

Marjorie Harness Goodwin, **The Hidden Life of Girls: Games of Stance, Status, and Exclusion, (Blackwell Studies in Discourse and Culture)**, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 344 pp., \$26.95 (paperback).

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As its title suggests, this book seeks to bring forth and elucidate the lesser-known aspects of pre-teen girls' experiences of their peer-group culture. Combining ethnographic fieldwork in neighborhood and school grounds with micro-analysis of both discursive and non-discursive situated practices, it offers a powerful and rare look into the social dynamics of girls' social life. The socio-culturally diverse range of girls' groups studied by the author over some 30 years in their informal conversations and play activities includes white American, African American, and Mexican American girls from both middle-class and lower-class backgrounds. Some of the groups were ethnically homogenous, others ethnically mixed; some were same-gender groups, others mixed-gender ones. The author moves within and between the various data sets she has gathered over the years with elegance, offering multifaceted analyses of particular interactional moments and communicative practices in ways that make them speak to and illuminate each other.

Moreover, the author uses her impressive empirical investigations to both illustrate and argue for the value of a discourse-oriented ethnographic approach based on the videotaping of naturally occurring interactions. She is able to harness her micro-analyses of girls' everyday interactions toward a reconsideration of macro-societal issues relating to power relations and moral agency, while addressing the institutional enactment of social justice as well as the interactional accomplishment of social exclusion. Thus, she offers empirically grounded critiques of widely accepted theoretical positions in the study of girls' gendered socialization, using the introductory chapter (1) to situate her work in relation to other research approaches to the study of children's (and particularly girls') lives. She raises serious questions about the viability of essentialist approaches to the study of language and gender and argues for the value of linguistic ethnography for the study of the situated construction of gendered (and other) identities. I will address the author's critiques of current research approaches as I briefly discuss the book's substantive chapters, each of which presents a meticulous analysis of a particular set of communicative practices associated with girls' mundane play and conversational activities.

In the second chapter, the author considers the game of hopscotch as an activity system and offers a turn-by-turn examination of how "participants co-construct their social universe" (p. 71). In tracing the dynamics of this play activity, she shows how local game-related identities of players and onlookers are constructed and negotiated, how rules are articulated in mid-activity rather than being predetermined, and how overt conflict plays a central role in the girls' game experience. Rather than seeking cooperation and harmony, as the literature on girls' sociality would lead us to believe, the girls observed in this study use opposition strategically to vie for social position within their group. This takes the form of expressions of polarity and response cries, negative person descriptors, heightened volume

and intonation contours, and embodied performances, such as touching and jumping. In the author's words, "As these girls play, they do not simply rotate through various positions, but animatedly and playfully dispute, resist and probe the boundary of rules as referees and players, in the company of their friends; together they build the game event — without the development of physical fighting" (p. 71). She rejects the claims made in earlier research in which girls' engagement in hopscotch was used to promote a deficit view of girls' abilities as unable to use and contest rules, arguing that "ethnographic study of how the game is actually played reveals just the opposite" (ibid.)

The third chapter examines the social landscape in Hanley School in Los Angeles, focusing on asymmetrical relations on the school playground. In doing so, the author followed the social interactions of an ethnically mixed clique of six girls among themselves and with their schoolmates, both other girls and boys. She shows that gender and age orient membership categories in the children's talk, and that "girls exhibit a great deal of agency in their ability to structure and restructure social relations" (p. 119). Following the second chapter's discussion of girls' ability to effectively handle conflict situations and articulate opposition, this chapter shows young girls confronting the boys and contesting their control of space in the playground, and, at the same time, mobilizing school authorities to their cause. It also shows the younger fourth grade girls facing up to the older sixth grade girls in a demand to be treated in a respectful manner.

Chapter 4 explores the situated activity system of jump rope, looking at the ways in which participation is discursively organized, opposition is expressed, and directives are formulated by girls as compared to boy players. In analyzing girls' opposition and account sequences, the author brings evidence "for the ability of girls to present their cases through sophisticated forms of argument (juxtaposing past decisions and arguing from precedent) as well as demonstrations making use of embodied actions" (p. 135).

