees to a request' [Simmons, 2002, p. 21].

Recently, largely through questionnaires and surveys, psychologists have analyzed forms of relational aggression among preschool and adolescent females in Norway [Olweus, 1993], Finland [Bjorkqvist, 1994; Pulkkinen & Pitkanen, 1993], the U.S. [Crick & Grotpeter, 1995], England [Rivers & Smith, 1994], and Australia [Owens, 1996; Rigby, 1997]. Supporting a new form of gender dualism, not unlike the Separate Worlds perspective in anthropology and sociolinguistics, psychologists have differentiated forms of *direct physical* and *verbal* aggression – hitting, kicking, threatening, commanding, and refusing to comply with another's request – that have been associated with boys from forms of girls' 'relational aggression' or 'indirect bullying', defined as 'getting another person to assault someone, persuading another person to insult someone, spreading malicious rumors, and deliberate exclusion from a group or activity' [Rigby, 1997, p. 20].

Counter to the popular belief that direct verbal aggression is more the province of boys than of girls, recent work by Rigby [1998, p. 50] argues that few gender differences have been found. In fact Ahmad and Smith [1994] report that English girls are more likely than boys to be the victims of name calling by other girls. Rarely have researchers analyzed forms of relational aggression among boys; although beyond the scope of this paper, I observed processes of exclusion among fourth and fifth grade boys at Hanley School that were devastating to the targeted boy [see also Cadigan, 2002].

Important sex differences in forms of social alienation were found in the longitudinal studies of Cairns et al. [1989]. These studies followed the pathways of 695 young people (ages 9–17) in North Carolina growing up over a fourteen-year period. Cairns and Cairns [1986, p. 323] found that girls reported more themes of social alienation and ostracism in early adolescence than they did in childhood. While these studies provide important investigations of what children report about their experiences of peer victimization, we have virtually no studies of the language or interactive practices through which girls inflict harm and sustain what has been termed 'the dark side of close relationships' [Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998].

Methodologies for Investigating Social Exclusion and Aggression

All too often the methodology used to study aggressive behavior, as in studies of gender-appropriate behavior and friendship [Damon, 1977; Selman, 1980] assumes a traditional, individualistic rather than a socio-cultural [Ambert, 1995] or interpretive [Corsaro, 1992] model of human development. This is true even among psychologists working within a constructivist paradigm who assume a more social view of the child [Harré & Lamb, 1986]. Many psychologists examining social aggression formulate the locus of behavior in the individual. Thus the study of forms of social exclusion, like investigations of friendship [Winterhoff, 1997], proceeds by looking at individual responses to questionnaires and clinical interviews about victimization. In studies of peer victimization, psychologists make use of peer evaluation techniques [Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukainen, 1992; Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, & Peltonen, 1998; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Osterman, & Kaukainen, 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999; Ahmad & Smith, 1994], self reports [Boulton &

Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1991], or combinations of both self and peer nomination reports [Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2001].

Conversation analysis, coupled with long-term ethnographic study, provides a powerful methodology for documenting such practices in children's naturally occurring, moment-to-moment conversation. Examining the sequential organization of the stream of talk-in-interaction [Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974] as well as the affective displays participants provide [Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000], we can investigate how participants display for each other the meaningfulness of a prior action. Because participants have the job of providing next moves to ongoing talk which demonstrate what sense they make of the talk, it is possible to see how group members themselves interpret the interaction they are engaged in without having to rely on accounts passed on to researchers through interviews.

The Girls' Core Group

By bringing to my analysis sustained ethnographic observation, I can position specific interactions in the past history of interactions within the girls' group to examine the processes through which the social organization of a social group is built. Ethnographic fieldwork permits analysis of such processes and of the continuum from conflict to verbal aggression. I focus on a core group of girls of various ethnicities who regularly ate lunch and played together. The composition of the group was somewhat fluid, depending on who was available for lunch on any particular day. In fourth grade the members of the group included:

Aretha, an upper middle class African American girl, classroom A

Sarah, a working class White girl, classroom A

Janis, an upper middle class White girl, classroom B

Emi, an upper middle class Japanese American girl, classroom A

Melissa, an upper middle class Japanese American girl, classroom A

Lisa, an upper middle class South Asian girl (one year older than the other girls), room C

Brittany, an upper middle class White girl, Janis's best friend, in classroom B, replaced Lisa in fifth grade. Others who played with the group occasionally and are mentioned in this paper include:

Angela, a working class African American girl, classroom A

Kimberly, a middle class Japanese American girl, classroom A

Ruth, an upper middle class Japanese American girl, classroom D, Emi's sister, one year older than the girls in the clique

Kathy, an upper middle class White girl in classroom A, one year younger than the girls in the clique, who played with the core group in fifth grade

Most of the girls in the clique had attended the school since kindergarten, and were considered by all grade levels in the school as the most popular girls at the school. The group avoided playing with other girls they did not consider in the same league as them, people who tried to be their friends but were not considered 'cool' or popular.

