

Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School

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Chapter 5—

The Development of Social Categories

I guess, you know, we have all gone separate ways. I remember back in sixth grade, I can look back now in sixth grade, and see all of us kids back there so the same, but now we're all different, totally different. Some have gone so stuck up, and some have gone so burned out, and some have just stayed the same.

The entrance into junior high school is a formal transition to teen-age status, and marks a conscious recognition of the need for separation from the family. The issue of independence from the family is fraught with anxiety and ambivalence, and the long process of separation frequently involves emotional upheaval and sporadic regression (Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children, 1973). The intensity of personal conflict involved in separation is reflected in the intensity of the average adolescent's involvement in peer society. This intensity is an indication not only of the regressive compensatory role of peer relations, but of the progress in the nature of relations involved in the move from the family to the peer group. While pre-adolescent and adolescent peer groups compensate for the loss of the approval, security, and intimacy that the child enjoys in the family, it awards these on a new basis. Whereas family acceptance is based on ascriptive (kin) status, the peer group awards acceptance on the basis of the individual's personal qualities. Eisenstadt (1956) describes this function of adolescent groups.

Within these groups, as in the primitive age groups, new types of discipline, effected through the autonomous participation of the group, entirely different from those of family life, are imposed on the individual adolescent. The main difference lies in the fact that any individual is evaluated, as it were, according to his own worth and not according to his place within a given family; he is judged by universalistic criteria. At the same time his (or her) worth is not judged according to any specific achievement (as, to a great extent in school, in anticipation of his adult specialization), but according to his total personality and its harmony with both group values

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and goals, or according to diffuse and collectivity-oriented criteria. This diffuse image is defined in terms of new status aspirations and evaluations which emphasize the emancipation from family discipline. (pp. 182–183)

The function of adolescent society in moving the individual's identity into the societal sphere is enhanced by the extent to which that society is structured by broad societal values, and thus to which the individual can perceive himself or herself in relation to those values. This transition takes place gradually throughout childhood, as individuals become increasingly involved in peer groups. As childhood friendship groups emerge into the more organized society of secondary

school, a new element of independence is added. Childhood friendship groups function within the purview of parental norms and family obligations, and as such are dominated by adult society. Adolescent friendship groups emerge into a society of their own, providing an alternative to the authority structure of the family. The strictures of adolescent social norms replace those of the parents, and the heightened conformity of adolescents to their age-group norms helps compensate for the greater security of norms imposed by parents, who represent, during childhood, the ultimate in security and authority. Some of the intensity of adolescent peer society, therefore, is an indication of the need for structure and regulation to replace that of the family.

As they become aware that they are replacing peer for family society, adolescents develop a new sense of age-group membership. They are no longer members of an age group imposed upon them by the age-graded structure of the family, but of an age group that they have chosen as an alternative to the family. With the development of a sense of membership in an age group separate from, and opposed to, adults, they acquire responsibility for this age group and develop a stake in its structure and norms. As the alternative to the family as a basis of identity, adolescent society must appear to them worthy and reliable. Thus, the means of acquiring independence becomes a communal issue within the age group, and adolescents develop a sense of responsibility not only for their own behavior but for that of their peers. Within this context, the Jocks and the Burnouts become intensely involved in their mutual differences, which are based on their conflicting means of pursuing independence. The Jocks seek independence from the family in intense involvement in adult-sanctioned peer institutions, while the Burnouts seek it in a peer society that rejects the authority of these institutions. This difference cannot be neutral, since the behavior associated with each mode of separation threatens the basis of the other. The Burnouts'

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rebellious behavior threatens the carefully tended relations with adults necessary for the Jocks to realize their kind of independence, while the Jocks' acknowledgment of adult authority threatens the Burnouts' claims against this authority.

With their heightened sense of age-group membership, adolescents become sensitive to the possibility that the adult world will judge the adolescent cohort on the basis of the behavior of its most visible members. Alliances form among like-minded individuals and groups to control and monitor the behavior of those seen as working against their interests and to increase their own visibility in an effort to define norms for the age group. These alliances elevate to the level of ideology within the cohort differences in behavior that had, during childhood, been a matter between the individual and relevant adults. This ideological level in turn organizes perceptions of individuals and groups and leads to the development of categories.

Once ideology and identity merge in the formation of social categories, these categories can expand to involve increasing numbers of people and can elaborate category-specific cultural forms. In this way, groups unite into categories. The evolution of categories, therefore, involves the development of ideology around the behavior of individuals and groups; the expansion and consolidation of these groups into categories on the basis of shared ideology; and the elaboration of opposed ideologies through association with an increasing variety of membership, through the evolving issues confronting the cohort, and through the sheer force of contrasting ideologies in interpreting and assigning value to otherwise neutral behavior.

