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ABSTRACT

This naturalistic study provides a description and analysis of the processes through which 26 kindergarten students and a particular male student, called Lester, defined rules of social acceptability which stigmatized Lester as an "outsider." Findings are primarily based on 112 hours of recorded peer interaction and interviews conducted with teachers and students. As early observations and analyses were completed, the behavior of Lester and the behavior of other children toward Lester suggested that his relationships with his classmates were strained and difficult. During subsequent observations, attention was given to contexts in which Lester was involved and to reactions to his social behavior. Analysis of Lester's social behavior revealed three general kinds of behavior which breached peer norms and expectations in the classroom: aggression, teasing, and contact incompetence (poorly developed strategies for making positive social contact with peers). Classmates responded to Lester with snubs and by denying him entry into already established groups. In interviews and in classroom peer interaction, children talked about Lester as if his deviant status was taken for granted by the group. While the children did not knowingly construct the stigmatization of Lester, the impact of their treatment of him was potentially more devastating because his inferiority was assumed. Insofar as Lester accepted the correctness of that assumption he was learning to be an outsider. (RH)

Learning To Be an Outsider:

Peer Stigmatization in Kindergarten

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Learning To Be an Outsider:

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In Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, Becker (1963) described the processes through which social groups and individuals who do not acquire full membership in such groups are defined. Becker pointed out that all social groups make rules and attempt, to some degree, to enforce them. Rules define situations and appropriate behaviors. When a social rule is enforced, "the person who is supposed to have broken it may be seen as a special kind of person, one who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed upon by the group. He is regarded as an outsider" (Becker, 1963, p. 1). This study is an analysis of the processes through which a particular social group (a kindergarten peer group of 26 students) and a particular individual (a male student to be called Lester) defined rules of social acceptability which stigmatized Lester as an "outsider."

Perspectives and Methods

This study approached the investigation of children's social behavior from an interactionist theoretical perspective and applied methodological principles, data gathering practices, and analytical techniques from the naturalistic research paradigm (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interactionists take the view that participants in particular contexts construct social reality among themselves through the give and take processes of face-to-face interaction. Naturalistic research undertakes the reconstruction of

that reality from the perspectives of the social actors involved. Participant observation, interviewing, and the collection of unobstrusive data are the primary tools for gathering data which reflect naturally occuring social events. Analysis of these data is an inductive, systematic examination to determine the components of the social phenomena under investigation, the relationships among components, and their relationship to the wider contexts involved (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Spradley, 1980).

In this study, the researcher conducted participant observation field work in a kindergarten classroom. During the period from January through May of 1985, thirty-five observational visits were made and one hundred twelve hours of child-to-child social behavior were recorded. The researcher informally interviewed the classroom teacher throughout the participant observation cycle and conducted taped, "ethnographic" interviews (Spradley, 1979) twice with the teacher (midway through and at the conclusion of observations) and once with each child (following the observation phase). Unobtrusive measures, as described by Denzin (1978), were collected throughout the study. Examples of unobtrusive data include: school and district reports, official documents, student cumulative records, and student and teacher produced artifacts. During the observation phase, the researcher took a passive role (Spradley, 1980) in the classroom, making every effort to avoid interaction with children and to blend into the fabric of the classroom. Data analysis and collection were guided by the "Developmental Research Sequence" suggested by Spradley (1980). Analytical generalizations were carefully grounded in the data using principles of "analytic induction" described by Denzin (1978).

The study was begun with the broad goal of recording and analyzing child-to-child interactions within the contexts of their

kindergarten. As early observations and analyses were completed, the behavior of a particular child, Lester, and the behavior of other children in relation to Lester seemed to indicate that his relationship to the peer group at large was strained and difficult. As the researcher continued his data gathering strategy of focusing on the interactions of a different individual child during each observational visit, careful attention was given to contexts in which Lester was involved and to individual and small group reactions to Lester's social behavior. As the observation cycle neared completion and the researcher began reviewing sociological literature describing interactionist perspectives on deviance and stigmatization, the following more specific research questions emerged (adapted from Becker, 1963; Kitsuse, 1968): What are the behaviors exhibited by Lester which constitute rule-breaking by his peer group? and What are the consequences for Lester of breaking socially defined rules? These questions focused the remaining observations and the analyses related to this report. In addition, formal interviews with the teacher and each child included questions designed to explore participant perspectives of Lester and his peer relations. Interactionist explanations of deviance and stigmatization processes which frame the findings of this study are reviewed below.