Gender Groups and Their Preferred Activities

During recess while girls and boys participated in a number of activities in their same-sex groups, they were not physically separated. The model 'with them apart' described by Thorne [1986] characterizes much of children's play. Fourth through sixth graders had lunch and recess period at the same time. Fourth grade boys alternated between basketball, football, soccer, baseball, volleyball, tetherball, roaming the schoolyard and causing mischief (locking people in the equipment shed), talking with girls, and jumping rope.

Ethological [Strayer & Strayer, 1980] as well as ethnographic cross cultural [Whiting & Edwards, 1988] studies have found that males establish dominance hierarchies through competitive and often quite physical interactions. Studies of Caucasian middle class boys in the Midwest U.S. [Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992], Norway [Berentzen, 1984], and Australia [Danby & Baker, 1998] have found that boys value 'toughness, trouble, domination, coolness, and interpersonal bragging and sparring skills' [Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992, p. 184]. Such activities permit the boys to develop a ranked ordering, making comparisons in their skill levels in various sports in large, somewhat fluid, social groups.

As Adler and Adler [1996, p. 122] have argued, while boys' sports can accommodate relatively large numbers of people, in order to participate in more intimate situations of talk, the appropriate unit consists of 'the main people and no borderline ones'. Girls' groups I observed were frequently no larger than six. The girls averaged ten or fifteen minutes longer eating their lunch than the boys and preferred to play games where they were in ecologically close huddles, permitting conversation. Psychologists such as Maccoby [1998, pp. 135–139], Dunn and her colleagues [Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987], and Radke-Yarrow [1983] report that girls are socialized from an early age (18 months) to talk about emotions and interpersonal events and their causes to a greater extent than boys.

For the girls, talking itself was a valued activity; girls spent the bulk of their time making commentaries on other children in the school (including members of their own playgroup), planning future activities together, and talking about their experiences in and outside of school. While clear hierarchies were absent, girls delineated their social groups through forming alliances against particular individuals, in coalitions not unlike those described by Simmel [1902, pp. 45–46], Caplow [1986], and Vinacke and Arkoff [1957]. As fieldwork in egalitarian groups has amply demonstrated, nonhierarchical groups have their own dynamics of coalition formation and shifting alliances that can provide considerable conflict. The egalitarian Swat Pathans studied by Barth [1959] have sometimes been compared to the Mafia. Forms of social organization, based on what has been called 'exclusiveness' and a set of close friends rather than a large group, are reportedly more characteristic of girls' groups than of boys' [Canaan, 1987; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Savasta & Sutton-Smith, 1979; Savin-Williams, 1980, p. 348; Schofield, 1982; Thorne & Luria, 1986]. Talk concerning relationships with others is particularly damaging with girls [see Merten, 1997].

'Distinction': Differentiation with Respect to Social Class

While girls did not talk about their athletic or other achievements, discussion at lunchtime frequently provided ways of differentiating group members with respect to access to privileges of the upper middle class. In his discussion of how judgments of taste are the product of practices of socialization, Bourdieu [1984, p. 57] argues: 'Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters such as cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept.' Girls talked about after-school activities, attending Cotillions, private tennis lessons, after-school soccer leagues, Girl Scouts, and recreational activities – weekends skiing in Colorado or at a family ranch in Southern California, as well as summer camp activities, and concerts. Not all the girls had access to the same activities. Emi, Melissa, and Janis frequently were involved in similar activities, for example attending Cotillion or private tennis lessons, while their friends Aretha, Sarah, and Lisa were not.

In the sixth grade, lunchtime consisted of endless comparisons regarding who had been accepted at which private middle school, was on the waiting list for one, or would be attending a public school. After the sixth graders took a class trip in March to San Francisco, at lunch one of the classmates disclosed that this was the first time she had ever been on an airplane. One of the clique members then proceeded to recount the ten trips she had already made that year stating 'And it's only April!' The girls actively read the important symbols of consumer culture, such as visiting exclusive resorts or shopping at upscale stores to define class differences between group members. For example, they distinguished themselves from other girls at the school by the places they buy their clothes (preferring the Gap and the Limited) and often checked the labels of their friends' t-shirts and sweaters. Within the group, girls jockeyed for position, making comparisons of ascribed features of their status. Consider the following talk between two close friends. [Data are transcribed according to the system developed by Jefferson [Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974, pp. 731–733].