Because of the transitional nature of adolescence, an accurate view of the social categories of this period requires examination of the passage of the cohort into and through the period of adolescence. The passage through secondary school is accompanied by physiological, cognitive, and emotional changes that no doubt alter the cohort's ability and need to perceive social identity in abstract and categorical terms. At the same time, the increasing opportunity for participation and responsibility in school institutions creates new material for cultural differences between the categories. Finally, the progress toward graduation brings increasing orientation to the world beyond high school, adding concrete adult aspirations to category differences.

Since my field work was limited to the high school and did not include any direct involvement with students in their elementary school or junior high school years, my discussion of the development of social categories does not have the same empirical basis as my discussion of the end product in high school. The following is based on the reminiscences

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and reports of high school students about their own earlier experience. (The childhood and junior high school memories of high school students bear the same relation to actual experience as do my own adult memories of high school, as discussed in Chapter 2.) The reports on which this discussion is based are the product of selection, reconstruction, and reinterpretation of memories. But most of this is a reflection of community process, as indicated by the overwhelming agreement among the reports given by students throughout the school. As such, it is a particularly important version of the development of this community's social categories.

Junior High School

Most Belten students report that the differentiation between Jocks and Burnouts arose "overnight" upon entrance into junior high. This is supported by a particularly striking piece of evidence of the suddenness of the category split that I encountered while running a workshop for public school teachers in Flint, Michigan, in 1981. When I introduced the subject of Jocks and Burnouts, a number of the teachers said that they had never heard of Jocks or Burnouts and that there were certainly no such categories in their schools. This response in turn evoked loud expressions of incredulity from a number of other teachers. I asked those who did not have such categories in their schools to raise their hands, and about half of those present did so. When I asked all those who were elementary school teachers to lower their hands, all hands went down. Subsequent discussion of these categories led some of those elementary school teachers to turn to the secondary school teachers and demand to know what they had done to the children. "They certainly weren't that way when we sent them to you." So it appears that suddenly, in junior high school, a population differentiated by what had been perceived in elementary school as individual differences became organized into two major categories.

I hate classifying people, even though it's something that's geared into my head.

UH-HUH. WHEN DID IT GET INTO YOUR HEAD?

In junior high.

DO YOU KNOW WHY?

Because it's what everybody else was doing, you know. I hated junior high. I did. I hated it because it was like—it's a total identity

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crisis, or it was for me, you know. Just trying to figure out where you belong. . . . OK, seventh grade, day one, Jocks and the Burnouts.

BOOM. RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL.

That fast. That fast.

A boy who became a Burnout a little later in junior high describes the same suddenness in the emergence of the categories.

CAN YOU REMEMBER WHEN IT STARTED SPLITTING INTO TWO GROUPS?

First day of junior high school.

REALLY? WHY?

Just about. I don't know. I don't even know if all those Burnouts back then got high. I don't know if they were Burnouts or not. But there was two different groups starting out, right in junior high. I don't know how that came about. Just sort of was. I don't know.

Although the categories became manifest in junior high, the underlying social divisions had been developing throughout elementary school. The Burnout category had its origins in social networks based in the lower-income neighborhoods served by Belten, which were reinforced in neighborhood elementary schools. One girl, who claimed that Finley Junior High had more Burnouts than Rover, gave the following explanation:

WHY ARE THERE A LOT OF BURNOUTS AT FINLEY?

I don't know. I really don't know. I guess, well, lots of them come from Hull, and Hull is supposed to be, you know Hull Elementary, and that's supposed to be, you know, like a really bad elementary school. I don't know why, just, you know, lots of kids, I guess, around from that area and stuff, and they just—they just hang around, I guess, lots of them hang around with, like you know, older kids, you know, so they get involved in stuff earlier.

The age-heterogeneity of Burnout networks can be traced to working class neighborhood and family patterns. Working class adults' greater neighborhood orientation and solidarity provide children with readymade social networks. Children's networks are matched to a great extent to parental networks, within which a certain amount of parenting responsibility can be shared. Social network and neighborhood are frequently synonymous, as reflected in one Burnout's recollection.

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SO WHO DID YOU PLAY WITH WHEN YOU WERE A KID?

Oh, everyone on the block pretty much. There were lots of kids on my block—you just went out the door and looked to see who was around and that was who you played with.

