

Odd girl out: a case study

Business



Based on her writing, I concluded that Ms. Simmons' social learning style has two definitive faces.

It is most obviously supported by the physiological school of thought. For example, she believes girls will do anything to be a part of the group, "to avoid rejection, they must enter whitewashed relationships, eschewing open conflict and becoming shackled to cultural rules that deny their freedom to know the truth of themselves, their bodies and their feelings" (268) Ms. Simmons describes the girl's group think as one where "fear of solitude is overpowering.

In fact, what victims of bullying recalled most to me was their loneliness." (32) Moreover, she lives that what is learned can be unlearned, "We might work harder to prohibit girls from engaging in alternative aggressions and instead guide them into more assertive acts of truth telling and direct aggression." (269) Her second style supports the learning school of thought; she believes the behavior exhibited by the girls is not of natural, but a learned behavior, "the rite-of-passage theory suggests several disturbing assumptions about girls.

First, it implies that there is nothing we can do to prevent girls from behaving in these ways because it's in the developmental tea leaves to do it. I gather from her phrasing "disturbing assumptions" that she does not agree with this theory. Aside -2- from conflict theory, addressing the author's bias on this subject is necessary. It is obvious that she carries deep, unresolved wounds from her childhood. First, Ms. Simmons' childhood stories of being a

victim reflect no fault of her own part, she directs blame squarely on the shoulders of the girls who bullied her.

What were the bullies' crimes?

The popular friend (bully) whispered about author to her best friend and after dance class convinced other friends to run from her in the darkened once theater. In an effort to find her friends she would “sprint after them, winded and frantic.. “(I) In the author’s mind, this should be a punishable offense; whispering and isolationism would not be permitted. She believes girls should be taught to address each other, face-to-face. All this to say, Ms.

Simmons is very invested in this topic and seeks to create her own peace by addressing this cultural issue with ten world.

In order to understand the premise of *Odd Girl Out*, it is necessary to define the conflict. *GO* is crafted around individual stories of conflict and aggressive behavior; these situational conflicts are used as evidence to support Ms. Simmons’ theory and are not meant to define the “conflict.” The actual conflict described in the book is between a culture/society that supports an unwavering and unrealistic standard for girls and the girls who try to live under those standards, “Our culture refuses girls access to open conflict, and it forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms.

(3) It is important to draw this distinction as the individual conflicts in the book have their own sets of players, issues, resolutions, etc., while the actual conflict has a very specific anatomy. Secondly, it is necessary to define “aggression” or emotional bullying as it relates to this book.

Aggression, for the purposes of 060, lacks physicality, but takes on other forms, “ Within the hidden culture of aggression, girls fight with body language -3- and relationships instead of fists and knives. In this world, friendship is a weapon, and the sting of a shout pales in comparison to a day of someone’s silence. (3) With regard to parties and roles, Ms.

Simmons, a self-described white, middle- class woman (8), specifically writes “... Found alternative aggression most severe among white middle class girls...

” (11) Within this defined group, girls take on roles as bullies and victims, and at times victims turned bully. Society, another primary party to the conflict, supplies a fertile environment for the conflict to grow. Specifically, that part of society which has, rightly or wrongly, cursed girls by not providing them a vehicle to display appropriate aggressive behavior. Our culture refuses girls access to open conflict, and it forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms. “(3) Secondly, but not surprisingly affected are the arenas of the bullies and victims. Parents, of bullies and victims, play their role by either avoiding the conflicts or becoming the concerned caregiver.

Their avoidance of the issue may be caused by one or more factors, for example, their own ideology – this is a rite of passage, their own painful childhood memories, or perhaps their daughters asking them to stay out of the conflict.

Often time parental involvement can cause a conflict to escalate. In their role as concerned parents, they may take the conflict issue to their child’s

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teachers or the school principal, this can have mixed results. The concerned parent must tread lightly so they do not appear hysterical or over-involved in their child's life. Other secondary parties include siblings, friends and teachers.

The friends have an important role in the conflict as they sometimes play mediator, the go-between, to the bully/victims. " Even if a girl manages to avoid being on neither end of a conflict, she may end up -4- stuck in the middle of it. And " Over the treachery of taking a side, they choose to be mediators, or what I call " middleware. " (84) Friends can be pulled in by the bully to be part of an alliance, culling the victim from the crowd and exiling her to no friendships. " Spotting a conflict on the horizon, a girl will begin a scrupulous underground campaign to best her opponent. Like a skilled politician, she will do her best.

" (80) The parties least affected, but still feeling the sting of the culture of hidden aggressions, are school systems and society en masse. Teachers and principals play the role of non-engaged or engaged observer.

Typically, teachers tend to ignore covert aggression because it is not disruptive to the class and does not take away from their main objective, teaching. The sources of this conflict are plentiful, ranging from multiple types of myths to inadequate modeling of appropriate behavior. One myth is that girls should be nice, in all ways, at all times.

The author quotes one victim's mother as saying, " Her daughters are to be ' sugar and spice and everything nice,' they are to be sweet, caring, precious, and tender. "(17) A second myth is that hidden aggression is a natural

behavior and that this is just a part of growing up “... RL bullying is a rite of passage a stage they will outgrow. “(33) Combine these myths with a society that does not give voice to girl aggression, arenas and teachers who choose, for whatever reason, not to acknowledge the problem, add to the mixture school systems that let emotional bullying go unchecked and unpunished, throw in a pinch of acceptance of this aggression as a rite of passage, fuel with poor role models and the recipe for conflict involving emotional bullying is complete.