Example 1

- 1 Brittany: **How** many houses does your family own.
2 Cuz like I'm going to **one** of your houses.
3 My dad's side of the family they own **two** houses
4 And my mom's side of the family
5 They own three houses.
6 But they're all kind of family.
7 We can all kind of go whenever we want.
8 My grandparents have a separate house
9 In Palm Springs too.
10 Janis: My grandparents have a farm.
11 Brittany: So do **my** grandparents.
12 Janis: But it's two hundred **acres**.
13 It's either one hundred or two hundred acres.
14 Two hundred acres.
15 Brittany: And I had a hundred fifty. My grandparents.
16 Our grandparents' families are so alike.

Quite literally a social geography is used as a taken-for-granted means of comparing social positions within the society. Making use of format tying [Goodwin, 1990, pp. 177–185], reusing the structure of a prior utterance to produce a next related one that tops the prior description, participants jockey for status. Social position is indexed with respect to how many family houses one can claim and how large the acreage is on one’s grandparents’ farms.

Wealth was also invoked in accounts for not complying with rules on the playground. On the playground one day when the bell rang signaling the end of recess Janis told her friends that in no way was she obligated to go in then because her grandfather had donated thousands of dollars to the school.

Processes of Exclusion in a Preadolescent Girls' Peer Group

Members of the girls’ clique sanctioned members of their own group when someone attempted to show herself better than other clique members. This could occur in a variety of ways: (1) through cryptic comments and exchanges of collusive ‘knowing’ looks and gestures in the presence of the targeted individual; (2) indirectly, through talk about someone in her absence; (3) more directly through excluding someone from play and yelling insults from a distance. Two of the six clique members, considered among the most popular of the group, were regularly subject to gossip and peer review [see Eder & Kenny, 1995]. Janis and Emi frequently acted in ways that others felt were displays of considering oneself above the other girls in the group. These two girls were skillful at organizing games, good storytellers, and were always chosen for teams by the boys. Though the six girls were close friends, ways that Janis or Emi presented themselves to others often precipitated involvement in collusive commentaries on these girls by members of the core group.

For example, in fourth grade at lunchtime one day the girls sanctioned both Janis and Emi for behavior the group interpreted as putting themselves above others in the group (examples 2–3 below). As Aretha, Lisa, Melissa, and Ruth are eating lunch, Janis joins them. Janis approaches the group late during the lunch because she has been attending a Student Council meeting. As she joins the group she provides a commentary on her meeting: ‘The worst Student Council meeting we have **e:ver been to**’ (line 1). While she delivers her commentary as a complaint, the mere mentioning of the meeting serves to differentiate herself from others of the group, who did not attend it.

Example 2

- 1 Janis: The **worst** Student Council meeting I have- we
2 have **e:ver been to**.
3 Lisa: Okay. Ruth!
4 ((*head movement to Ruth, as if*
5 *commenting on Janis’s announcement*))
6 Ruth: Hm? ((*to Lisa*))
7 Janis: So boring!
8 Ruth: **OH::** Okay. ((*gazing toward and nodding*
9 *to Lisa*))

Janis's talk (line 1) is produced as an announcement, a form of story preface [Sacks, 1995, pp. 222–228]; the assessment in the preface ('the worst Student Council meeting') invites further talk. However, rather than talking into Janis's talk, instead Lisa (a fifth grader and reputedly one of Janis's best friends) and Ruth (another fifth grader, Emi's sister) comment among themselves about it through collusive 'byplay' [Goodwin, 1997]. Lisa's talk – 'Okay. Ruth!' (line 3) – acts as a summons to Ruth; it is accompanied with a head movement, which also comments disparagingly on Janis's talk (line 4). Lisa's comment is answered quickly by Ruth, who provides a request for clarification: 'Hm?' (line 6) which is then followed quickly by Ruth's 'OH:: Okay.' (line 8). This action closes down the dyadic exchange.

In the continuation of talk between the girls, example 3, Ruth questions Janis why she is not at her Student Council meeting (lines 1–2). After Janis explains that she took off early from the meeting ('I'm **done**. Well we kind of did a blast off.') (line 3), Ruth next launches an explicit negative assessment of Janis's prior activity: Ruth describes Janis and her fellow Student Council members as 'wild' (line 4) and depicts them as jumping on tables and chairs like zoo animals (lines 9–10). Lisa for her part also provides fuel to Ruth's negative assessment with 'That's **very** retarded' (lines 5–6):