Working class parents frequently rely on older children as caretakers for their younger siblings and encourage closeness and nurturance among siblings. Working parents' lack of time at home gives rise to a relatively strong division between child and adult activities, leaving children to develop strong peer groups that foster solidarity in the face of parental authority. Caretakers are frequently expected to include their charges in their peer activities, and neighborhood networks develop that integrate siblings and friends.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN CLOSE WITH YOUR BROTHER?

Yeah, like you know when we were growing up and that, we hung around in the same crowd in our old neighborhood and the same crowd when we came here. So we have always been really close. I guess closer as you get older.

Greater resources allow middle class parents to provide adult care and adult-led activities for their children when they cannot be around themselves. Students from wealthier neighborhoods complain that there weren't many other kids to play with, and a number of Jocks remember being taken to other neighborhoods to play with children of their parents' friends. This parental supervision guaranteed age-homogeneous friendships, and although Jocks did of course play with kids in their own neighborhoods, these groups did not have the same kind of autonomy as those in Burnout neighborhoods. To a great extent, therefore, Jocks waited until they began elementary school to develop independent peer networks, which, by virtue of the school's institutionalized age-grading, were age-homogeneous.

Under the guidance of older friends and siblings, Burnouts claimed freedom earlier than their age mates in age-homogeneous groups. Behavior such as going out in the evening and cigarette smoking set them at odds with adults well before they arrived in junior high. In elementary school, this behavior was judged as children's "troublemaking" and acquired a structured social evaluation only within the context of the junior high social system.

WERE THERE JOCKS AND BURNOUTS IN SIXTH GRADE?

No. Sixth grade there was cool people and—in sixth grade it was weird. There was people you knew smoked and they thought they were really cool. The guys, it was the guys.

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The relatively unstructured sixth-grade cohort did not, of course, suddenly acquire structure spontaneously upon entrance into seventh grade; it merged into a social system already present in the upper grades. The Burnouts' age-heterogeneous networks introduced them not only to precocious behavior but to the school's social system, in advance of the Jocks. Although the majority of the cohort trace category formation to the first day of seventh grade, the earliest Burnouts trace the beginning of their Burnout identity to late sixth grade, and particularly to the summer between sixth and seventh grade. As they approached junior high school, many sixth graders in "Burnout" neighborhoods gained access to evening group activities with the older members of their networks. Most important of these activities for the development of category consciousness were evening gatherings during good weather in neighborhood parks. During

these gatherings, the sixth graders were introduced to smoking, marijuana, heterosexual relations, and discussions of adolescent social structure and adolescent problems. By the time they reached junior high in the fall, therefore, they had been introduced to Burnout culture and integrated into the Burnout network existing in the junior high. They knew to go to the "T," which was an illicit smoking area, their first day of junior high, and they knew to regard those who did not as "childish" and less "cool."

Well, in seventh grade we were allowed to hang out at the T. That's what they called the T—it was right across the driveway in front of the school. And there's a big field, we'd play Frisbee and stuff, and everybody'd go out there and smoke dope or whatever. So that's where I hung out with all my sister's—all the ninth graders and stuff. You know, they all liked me because I was a little kid that they could tease and I wouldn't care and everything. And then, yeah, after they left is when I started making a lot of new friends and stuff. Yeah, then we hung out at the T. Just to hang out at the T. Because there's nothing else to do.

Since Jocks by and large formed their social networks in the school, academic tracking clearly played a role in the development of Jock networks and in the separation between Jock and Burnout networks. One Jock traced some of her network relations to a "gifted" class in elementary school.

Well, we started out in reading in kindergarten, and there was a certain group of kids that did. And then they kept us together with the same kindergarten teacher in first grade, and they just kept us together. They just did it. . . . There were other kids in the

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class, but that was the group that stuck together. We never were broken up. We were a set. It's like they moved us as a whole and they moved us from teacher to teacher as a whole. It was really, it was, maybe it was a trial experiment or something. But I liked it because you developed fast friendships with these, some of these people. Like Joan, who strayed away from the group in tenth grade. You've heard about Joan. And that sort of thing. There's nothing you can do, she still is a friend and she still is friendly. But it's like, Grace is like, you know, I can go up to her and say, "Hey, Grace, I remember what we did with our Barbie dolls" and stuff like that. And just have chuckles in the hall and that sort of thing. And Joe, who proposed to me in first grade and kindergarten, you know. It's like, you know, he's my old knight, old fiancé, and things like that. And so it's close friends, and just old memories that you share, that ties you together. Plus things in the future, you know, just discussing how you feel about each other and that sort of thing, so we're close.

AND THEN WHEN YOU WENT TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, WHAT HAPPENED?

Mm, we got more friends, but we really didn't break up. It was very clear in ninth grade that we didn't. We had added friends to our group.

UH-HUH, WHO?