Deviance and Stigmatization as Social Constructions

Becker (1963) described a relativistic, interactionist view of deviance and stigmatization. From this perspective, deviant behavior is taken to be an interactive social phenomenon rather than merely an individual's failure to obey group rules. As Becker explained:

> Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From

> this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender.' The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label (1963, p. 9). (Emphases in original)

In this view, group rules are relative entities, constructed by particular participants in particular contexts through the give and take processes of social interaction. Just as group rules are constructed, so are judgements regarding what constitutes rule breaking and what sanctions against those judged to be rule-breakers ought to be. In Erikson's words, "deviance is not a property inherent in any particular kind of behavior, it is a property conferred upon that behavior by the people who come into direct contact with it" (1966, p. 6).

Goffman (1963) pointed out that when groups stigmatize individuals as outsiders, they construct a "stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his/(her) inferiority and to account for the danger he/(she) represents" (p. 5). Stigmatized individuals are treated as "not quite human" by the stigmatizing group, the "normals" (see Webb, 1981). Barriers are constructed which systematically obstruct social interaction between stigmatized individuals and normals (Buckner, 1971; Pfuhl, 1980). Goffman (1963) and others (e.g., Mankoff, 1971; Pfuhl, 1980; Shur, 1971) have suggested that the outsider status assigned to rule-breakers by normals is frequently internalized by those being stigmatized. Stigmatized individuals come to believe that the labels applied to them are accurate and act accordingly; i.e., they continue to violate group rules.

From the interactionist perspective, the effective analysis of deviance and stigmatization ought to focus on the transactions that take place between some social group and one who is viewed by that group

as a rule-breaker. In this view, the personal characteristics of deviants are of less concern than the process by which they come to be defined as outsiders and their reactions to that definition (Becker, 1963). Following a brief description of the participants in this study, findings which describe classroom interactive processes through which Lester was defined as an outsider by his peer group will be presented.

Participants

The study was conducted in a morning kindergarten program in a K-5 elementary school located in a middle-class neighborhood in a small mid-western city. Kindergarten attendance is not required by the state in which the study was conducted.

At the beginning of the study, the class enrollment was twenty-six. One child moved away and two joined the class during the research. The original group consisted of fourteen girls and twelve boys. Two girls in the original group were black, one girl was oriental, and the rest were white. Eleven of the twelve original boys were white, and one was oriental. One white male left the group, and one white and one black male joined the class during the study.

As observations began in January of 1985, the ages of the children in the study ranged from 5 years 3 months to 6 years 4 months. The average age of the group was 5 years 7 months. Lester was the oldest child in the class. He and another boy (age 6 years 3 months) were the only children repeating kindergarten. Of the twenty-six children for whom family data were available, sixteen (61.5%) were living with both parents, seven (26.9%) were with mothers only, two (7.7%) were with mothers and step-fathers, and one (3.8%) was living with his father only. The average number of siblings of children in the study was 1.2; five were only children and two children had three siblings (the most

in the class).

The teacher in the study was a white female with sixteen years experience in kindergarten. She was identified by school district administrators as an excellent kindergarten teacher. The researcher observed that this teacher devoted large amounts of extra time to her work. She often spent whole Saturdays working at the school during the study.

Lester was the tallest and heaviest child in his peer group. He was a Caucasian child with a fair complexion and straight, reddish-brown hair. Lester was sent to school in neat, clean clothing that was similar in style and quality to what his peers were wearing. He was always clean and his hair was always combed.

At the beginning of the study Lester was 6 years 3 months of age and the oldest in his class. He was repeating kindergarten with the same teacher. His parents agreed to keep Lester in kindergarten for two years based on the recommendation of the teacher.

Lester lived with his mother, stepfather, and two older children of the stepfather. He was picked up from school by his maternal grandmother who took care of him in the afternoons while his parents worked. Lester's mother had a baby during the last few days of the study.