Example 3

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| 1 | Ruth: | Janis! |
| 2 | | Aren't you supposed to be at Student Council? |
| 3 | Janis: | I'm done . Well we kind of did a blast off. |
| 4 | Ruth: | You guys are just like w::: ild! |
| | | [|
| 5 | Lisa | That's very |
| 6 | | retarded. |
| 7 | Ruth: | And you're jumping on tables and chairs? |
| 8 | Janis: | No.: |
| | | [|
| 9 | Ruth: | And it looked- act like lions and tigers |
| 10 | | in a zoo . |

In example 2 we find girls who are close friends providing collusive commentaries about the talk of one of their members. In example 3 they use assessment adjectives [Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987] ('wild' and 'retarded') to describe Janis; Ruth compares Janis's activity to that of wild animals (lines 9–10). The original preface, 'The worst Student Council meeting I have- we have **e:ver been** to.' – which could have launched a story portraying Janis, the teller, as someone who enjoys special privileges – is transformed; the story becomes one about children who were out of control.

In example 4, ten seconds after Janis is sanctioned, the girls talk about how they should deal with Emi, who has (1) attempted to show her power in the group by wanting girls to follow her to a distant area of the playground and (2) called Lisa a lesbian. The girls concur that they want to make Emi in some way feel 'jealous' (lines 18, 33). In response to having been called a lesbian (line 1), Lisa yells a taunt 'I HOPE THEY **SLIP!** OFF THE **SWING!** AND CRACK THEIR HEAD OPEN!' (lines 8–10). The situation brewing between Lisa and Emi is categorized by the girls as a 'fight' (line 14) in which girls take 'sides' (line 11).

Example 4

1 Lisa: She called me a **Lesbian**.
 2 Janis: *Hhhhhh! ((*inbreath*))
 3 Emi called you a lesbian?
 4 Lisa: Yes. So **fuckin la:me**.
 5 ... (21 seconds later)
 6 ((*Emi and friend swing on the swings at some*
 7 *distance from the girls*))
 8 Lisa: I HOPE THEY **SLIP!**
 9 OFF THE **SWING!**
 10 AND CRACK THEIR HEAD OPEN!
 11 Janis: **I'll** be on **your** side.
 12 eh heh!
 13 Lisa: Of **course** you are.
 14 Janis: [Hey Ruth! What's the **fight** about.
 15 uh since you guys
 16 (°have known her for so long).
 17 Lisa: Because um-
 18 Aretha: **I** wanna make Emi **jealous**.
 19 Janis: Yeah. Let's j's ignore her-
 20 Ruth: [**No**: you guys. No. No.
 21 Janis: You guys and laugh.
 22 Ruth: I don't think that's such a great idea.
 23 Janis: [Let's laugh guys.
 24 Lisa: We can do it if we want to.
 25 **You** can't tell us what to do. ((*to Ruth*))
 26 Aretha: eh heh!
 27 Ruth: Okay. **Fine**. I'm **out** of this then.=
 28 Janis: You guys let's go tell her (then).
 29 Aretha: [No. But she hasn't got-
 30 Janis: They half laughing.
 31 Janis: Okay. Something **really** bad.
 32 Melissa: (I'm in the middle of it.)
 33 Janis: [How can we- **how** can we make her jealous.
 34 ((*to ethnographers*))
 35 Aretha: Then be in the middle.
 36 Janis: What should we do.
 37 Lisa: Ruth. Ruth. Ruth.
 38 [**I** know something!
 39 Aretha: What.
 40 When you guys come over my house,
 41 and she would have to leave by one thirty four
 42 kinder time.
 43 Ruth: eh heh heh heh!
 44 And so we could say 'Oh:: I'm so **sad** that
 45 you have to leave'.
 46 Janis: [Yeah but will- you guys won't be in a **fight** by
 47 then.= will you?
 48 (0.5)
 49 Janis: What did she-
 50 Ruth: [You guys it's gonna become a-
 51 Janis: What did she say.
 52 [A- much (.) worse (.) fight.

In this sequence the girls take up different stances towards sanctioning Emi's behavior. Lisa screams taunts to Emi wishing that she crack her head open (lines 8–10). Aretha suggests that they attempt to do something to make Emi feel 'jealous' (line 18). In desperation Janis even asks the ethnographers how to make Emi jealous (line 33). The girls attempt to come up with specific types of activities they can engage in that would generate this emotion state. Janis's solution is to ignore Emi and laugh at her (line 19–21). Aretha's idea is to invent a scenario in which after inviting Emi over to her house, she'll have to leave earlier than the other girls (lines 39–44). In this way she evokes a hypothetical situation in which exclusion occurs. Aretha enacts the words which she would say in mock sympathy with Emi: '**Oh:::** I'm so **sad** that you have to **leave**.' (lines 43–44). Not all the girls present agree with the projected scenario. Ruth, Emi's sister, disagrees with the plan and opts out of sanctioning her (line 20–22, 27). Several minutes after Janis talks negatively about Emi, she runs to ask her to play hop scotch: '**Emi! Come on! Emi!**' This illustrates the quick-changing nature of alliances among girls that 'fluctuate like a merry-go-round' [Canaan, 1987, p. 394].