Oh, well, just other, like Georgia had come into the group and—so to speak, the group—and that sort of stuff. And we weren't, we weren't so, as one whole group, we had gone into separate ones, but when we came together we were a group. That sort of stuff. And there were more people, but we were still all close. Even, even through ninth grade and especially ninth grade, some of us got even closer. So it was great.

HOW?

Well . . . we worked side by side diligently on the yearbook and on Honors Committee and on this and that and the other thing.

The following recollection about one of the other junior highs gives the non-Jock's view of the Jocks' cohesiveness:

In junior high school you heard about it [school activities] but you didn't go because you didn't belong, you didn't fit in with the people, you know. . . . They were friends ever since you know they

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were little and they just kind of stuck together, you know, and then they, somewhere along the line they, they thought they were better than the rest of us and kind of made us like outcasts in a way.

WAS THERE A TIME . . . WHEN THEY HUNG TOGETHER BUT THEY STILL WEREN'T LIKE A CLIQUE?

Yeah, in elementary school. But then it seemed like in more, and then when they got in junior high they got more like, sort of independent, in a way, or went about their own way. Kind of left everybody out. . . . Well, they were usually a little bit smarter than the rest of us. And, um, they were teacher's pets. And, um, I don't know, they were always like the captain of the Service Squad Team, or the captain of the Safety, you know.

DO YOU REALLY THINK THEY WERE SMARTER THAN THE REST OF THE PEOPLE?

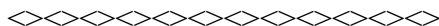
No, but I think the teachers had a little bit to do with it. You know, I think they were really teacher's pets, you know, and—I think they made them, you know, they, because they would always say, no, you know, they'd say to the rest of the class, "Now look at Joel," you know, "Now look at his—" you know, how he does his paper. "Now isn't this good," you know, and so, you know we think, "Oh, wow, they're a lot smarter than we are," you know, and stuff like that.

Many non-Jocks trace the origins of the Jock category to differential treatment in more heterogeneous elementary school classrooms and on the playground, where teachers control the visibility that is so essential to developing social status.

There's a good percentage [of Jocks] you could pick out [in elementary school].

REALLY? WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT ABOUT THEM?

I don't know. Sometimes, um, it seems to me like . . . oh, I can remember when I was little this one girl who I used to think—and she was so popular—but everybody—it was because she had everything. You know what I mean. It was one of those syndromes, like "I want what she's got." And so everybody knew her. . . . Like I remember, you know, show and tell, she'd bring in her . . . awards, and the teacher used to make such, oh, elaborate things, and show—go around showing the teachers. And she had all kinds of clothes, and you know just the very best, and we're just kind of going, "Ooh," you know.

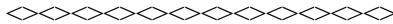


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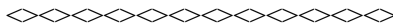
You have the little groups in sixth grade and you begin to form little groups and stuff and, I don't know if you could even classify it as popular, just, you know, maybe it was, um, the jocks were in one group and it just seemed like they were, you know, they were always better at sports and stuff, and that's sort of what, in elementary school that's sort of what makes you popular because, you know like your teacher takes you out for kickball and stuff. And you pick teams and then they always, the jocks always got picked first. So it always, maybe it just seemed like they were more popular.

Belten High students look back on the development of social categories at the beginning of junior high school as a sudden loss of innocence and frequently express nostalgia about the simplicity of human relations in elementary school. They view differences among elementary school peers as negligible, and their choice of friends as the result of external circumstances:

We were all the same. We weren't all Jocks but there's no such thing as Burnouts until junior high. So we were all just friends. . . . There was probably still little groups, everybody who lived around each other, but we were all friends.



You know, it was, like I said, when we were young, everything we did was the same, because—I see that a lot even with younger kids now. They do the same things not because there isn't more to do, it's just that that's what everybody else is doing, but their interests aren't that way. When you get a little older, there's a broader type of atmosphere where you can just pick what you want to do. People go their separate ways.



Mentally, you do a lot of growing up, and maybe you realize that there's different roads to take, you know, so you just got to decide which one you're going to ride on. Um, you know, elementary, things are pretty set. You have your teacher, and you go to class, and go home, play basketball, or something. High school, there isn't, I mean junior high, there's, you know, there's more choices. You know, you're just growing up, I guess.

Action and Reaction

The social choices presented in seventh grade were introduced by the Burnouts who, in their early claims to personal freedom and adult

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prerogatives, represented a departure from the relative docility of childhood. At the start, therefore, the Burnouts emerged as rebellious and precocious in opposition to the obedient mass of seventh graders. Since this behavior was markedly different from elementary school behavior, and was based on adult-identified behavior, the Burnouts emerged as more socially developed and "grown-up" than the rest of the cohort. The Burnouts' sense of growing up faster, and the others' resentment of their apparent contempt and their adoption of frightening and "inappropriate" behavior, led to polarization. The Jocks, therefore, developed a sense of identity in reaction and opposition to the new Burnouts.