Lester's attendance at school was erratic. He missed thirty-seven days during the year of the study (the most days in a class that averaged 13.5 absences per child).

In formal interviews, the teacher described Lester's home life as she was seeing it. Substantial portions of interview transcripts are included below.

> Researcher: "How about Lester? He's absent a lot but interesting to watch when he is here." Teacher: "Interesting to watch! Well, this is Lester's second year in kindergarten and um, Lester's family has a history of special education." Researcher: "Brothers and sisters?" Teacher: "No, mother and aunts and uncles and Lester was born as a result of a

teenage pregnancy. And so the mother did not finish school and she was not married. She's now married and it's kind of a bad situation. He resents his father, he resents the two older children that . . . he resents his stepfather. He resents the two older children that his mother and stepfather parent. I haven't talked to her since the third one was born. He wants to live with his grandmother because he and mom lived at grandma's and grandpa's. He called his mother Sherry and his grandma and grandpa, mom and dad." Researcher: "Is that right?" Teacher: "He does not, has not, since mother has remarried, he has not made the change. And last year, we went through . . . he had to sleep at grandmas because he wouldn't sleep, he wouldn't go to bed, he would get up and get knives and things out of the drawers when he stayed with mom and so he would stay with grandma and she would bring him to school in the morning. He was having a lot of emotional problems last year and that was one reason we decided on another year of kindergarten. But, of course, he didn't have the skills to go on. He still doesn't. He has poor attendance." Researcher: "I don't understand about the knives." Teacher: "Last year she was supposed to be getting him in the Midstate County Counseling Center because he had become suicidal." Researcher: "Suicidal? According to who's diagnosis?" Teacher: "According to her. According to her." Researcher: "And that had to do with the knives and things?" Teacher: "Uh-huh. One day when she was bringing him to school, he threatened to open the door and he would jump out of the car on a busy street. I talked to the counseling center, she was making arrangements that haven't occurred yet."

The findings below are an analytic description of Lester's social relationships within his peer group. The emphasis will be given to describing social contexts constructed by children in kindergarten, contexts in which Lester was involved. The teacher's descriptions of Lester's home life are not offered as "explanations" of his social behavior with peers. Such explanations are beyond the scope of this project. What follows is an analysis of one troubled little boy's everyday social relations in school.

Findings

This study was neither begun with the intention of studying peer stigmatization in school, nor of focusing on Lester as a participant. In early stages of the observation and analysis cycle of the research (see Spradley, 1980), evidence emerged that Lester's status in relation

to his peers was different from other children in the class. He consistently was being treated differently than others. This led the researcher to analyses of Lester's behavior in social interactions with peers and group responses to Lester. The results of these analyses will be reported below. Lester's social behavior was problematic in that much of his behavior did not fit the norms and expectations of his peer group. An analytic domain called "Rule Breaking" organizes descriptions of Lester's problematic behavior. Ways that peers treated Lester differently are called "Group Responses." As has been suggested throughout this paper, the relationship between Lester and his peer group is taken to be interactive and dynamic, not linear and static. Lester did not always behave in a prescribed way followed by a set "response." Domains are ways of organizing complex patterns of social phenomena. The domains in this case are meant to be understood as patterns of give and take interaction which were used consistently by the children in this kindergarten.

Rule Breaking

Analysis of Lester's social behavior revealed three general kinds of behavior which were problematic in that they were out of line with peer norms and expectations in the classroom. Aggression, Teasing, and Contact Incompetence will be described as kinds of rule breaking which contributed to Lester's being defined as an outsider by his peers.

Aggression was a prominent feature of Lester's social behavior with his classmates. Aggression here means hitting, kicking, pushing, pinching, squeezing, and the threat of these. In all kinds of classroom contexts, Lester was observed threatening children with physical harm (usually non-verbally with a raised fist and jutting jaw) or actually physically attacking other children.

When children were gathered in a large group on the rug for a

teacher directed activity, when they were working on assigned activities at their seats, or when they were allowed to select their own activities and play partners, aggresive behavior that was observed almost always involved Lester. An example of Lester's aggression in each of these contexts is presented below.