While examples 2–4 provide instances of how girls sanction those who put themselves above others, girls can also select ways of interacting that do not treat peers as co-equals, but rather sanction behavior and inflict harm in line with a social group's strong feelings of differentiation of in-group and out-group membership.

Processes of Excluding a 'Tag-along' in a Girls' Peer Group

Forms of exclusion were quite evident in the clique with respect to their interactions with a 'tagalong' girl – a person defined in terms of her efforts to affiliate to a particular group without being accepted by the group. A tagalong, like a 'wannabe' [Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 95] or an 'isolate' [Eder, 1995, pp. 50–51], is a child defined by her marginal relationship to a peer group. In the case of the group I studied, Angela, a physically developed working class African American girl, was treated as a marginalized member of the group. During lunchtime girls explicitly complain about the fact that Angela 'follows' them.

Example 5

Janis: Angela do you have to **follow** us
Everywhere we go?
 Angela: **Why** do people always ask me that.
 Janis: Well I mean you're always-
 You're always **with** us.

In the following interaction the term 'tagalong' is explicitly used. Three girls (Aretha, Sarah, and Angela) are talking about having been excluded from playing softball when the boy selecting team members picked only his girl friend Janis and her two best friends to play.

Example 6

- 1 Angela: I- I mean like- **you** guys are like-
 2 I don't **judge anybody** because you guys know,
 3 that like I just, you know, follow you guys.
 4 wherever you guys go, but um,
 [
- 5 Sarah: You're like a **tag**. You tag along. *((left palm
 6 extended with arm bent towards Angela))*
 7 Basically- Angela tags along.=
 [
- 8 Angela: So,
 9 Sarah: That's it.=right?
 10 Angela: So li ke- **Yeah**. *((shoulder shrug))*
 [
- 11 Sarah: Right Angela? Admit it. eh heh heh!
 12 Angela: Yeah like- whatever.
 [
- 13 Sarah: **ADMIT IT ANGELA!**
 14 Sarah: **ADMIT IT!** *((extends arms palm up to Angela))*
 [
- 15 Angela: **OKAY!** *((leaning towards Sarah))*
 16 Sarah: Say it. '**You::** (.) are:: (.) **I:** am a: (.)'
 17 *((using hands as if conducting on each beat,
 18 then extends hands palm up towards Angela
 19 as if asking her to complete the utterance))*
 20 Angela: I'M A **TAG-ALONG** °girl! *((moves body in
 21 direction of Sarah))*
 (0.4)
 22 Sarah: **Good** girl! eh heh!

In this encounter Angela (lines 1–4) describes her position as someone who does not enter into group by 'judging' others but merely follows other girls. Sarah (lines 5–7) then reformulates Angela's talk with a metacommentary on Angela's status in the group with her utterance: 'You're like a **tag**. You tag along.' Rather than accepting Angela's bid for inclusion Sarah (lines 9, 11, 13–14) next asks Angela to publicly confess her position: 'ADMIT IT ANGELA!' When Angela agrees with 'Yeah' (line 12) and 'OKAY!' (line 15), this is not treated as adequate. Sarah provides the explicit frame Angela needs to repeat (line 16). In this degradation ritual [Garfinkel, 1956] Angela is allowed no role distance from the marginalized identity she is asked to assume as she states 'I'M A **TAG-ALONG** °girl!' (line 20) and Sarah places herself in the position of evaluating Angela's performance (line 22) with '**Good** girl!', using an intonation contour similar to one might use to praise a dog.

Across a range of circumstances Angela was treated as a non-person [Goffman, 1963, p. 40], an invisible member of the group. At lunch in fourth grade after one of the girls says she's going to get the ropes to play jump rope, one of the clique members tells Angela 'You're last' (line 2). Angela counters, making a bid to be 'first' (line 3). However, she is flatly refused (lines 7) and told 'You're not even **here**.'

Example 7

Girls are sitting at lunch table

- 1 Lisa: I'm gonna go get the jump ropes.
2 Janis: °You're last. ((to Angela))
3 Angela: I'm first.
4 Lisa: No.
5 Janis: NO::.
6 Lisa: You're not here.
7 Aretha: [You're not even here!
8 Angela: Go:d.