Through a fine-tuned study of the uses of directives during play, she found that the social organization in same-sex boys' groups was more hierarchical than that of girls' similar groups, where leadership was more diffuse, but that "girls' practices of exclusion toward out-group members were more pronounced and provided a way of defining the boundaries of their playgroup" (p. 140). Most intriguingly, she shows that girls controlled activities in mixed-sex groups, gaining authority from their greater expertise as players in the game, and, moreover, that this pattern shifted over time with the boys' growing facility with the game. These findings argue against the prevailing view that boys and girls inhabit separate social worlds and develop sex-related speech codes. Rather, the author points out that boys and girls produce similar types of speech acts, and suggests that "rather than being sex-linked, features of language use may be closely related to one's achieved position in a specific context" (p. 155).

Chapter 5 investigates the discursive devices children use to index social status in the midst of storytelling and other speech activities. The author found that children index their alignment with others through a range of discursive practices — "through the ways they participate in description sequences, with positive or negative assessment, questions that elaborate a speaker's description, attempts to close it down, reluctance to speak, or rebuke" (p. 189). Interestingly, girls' social assessment of their peers did not involve mention of personality characteristics, but rather comments on their degree of access to

consumer values, famous people, or elite activities, which was an indication of their socioeconomic backgrounds.

The sixth chapter further enriches the analysis of girls' communicative practices by elaborating on their use of assessments and gossip activities. Assessments, according to the author, "provide a principal way in which girls come to terms with how they understand their world, how to make sense out of experience and objects in it" (p. 191). Each time assessment as a situated activity system is invoked, a field of subsequent moves on the part of interlocutors is opened up, calling for agreement, disagreement, or adjustment. Talk glossed as gossip is filled with such assessments about absent parties. Through the use and negotiation of assessments, girls articulate their moral positions with regard to interpersonal conduct and sanction untoward behavior. Assessments thus "provide an important window into the processes through which girls come to construct notions of normative value and articulate their notions of cultural appropriateness and normal personhood" (p. 209).

Finally, Chapter 7 explores the discursive practices that girls employ in the ongoing processes of coalition formation, in policing the boundaries of their cliques, and in sanctioning the behavior of girls who put on airs or claim superiority over others. The chapter is replete with examples of exclusionary practices adopted by group members in their efforts to differentiate in-group and out-group membership. These include various discursive forms such as negative commentary, rude behavior, ridicule, degradation, negative assessments, and dismissal, or the use of nonverbal means (such as collusive smiles). The analysis is made particularly vivid and poignant as the author follows the degradation and exclusion suffered by a "tagalong" girl whom the girls' clique treats as contaminating and tries to shake off. All these observations lead the author to question the view promoted by many psychologists whereby direct or overt aggression is associated with boys, while indirect forms of aggression are associated with girls, and she points out that "direct and indirect forms of aggression among girls are by no means mutually exclusive" (p. 240).

The concluding chapter draws out some of the implications of this rich body of research. Reasserting the unique value of peer interaction for the development of children's communicative competencies, the author argues against recent policies in the USA and the UK to reduce recess time at school, pointing out how increasingly structured children's after-school recreational activities have become, leaving little opportunity for children to interact freely when the school day is over. Pointing to many of the findings in the book, she argues for a proper recognition of children's agency and the communicative versatility they develop over time. Citing the examples of the deliberate victimization of marginal figures on the school ground, she questions the portrayal of girls in social science research as oriented toward cooperation and harmony. She then links the study's findings about the girls' use of exclusionary measures, blame attributions, and degradation rituals to the intense concern of educators with the phenomenon of bullying as a social practice, one that, this study shows, is enacted through both direct and indirect acts of aggression.

The book, then, offers both rich and rigorous ways of looking at children's naturally situated conduct that speak to larger concerns of social science research. While communication scholars are not explicitly mentioned among the target audiences of this book, it is clearly of great value to students of

language and social interaction, interpersonal communication scholars, and researchers concerned with the development of communication competence or with group processes, to mention but some of the more obvious subfields in our discipline for which this book will prove to be a great asset.