> As teacher reads a story to the group, Lester extends his leg and kicks Larry who is in front and to the left of Lester. Larry says: "Stop!" then moves a short distance away and kicks out at Lester, not reaching him. Lester turns and kicks Marie in the back. Marie turns and gives Lester a hurt look, then raises her hand [to tell teacher]. Lester scoots away. Marie keeps her hand up and looks back at Lester. Lester shakes his head 'no.' Marie continues to hold her hand up. Lester kicks Kathy. Marie sees this and says: "He's kicking me, too." Teacher finally calls on Marie, who reports: "Lester's kicking me in the back." Teacher looks at Lester and says: "Excuse me," pauses with a disappointed look on her face, then goes back to the story.

> Robert gets up from his seat and moves to teacher: "Teacher, Lester kicked Joni." Teacher: "I think Joni is perfectly capable of telling me her problems." Robert heads back to his seat but meets Lester who blocks his way. Lester kicks Robert in the leg and Robert kicks back. [Robert's kick was not as hard as Lester's.] Lester kicks Robert and Robert kicks back a little harder. Alex joins Robert and reaches out and pushes Lester. Teacher sees this and yells: "Take your seats."

> During choice time, Lester notices a group of children standing around Kip who has the car she shared today. Lester rolls up his sleeves and pushes his way into the group. Baylor is bumped out of the way by Lester. Baylor pushes his chest out and bumps Lester back. Lester gives Baylor a healthy bump sending Baylor sprawling into the other children. Baylor calls out: "Lester!" and teacher intervenes.

The examples demonstrate what was evident in the data; that much of Lester's interaction with peers was characterized by aggressive physical behavior or the threat of it. In interviews with students following the observation phase of the study (without being asked about Lester directly), eight children referred to Lester's aggression in their comments. When teacher was describing each child's social relations with peers, she said of Lester: "I think some of them were

probably afraid of him because of his size and he was hitting and kicking at people constantly."

Teasing was a second feature of Lester's behavior which was different from "normal" peer social behavior in this classroom. On several occasions, Lester teased and taunted other children. Examples follow.

> As Marlene and Lester return to their seats after picking up their snack, Lester quickly sits down in Marlene's seat. Marlene: "Get offa my seat. That's my chair." As Lester moves he says in a low, mocking voice: "Get offa my seat. Get offa my seat." Marlene: "You better stop." Lester continues with a smile: "Get offa my seat. Get offa my seat." Marlene is almost in tears: "That's not funny. You better stop." Lester continues.

> Joni goes to the holder for scissors. Lester grabs the last pair as Joni approaches. Joni: "You need green." (Lester has green, left-handed, scissors on his table and holds a red, right-handed, pair in his hand). Lester pulls away. Joni tries to get Lester to give up the green pair: "I need green." Lester: "Uh-un." Joni: "You already got scissors." No response from Lester. Lester puts the red scissors from his hand into the holder; then, when Joni reaches for them, he pulls them out again. He puts them back in the holder but when Joni does not reach, he takes them out and offers them to Joni: "Here." She reaches and he turns away, laughing. Joni goes to teacher.

Teasing was not unknown among other children in the class; but, others' teasing had a playful quality. Both parties in other children's teasing were participating in the construction of an experience both enjoyed. If Lester's teasing was play to him, those being teased did not share that view. When interviewed, one child (Alex) identified Lester as someone who "doesn't talk to me very much." When asked why, Alex responded: "I don't know. I think he's thinkin' about more stuff to tease about."

Contact Incompetence refers to Lester's poorly developed strategies for making positive social contact with peers. Lester had few positive interactions with peers. Analyses of his attempts at making contact with peers and of his responses to positive contact attempts by others

revealed a lack of social skill in both areas.

The most apparent characteristic of Lester's contact attempts was their infrequency. He spent large amounts of time in what the teacher called, "his own little world." On a field-trip to a fire station, the researcher overheard adults who had just finished working with the children refer to Lester as "the little boy who doesn't talk." In contexts in which other children were bustling around him, Lester would sit expressionless, glancing around occasionally, but rarely joining in.