Across a range of different speech activities, including assessments, bald imperatives delivered in the midst of play, storytelling, and ritual insult, girls sanction the behavior of the tagalong girl Angela. For the most part Angela is positioned as the lowest ranked girl in the group, and even at times an invisible member of the group that she wants so much to be a part of. She sits on the margins of the group when they eat lunch, though on some occasions participates in storytelling with the girls. She more frequently than not jumps rope by herself on the periphery rather than in the double rope with the core group of girls. She is charged with making someone miss the rhythm, even when she is playing rope solo at some distance. Though she is known as one of the best jumpers, when she suggests a co-ed contest of jump rope she is told that she cannot play [Goodwin, 2002]. When she is permitted to play hop scotch, she is told that she will be last to jump and that her name will not be inscribed in chalk on the list of players. In the midst of a game of volleyball the girls yell bald imperatives to her and treat her as a social inferior: 'Did you hear what Miss Murphy told you? Don't plug your ears when somebody's telling you something!'

Insult provides a way in which readings of the social status of persons are mobilized in interaction to differentiate people in the group. Among fourth grade boys, ritual insult concerns attributes of the target known not to be true. In the fifth grade among the girls, insult volleys not only are concerned with fictional aspects of self but also with attributes of the target known to be true. The assessments and comparisons that the girls make among themselves contrast with those which are made with regard to the outcast girl Angela. While middle class girls of the group compare themselves with reference to access to material wealth (see example 1), they depict Angela as poor and unemployable in insult sequences.

In example 8, during a lunchtime discussion, the phrase 'at least' is a language resource that can be used to make comparisons between current speaker and hearer. The speaker makes herself the subject of an utterance initiated with 'at least' which compares her with the target or hearer. Prior to example 8 below, Angela says 'Who cares!' when Sarah, a working class girl, told the others she needed to take home uneaten food. Playful joking begins when Angela argues that Sarah will be working at 'Pick and Save' (a discount store) when she grow up. Sarah, Emi, and Brittany then counter that they are uncertain whether or not Angela will even be working (lines 4–9). Melissa chimes in, arguing that Angela will have the low status job of cleaning out the gutters (lines 10–12). While Angela retorts that such a job would be preferable to working at Pick and Save (line 16), others counter with degraded images of her, describing her as occupying the status of a chimney sweep (lines 18), and not even being accepted by the gutters (line 19).

Example 8

1 Angela: When you grow up, you gonna be working
2 at **Pick** and Save.
3 Girls: ah hah hah ha HAH HAH HAH HAH!
4 |
4 Sarah: **So?** Are you going to be **working**?
5 Emi: You're not even **going** to be working!
6 |
6 Brittany: At Sears.
7 Sarah: I know!
8 Angela: So you gonna be-
9 Brittany: You can't find a job **anywhere**.
10 Melissa: Angela you'll be-
11 Angela you're gonna be
12 You'll be cleaning out the gutters.
13 |
13 Emi: Everywhere will eh heh
14 heh!
15 Girls: eh heh hih hih hih!
16 Angela: Well that's better than working at Pick N Save.
17 Emi: **Everywhere** will reject you.
18 Kathy: **Chimney** Woman.
19 Melissa: As **if** the gutters are going to accept her. *((smile voice))*

Five minutes later the contest between Sarah and Angela concerns low price stores where girls purchase clothing – at Payless (line 1), the Good Will (line 4) or the Thrift Store (line 7) and whether they are supported by county assistance, Food Stamps or Welfare (lines 15–21).

Example 9

1 Sarah: At least I don't get my shoes at Payless.
2 Girls: Eh heh hih hih hih!
3 Angela: **OH:** Let's not go there Miss
4 'I Shop at the Good Will!'
5 Sarah: Huh? *((opens mouth wide, drops bottle to table))*
6 Girls: eh heh heh!
7 Brittany: At the Thrif(hh)t Sto(hhh)re.
8 Sarah: **At least I** don't-
9 Angela: **At least-** At least **I'm** not on the county.
10 |
10 Sarah: At least I don't say that-
11 Angela: At least **I'm** not on the **county**.
12 Sarah: At least- at least-
13 Angela: At least I'm not on the **county**.
14 Sarah: **Okay:::.....**
15 |
15 Angela: At **least** I don't have to-
16 At **least** I don't have to- have-
17 food tamp- food stamps to pay with my
18 money.
19 Brittany: eh heh!
20 Angela: At least I don't-
21 |
21 Sarah: **You** have the **Welfare**!

The comment ‘You have the Welfare!’ (line 21) makes an explicit comment on Angela’s degraded status of being poor. Toward the end of ritual insulting the following more personal ritual insult occurs:

Example 10

Angela: At least I don’t wear holey underwear.
Kathy: At least- at least **we** have friends.