-5_ There are multiple issues driving this conflict.

For example, today's girls are being raised to be strong women; one would think addressing aggression in a demonstrable way would be learned through mothers, aunts or older sisters modeling appropriate behavior. However, nothing is further from the truth. While being raised to be strong, these same young women are being convicted with the “ nice” girl mentality. They are taught that nice girls don't say mean things, nice girls have friends, and nice girls are perfect angels. Combining “ nice” and strong, without guidance, is challenging and these behaviors can be at odds with each other.

As girls find their way in the world, specifically at school, they learn to address their aggressive feelings. Unfortunately, these self-taught ways include blatant meanness, name calling, rumor mongering, causing a “ victim” to be temporarily isolated from the roof and in the extreme, ruining a girl's reputation and causing her complete alienation by the larger school population. A girl's self-esteem and self confidence can be destroyed by either being the bully or the victim. Unfortunately, teachers are almost

forced to accept emotional bullying. “ When she sees a perpetrating girl, a teacher has little or no incentive to stop the class.

Taking the time to address relational discord is not always as easy as yelling at a boy to remove his peer from the trash can. ” (34) It is difficult enough to grow up, but girls in conflict often suffer the added problem of a decline in their grades because of their focus on social issues. There are a variety of methods or tactics which allow and even encourage hidden aggression. Girls create and live in a secret world using a coded language. “ Covert aggression isn’t just about not getting caught: half of it is looking like you’d never mistreat someone in the first place.

” (23) Girls form and use their own norms in aggression. Some alternative aggressions are invisible to adult eyes. To elude social disapproval, girls retreat beneath a surface of sweetness to hurt each other in secret” (22) Often, girls do not go to anyone for help, not to their parents or teachers. Clever girls learn to leverage the teacher’s inadequate knowledge of covert aggression to continue their behavior. “ Some people call each other names and stuff and the teacher wouldn’t believe it. They would say, so-and-so did this to me, and the teacher would say, “ no, she didn’t.

’ (24) In a desire to be seen as “ nice,” girls play directly into society hands. Off want to be nice and you want to be bad at the same time, and the bad part gets to you. You think “....

I have to be nice. ” (up) In the denied culture, bullies and victims act within their circle of friends, rarely outside it. “ The most painful attacks are usually fashioned from deep inside a close friendship and are fueled by secrets and
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once-shared weaknesses. ” (31) A sad fact is that this establishes the ground work females learning to distrust females for, essentially, the rest of their lives. Not in every circumstance, but in some circumstances, the victim becomes bully to her bully.

L felt really good that I had hurt her back. ” (29) The dream of exacting revenge on your bully can become a motivating factor in a victim’s life – sometimes it takes the form of stealing the bully boyfriend, other times it is besting your enemy in academics or sports. As the tide starts to turn in helping girls learn to deal with aggression, new villains appear on the horizon. Aggression is moving into the multi media age, text messaging, instant messaging, cell phone usage and computers. And, it is slipping past the boundaries of school, now invading homes via computers used by tech sax. .

Y girls. Some parents may not have the technical skills to monitor computer chat and emails, so -7- the bullying goes unchecked and unnoticed. Aggressive behavior is also becoming more intense and vicious, causing greater psychological damage to girls. In serious cases, victims are becoming bullies in a “ Columbine” like way, they try to harm others. As well victims sometime hurt themselves. As conflicts grow more difficult and intense parents are starting seeking help, reaching out to teachers, principals, and school systems and even turning to the legal system.

There is change on the forefront, albeit a slight movement, however it is in a positive direction and on multiple fronts. School systems are beginning to recognize emotional bullying for what it is, and to punish it. Teachers are

being trained to recognize symptoms. “ Assertiveness training is the new “ it” program for girls, mostly at the schools that can afford it. ” (248) Parents are taking a more active role in helping their daughters address their aggressive thoughts and feelings.

Mirror (parents) contribution here may feel passive but it’s also by far the most vital. (232) Lastly, cultural demand for “ sugar and spice” and “ nice” girl mentality is being set at a realistic level. “ We must encourage girls to embrace respectful acts of assertion and provide them with representations of female aggression that are neither sensationalists nor the stuff of antsy. ” (231) In light of the changes in attitude, culture has begun to acknowledge the existence of the conflict of hidden aggression. “ A world that acknowledges the hidden culture AT girls’ aggression would empower girls not only to negotiate conflict, out to Attlee relationship in new and healthy ways.

(261) Parents are adopting a behaviors address issues with their daughters. “ Parents would show girls that conflict-free relationships do not exist. Instead of believing conflict terminates relationship, girls -8- would learn not to be controlled by fear, understanding that relationships ebb and low beyond the power of one. ” (262) Schools systems are starting to educate and inform teachers of tactics of covert aggressive behavior and are considering punishment of emotional bullies on the similar level to physical bullying. In Washington State lawmakers introduced legislation requiring schools to adopt detailed intangibility policies. Included in the program special training for school employees is required.

“(249) Is there a winner or loser in this conflict? If society willingness to acknowledge the problem and its start at making changes, via programs to encourage listening to arils and educating them on safer ways of expressing aggressive their feelings, s an indication then we are all winners.

The biggest winners would be the girls themselves. By learning to express their aggressive thoughts in appropriate ways, by gaining additional self-confidence, by learning to have a greater trust for other females, girls would move toward a more mentally healthy lives. This conflict is not one which will end tomorrow, or even in the near future, but we are moving toward making the conflict manageable. In doing so we are providing our daughters, sisters, mothers, friends and ourselves with a better world in which to live.