When Lester did attempt to enter groups or join other singles, his contact attempts were usually non-verbal, narrow in scope, and not effective. Corsaro (1979) described non-verbal access strategies used by preschoolers to enter peer groups. In other research conducted by the author (Hatch, in press) kindergarteners (in other classrooms) rarely used non-verbal contact strategies. Lester, as is shown in the example below, attempted non-verbal entry but seemed not to know what to say when just moving close to others did not gain him access.

> As teacher is doing choral reading on the rug, Lester moves to a position very close to Robert. Lester is just inches from Robert's face and staring. Robert is apparently aware of Lester's closeness; he shifts his position so that his face is farther from Lester's. As Robert's face begins to turn toward him, Lester drops his eyes.
>
> As teacher teaches a song to children, Lester moves to a position next to Frank. Frank is singing what he knows of the song and does not acknowledge Lester's proximity. Lester turns his face to Frank and moves it to within two inches of Frank's face. Frank pulls back and looks questioningly at Lester. Lester drops his eyes and moves away.

Giving up when initial contact attempts did not work was another characteristic of Lester's entry moves. Other children in this classroom and in other kindergartens studied were not easily discouraged in contact attempts but generally repeated contact moves or tried new ones when attempts were unsuccessful (Hatch, in press). Lester's pattern

when he was not being aggressive or passive, was to try one move (usually moving closer) then give up.

When other children tried to make friendly contact with Lester, another dimension of his inability to have satisfying social contacts was revealed. Only nine interaction events in the data were classified as attempts by other children to enter interaction with Lester and only two of these led to a satisfying interaction. Lester seemed either not to know how to respond to friendly approaches or really did not want the contact; nonetheless, he communicated disinterest or aversion to his peers.

On the day valentine's were distributed in the classroom, the researcher watched Lester close himself off from the excitement and friendly feelings his peers were sharing. While others were noisely exchanging valentines, Lester was working, head-down at his seat. As others approached to put valentine's in his "mailbox," Lester rarely looked up and, during this time, never spoke. On one occasion, Linda stuck a valentine between Lester and his work and asked, "Is this you?" Lester did not look up or speak, just nodded yes. Linda dropped the valentine into his bag and left.

When Lester was approached by peers, typically, he either did not respond or responded in such ways as to end the interaction. On the two occasions below, when children were signally the desire to play, Lester missed the opportunity to join in.

> As Lester and Tad are clearing off their worksites after cut and paste, Tad picks some dried Elmer's glue from the table and playfully threatens to put it on Lester's nose. Lester turns away, lifting his shoulder to his cheek [not in a playful way - he really doesn't want glue on his nose or to play]. Tad turns away.

> The children at the second table are having milk and pretzels for snack. Tad, Debby, Connie, Kathy, and Tommy are taking turns loudly and dramatically crunching their pretzels. After several turns, Tommy leans toward Lester.

As Lester looks up, Tommy opens his mouth wide, tnrows his head back, then crunches down on his pretzel. Lester gives no sign of response.

Both excerpts are examples of social contexts in which Lester did not respond like other children given the same kinds of opportunities. In the last excerpt, Lester's table partners continued their game by taking turns being the "cruncher" and laughing and exchanging warm eye contact after each crunch. This pattern of missed opportunities characterized Lester's responses to the few contact attempts he received.

In this section, three areas of "rule breaking" have been outlined. Lester's aggression, teasing, and contact incompetence have been described as problematic in that they did not match peer norms and expectations in this classroom. In the next section, peer group responses to Lester are reported.

Group Responses

Two general patterns of peer response in interaction contexts involving Lester were discovered in the data: Exclusion and Snubs. Both of these will be described as patterns which characterized how Lester was treated by peers in this classroom.

Exclusion occurred when Lester was denied entry into already established groups. As was suggested above, Lester's attempts to enter groups were limited in number and in sophistication. From his perspective as one trying to enter, his attempts were seldom successful. From the perspectives of peers, success in many situations meant keeping Lester out of groups. Some examples of contexts in which two or more children worked together to exclude Lester from their interactions are presented below.

Lester moves to a place on the rug where Bobby and Jimmy are building with blocks. Lester stands and watches, then says: "What you makin'?" Jimmy: "We're building a hospital (pause) and you can't play." Lester moves to where Alex, Tommy, and Steve are playing with He-man

toys. Lester to Steve: "Can I play with you?" (Steve brought the toys for sharing). Steve looks at Tommy. Tommy to Lester: "Uh-un. Just me and Alex." Lester moves on.