The episode ends after the girls tease Angela about having ‘cooties’ (lice). Personal insult provides ways of framing events that are depicted in fictional present and future scenes with a negative valence. Here while Angela is an initiator of many of the playful ritual insult sequences, she figures as the target of return comments portraying being poor as a degraded status. She is defined as not being able to find a job when she grows up, working as a cleaning woman, needing to be on Welfare, and without friends.

In addition to being explicitly excluded from games and ridiculed in the midst of them, in the fifth grade she is the subject of stories by girls in the clique about her tagalong behavior. The following occurs as the girls are eating lunch. Beforehand members of the clique ran into a restroom and hid until Angela came outside. After Emi comments on Angela’s attempts to follow them (lines 1–3), Janis launches into a story about a girl without friends (lines 4–8), who Janis feels should ‘go find another friend’ (lines 9–10).

Example 11

1 Emi: **Why** do you always follow us.
2 I saw you just a few **moments** ago
3 Walk into that **other** yard
4 Janis: I was gonna tell you a story about a little girl
5 Who followed a bunch of other girls,
6 And **didn’t** make friends,
7 And was **no** fun at all.
8 They had already established their friends. So
9 Why doesn’t the girl who **followed** the friend
10 Go find **another** friend.
11 Angela: Why don’t **you** shut up!
12 Janis: eh heh-heh-eh!
13 Angela: °Janis that’s really not- **so** not fair. ((*shakes head*))
14 Janis: I just said it as a **joke**.
15 Angela: I don’t **care**.
16 Janis: **So:?**
17 ((*Angela walks away*))
18 Melissa: Angela, come back! ((*walks off, following Angela*))

Angela leaves the group and three minutes later Kimberly, a classmate, accompanies her as she returns to speak with Janis (example 12). Apprehensively, Janis wonders if she will have to go to the vice principal’s office (line 1). Janis attempts to redefine what she said as a joke (line 3) and claims that this is her way of trying to tell people that they should try to make friends (lines 12–13). Kimberly challenges the status of Janis’s prior talk as a joke (line 4) and Angela categorizes Janis’s strategies as a ‘bad way’ to deal with her (line 14).

Example 12

- 1 Janis: Oh no. Am I going to Miss Murphy's office?
*((looking towards Kimberly accompanying
Angela back to lunch table))*
- 2 Kimberly: Janis **why** did you do that.
- 3 Janis: I was just **joking** with her.
- 4 Bea: Janis I don't think it's a **joke**.
- 5 Kathy: **Janis** it wasn't **you**.
- 6 Janis: I'm **sorry**.
- 7 Emi: °Yeah somebody's gonna have to be
8 ().
- 9 (). [I bet it **was Janis**.
- 10 Kathy: Yeah I know.= But I mean it's not her
11 business to ride Janis.
- 12 Janis: That's actually **my** way of saying to someone,
13 'You **should** try to make friends.'
- 14 Angela: Janis. It was a **bad** way Janis.
15 It really was.
- 16 Janis: I'm sorry. Okay? It was my mistake.
17 I'm not gonna do it again.
18 *Angela sits down and Kimberly walks away*

Angela is the target of multiple forms of abusive talk, through a range of different genres. In the fourth grade she is explicitly told her behavior is disgusting, given directives that she cannot participate in games, and dismissed as a non-person from interaction. At points during fifth grade she plays with the clique members. She is asked to play soccer when the girls are told that they need a quorum in order to occupy the field without the boys and even participates in a gossip session with Sarah and Aretha about Janis when they are excluded from playing baseball, because the team leader selects only Janis and her friends Emi and Melissa to be on the team. Her slightly greater involvement in the fifth grade leads to more stigmatizing behavior by the clique. In the fifth grade she is made to confess her role as a 'tag-along', is the recipient of personal insults in what she constructs as a playful genre, is the target of stories that cast her as an outsider, and is argued to have 'cooties'. By sixth grade she played only rarely with the 'in' clique, in tetherball games where the clique conspired to get her out. For a short time period she quite successfully directed games of handball with girls who were one and two years younger, although at lunch she frequently ate by herself.

Conclusion

Frequently the playground is romanticized and overlooked as a place where social relationships based on power and status are played out [Blatchford & Sharp, 1994, p. 33; Adler & Adler, 1998]. A recent report of the *Journal of American Medical Association* [Spivak & Prothow-Stith, 2001] finds that in a survey of 15,686 sixth through tenth graders, one third of U.S. schoolchildren report they have bullied other children or been bullied. Other survey data estimate that between 40 and 80% of all American school age children have been targets of peer harassment [Bonney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995].