Sam and Steve have a set of Lego blocks and Lester comes to the place where Sam and Steve are playing and sits down on the edge of the group. He reaches across what they are building, picks up a piece from the box and adds it to their construction. Steve: "Don't." Sam: "You're breakin' it." (When Lester put the piece in, it separated another set of pieces). Frank comes and stands between Steve and Sam. Lester to Frank: "You can play." [We'll both join.] Frank looks to Sam to see if it's OK. [I don't see Sam's reaction but I do see Frank sit down.] After Frank sits down, Sam says to Lester: "Only three can play." Steve: "Ya, only three. You have to leave." Sam: "I'll decide. Frank, what does your name start with?" Frank: "F" Sam: "Steve, what does your name start with?" Steve: "S" Sam: "My name starts with S. OK S's and F's can stay." Steve to Lester: "You gotta leave." Lester looks down but does not move. Steve repeats: "You gotta leave. Only three can play." Lester continues to look down and says nothing. Steve: "I'ma tell the teacher." Sam: "OK, I'll decide. Go to your seats and I'll call who can play." Steve stands up and starts to leave. He looks over his shoulder and sees that no one else is leaving and returns to a standing position next to the group. Sam to Frank: "Go to your seat so I can call you." Frank: "No." Steve repeats: "Only F's and S's can stay." Sam: "OK, only those with red on can stay." Each boy checks clothing and announces "I got red!" "I got red." Lester: "I got red." Sam trys another color: "Who's got white?" Lester points to his T-shirt and says: "I got white." Sam: "That don't count. You gotta be wearin' it." Lester continues to check and sees white in his plaid shirt and says: "I got white." Sam continues to go through the colors [in what appears to be an exercise in trying to get Lester out of the group.] Lester does not leave, but stays on the outside of the group. Occasionally he reaches across to keep pieces in play. At one point he says: "Let's build a big house." Steve responds: "We already are. You can't stay." Another attempt by Lester was to pick up a toy lawnmower and say: "I'll mow the yard." (He acts as if he is mowing the rug with the mower.) Steve's response: "You can't stay. I'ma tell the teacher."

The last long excerpt demonstrates the exclusion pattern very well. Even on this occasion when Lester repeatedly tried to enter, his peers defined what was happening based on the understanding that Lester would not be allowed into the group.

Snubs were children's individual negative responses to Lester as an interaction partner. Goffman (1967) points out that, except when wide discrepencies in status exist between interactants, deference rituals compel individuals to respond to others who are seeking contact with them. Children in this study snubbed Lester by not responding when he sought interaction. This provided further evidence of Lester's low status position in relation to his classmates.

The examples below demonstrate the common pattern. Lester was frequently ignored by his classmates. They seemed not to accord him the same courtesy that they gave one another. In this classroom, it was permissible to ignore deference rituals and not respond to Lester.

> Tad has opened milk cartons for Steve and Connie. Lester slides his carton to Tad and says: "Can't open it." Tad brushes Lester's carton aside and joins in the interaction around the table: "I got a one and a eight" (date on his milk carton). Lester picks up his carton and takes it to the fifth grader helping with snack.

> As Lester joins the group forming on the rug he bends down and waves his hand in front of Jimmy's face. I see no sign of recognition from Jimmy even though the wave was close enough to make Jimmy blink.

When interviewed, both the teacher and one of the children (Linda) pointed out the frequency with which Lester was ignored in the classroom; and both connected children's treatment of Lester to his agressiveness. As a follow-up to the teacher's description of the peer group's protectiveness in relations with one of the youngest students, the researcher asked: "So the other kids kind of protect Larry, or someone like Larry. How do they react to Lester?" Teacher responded: "They try to stay away from him. They just ignore him. They don't play with him because he's just not nice." Linda, in her interview, volunteered that Lester would be someone who shouldn't be put in charge of the class if the teacher was gone. When asked why, she said: "Nobody listens to Lester." When asked why, she concluded: "Well, because

maybe he just acts mean and keeps tellin' people what to do every-time."