We have examined an array of oppositional sequences and social processes through which forms of relational aggression occur as girls delineate the boundaries of their group. Rather than relying on reports about experience I have provided transcripts of the naturally occurring talk through which girls make comparisons with reference to features of difference. I have also shown how girls sanction those within their friendship group who they feel put themselves above others, through nonvocal collusive looks and byplay, countering attempts at one-upmanship, taunts from a distance, stories in one's absence which are plans of exclusion, and prohibiting someone from playing games with the group. In interaction with a 'tag-along', girls construct degradation rituals in response to behavior they cast as socially inappropriate. In Angela's case such acts included eating without a utensil and sitting on the lunch table. Often, however, victimization was unprovoked by her own actions. Rather than talking about a girl obliquely, as occurs with members of their friendship group, clique members instead quite openly humiliate the tag-along to her face; they issue imperatives and insult her through deprecating reference to her social class, economic situation and status as someone who lacks friends, in personal insults and stories. Acts of aggression among girls are thus built through verbal means that are both direct as well as indirect.

Believing that 'everyday moral discourse' has the power to 'represent and transmit moral beliefs' [Shweder & Much, 1987, p. 198], Packer [1987, p. 253] and Shweder and Much [1987, pp. 198, 231] have argued that we should shift the focus from hypothetical explanations by individuals and instead study ongoing practical deliberation in naturally occurring interaction. To date, however, most studies of moral development throughout the social sciences have relied on interviews and questionnaires, conducted in laboratory settings, locating values within the individual (as presented in talk to the social scientist). Damon [1983, p. 61] has stated that 'the more we structure a setting for the purposes of systematic observation, the more we risk losing the richness, complexity and spontaneity of natural children's interactions'. Yet some psychologists are reluctant to move outside the laboratory or to use anything other than a controlled, experimental approach because ethnographic research with children is deemed too time consuming or unscientific. As Damon [1983, p. 61] argues 'We cannot send researchers out all day looking for appropriate incidents; and even if we could it would be impossible to analyze incidents in a comparable manner from a variety of real-life settings.'

All too often the methodology used to study aggressive behavior assumes a traditional individualistic rather than a socio-cultural or interpretive model of human development [Ambert, 1995]. This is often true even among psychologists working within a constructivist paradigm who assume a more social view of the child. The study of forms of social exclusion, like investigations of friendship [Winterhoff, 1997], often proceeds by looking at individual responses to questionnaires and clinical interviews about victimization. There is little investigation of the role of the peer group [Bukowski and Sippola, 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1996] in peer victimization. An important alternative approach would view the activity of victimization as a social rather than an individual process and locate values within interactive practice, adopting a Vygotskian [Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1998] perspective.

Throughout the anthropological literature, female aggression is often dismissed as minimal and insignificant, behavior not worth theorizing [Burbank, 1994,

pp. 100–101]. Adults in the school situation acknowledge that males colonize the playing field and are fully aware that males practice aggressive behavior in the midst of games; however, they are oblivious to (or treat as inconsequential) girls' practices of exclusion or relational aggression (which constitute seventy per cent of the cases of female harassment) [Crick et al., 2001]. Forms of social exclusion and aggression in girls' groups call into question the notion that girls' groups are fundamentally interested in cooperative interaction and a morality based on principles of relatedness, care, equity, and responsibility [Gilligan, 1982, p. 4]; they also provide windows into understanding how children learn to construct difference.

Feminist anthropologist Sarah Hrdy [1981, p. 189] notes that social scientists have collected little information on the competitive features of feminine personalities. Jane Flax [1990, pp. 181–182] has argued that we need to avoid seeing women as totally innocent, acted upon beings; such a perspective prevents us from seeing the areas of life in which women have had an effect, are not totally determined by the will of the other, and the ways in which some women have and do exert power over others. In her recent book *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman*, Phyllis Chesler [2002, p. 7] expresses the hope that by acknowledging the 'shadow side of female-female relationships' that 'women can begin to transform envy into compassion, betrayal into cooperation'. Rachel Simmons [2002, p. 262] feels that by acknowledging the hidden culture of female aggression, and by making girls aware that no friendships can survive without conflict, girls will be better prepared to deal with 'girl bullying' 'as a painful, but not earth-shattering event'.

In his recent 'call for research' on new methodologies for the study of peer victimization, Pellegrini [1998, p. 166] has argued that 'the time has come in our study of bully-victim relations to complement self report and laboratory methods with direct and indirect observational methods of youngsters functioning in the natural habitats in which these problems occur.' I could not agree more. In addition to accounts of girls' 'alternative aggressions' obtained through interviews [i.e., Simmons, 2002], we need careful examination of the actual *practices* that make up the life world of a particular group so we can investigate how morality is lodged within the actions and stances that children take up in interaction with their peers.

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