Conclusions

From the interactionist perspective taken here, deviance is a socially constructed phenomenon. Social groups define what constitutes rule-breaking and label individuals who violate their rules as outsiders. Outsiders, from this perspective, are not labeled as "less than normal" as a necessary consequence of unsavory personal traits or particular offensive habits. Labeling is an act of the group and an outsider is one to whom less than normal status has been ascribed.

There is considerable evidence that Lester had been labeled as an outsider by his classroom peer group. His aggression, teasing, and contact incompetence were defined as deviant behavior and he was treated differently because of his less than normal status in the classroom. A cycle of expectations, behaviors, and responses was in place that signalled Lester that he was deviant. The degree to which his notions of his own identity were affected is difficult to know.

In interviews and in classroom peer interaction, children talked about Lester as if his deviant status was taken-for-granted by the group. On one occasion, when Alex was involved in a confrontation with Tomeka, he retaliated against her threatening to give him "a karate kick in the neck" by saying: "You're actin' just like Lester. That's why Lester doesn't have any friends. He always says he'll hit you and kick you." The teacher's comments concerning Lester's peer relations indicated, as well, that she believed his peers saw his behavior as deviant. She told of how children complained to her that "Lester does wierd things." When asked what 'wierd things' meant, she said: "Like he spit on Frank to get his attention."

The domains described in the findings document Lester's rule breaking in relation to peer group norms and expectations and reveal ongoing group exclusions and personal snubs which defined Lester's everyday experience in school. It was clear that Lester behaved differently and was responded to differently than any other child in the group.

Studies of "popular" children in school contexts have suggested that popular children have well developed interaction skills and are operating within a self-perpetuating social circle which reinforces their competence and stimulates further growth (see Moore, 1981). In contrast, Lester and children like him operate within a different circle. The feedback they get from their interaction attempts is evidence of their own inadequacy. What is stimulated is their withdrawal into the relative safety of not trying to make contact. What are developed are strategies for putting up an aggressive front to deter negative sanctions.

Goffman (1963) pointed out that when we stigmatize an individual as an outsider we "effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his/(her) life chances" (p. 5). The children in the study did not "thinkingly" construct the stigmatization of Lester. The impact for Lester, however, is potentially more devastating because his peers treatment of him was unexamined; that is to say, his inferiority was assumed. In so far as Lester accepted the correctness of that assumption he was learning to be an outsider.

Implications

The experience of being labeled an outsider in schoolrooms may have far-reaching consequences for young children. After reviewing several studies of social adjustment in school, Perry and Bussey (1984)

conclude: "Children who are actively rejected by their peers in grade school stand an above-average risk of dropping out of school, of becoming delinquent, of being diagnosed neurotic or psychotic, and of even committing suicide" (p. 311).

Experiencing the processes of peer stigmatization in kindergarten do not, of course, determine that Lester or any other young child is destined to suffer the troubles listed. Understanding the dynamics of labeling individuals as deviants and the frequency with which such labels are internalized by those being stigmatized does provide an explanation of how such troubles may evolve. Early labeling influences children's definitions of themselves and their behavior in relationship to others. The process of labeling stabilizes deviance and can lead to a cycle which causes individuals to begin to see themselves as "career deviants;" i.e., those who's identities and behaviors are principally defined in terms of deviance (Becker, 1963; Pfuhl, 1980).

This study treats the definition of an individual as outsider as a transaction between a social group and one who is viewed by that group as a rule-breaker. By understanding the processes involved in transacting such a definition in classrooms, teachers are given a framework for intervening appropriately. Ways of guiding children's social development in classrooms are suggested in several recent articles (e.g., Rogers & Ross, 1986; Roopnarine & Honig, 1985).

Researchers interested in the study of deviance and social processes in school may find this study useful. The interactionist approach taken offers a conceptual framework which allows for the analysis of stigmatizing processes. By describing stigmatization processes experienced by children in a variety of social contexts, researchers may be able to construct a theory for explaining childhood deviance. This study represents a step toward constructing such a theory. In addition, educational

researchers and other scientists interested in studying schooling as a social phenomenon may find the methods and findings useful as investigations of social processes in school are continued.

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