You know, they [the Burnouts] were on drugs and everything, and then the other people were afraid to try them, or drink or anything like that, and so they became, you know, the Jocks.

This reactive and residual definition of the Jock category at the beginning of junior high is confirmed by non-Burnouts, as illustrated by one person who considered himself an In-between in high school.

I'd say at the beginning of junior high I considered myself a Jock.

WHY?

Well, we didn't smoke, we didn't drink, and, you know, we didn't do anything [like] that.

The Burnouts emerged, therefore, as a group opposed to an undefined mass on the basis of behavior that was seen as a departure from established childhood patterns. Earlier heterosexual involvement was another important component of Burnout life, reflecting the general value that Burnouts placed on adult status.

It was sort of like, the boys and the girls that were really starting to notice each other, you know, they were in one group and then the other ones that really didn't care were in another, you know what I mean? . . . There was a division, now that I think about it. One of the groups that, you know, hung around together [with the opposite sex], they did turn out to be Burnouts, I don't know why, but you know they did, in junior high.

The shift from mixed friendship group to dating was apparently part of conscious preparation for junior high school, although the nature of the heterosexual relationships was typically elementary schoolish, as re-

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ported by one girl who had hung out with Burnouts in elementary school.

In about fifth and sixth grade, all our little group that we had, you know, that I mentioned before, was like, "OK," you know, "we're getting ready for junior high," you know, "it's time we all have to get a boyfriend." So I remember, it was funny, Carol, like, there were two guys who were just the heartthrobs of our class, you know . . . so, um, I guess it was Carol and Cindy really, they were, like, sort of the leaders of our group, you know, they were the, yeah, they were just the leaders, and they got Tim and Joe, each of those you know. Carol had Tim and Cindy had Joe. And then, you know, everyone else, then it kind of went down the line, everyone else found someone. I remember thinking, "Well, who am I gonna get? I don't even like anybody," you know. I remember, you know, all sitting around, we were saying, "OK, who can we find for Sandy?" you know, looking, so finally we decided, you know, we were trying to decide between Al and Dave and so finally I took Dave, you know.

WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET HIM?

Oh, I think someone went and delivered him the message that I like him, you know, that was it. And so I guess the message came back that, OK, he liked me too, so I guess we were going together, so he asked me to go with him. So I sent the message back to him, of course, I wouldn't talk to him, heavens no, you know, you didn't talk to . . . [laughter].

REALLY, YOU NEVER TALKED TO HIM?

Oh, well, not before then, anyway, you know, so I had someone else go over and tell him that, yes, I would go with him, you know. And so, I don't even remember what came of that then. I don't think anything. I think we would talk, you know, that that was about it, really.

DID YOU EVER GO PLACES TOGETHER?

No. Oh, one time, yeah. One time, our whole little group, we all, oh, there must have been about eight of us. Yep. Us four girls and those four guys. Those four guys you know, they had their own little group too. So, of course, the boyfriends that we picked had to be within that group, you know, we couldn't get an outsider. So the eight of us walked up the Handy Dip. That was it. Big time stuff, yeah.

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During the early part of junior high, the Burnouts enjoyed considerable status and were thought of as the "cool" crowd. Their status was based on their relatively precocious behavior—in some sense they were seen as "typical teen-agers" and as "getting more out of life." A number of people were attracted to the Burnouts early in junior high because of this, but later moved on when it became apparent that Burnout activities could lead to trouble.

The adolescent's sense of identity beyond the family is based on the personal autonomy that grows out of a sense of participating as an individual in a social structure beyond the family. For most adolescents, adolescent society provides the only such structure, and the individual adolescent's identity is dependent on the degree of his or her integration into it. To the extent that it is structured around broad cultural values, adolescent society provides the means for the development of an autonomous identity. Since the issue of separation from the family, which divides Jocks and Burnouts, involves just such values within the adolescent context, the development of Jock and Burnout categories enhances the value of adolescent society for its members. The individual's sense of identity is strengthened by participation in the social process of categorization both because it provides a separate age-group world in which to participate and because it allows individuals to define themselves in relation to global issues.

Expanding Social Networks

Entrance into junior high school represents a great leap into adolescence, and the approach of seventh grade brings both anxiety and excitement about teen-age status and the expanded school environment. Although Jocks and Burnouts are opposed in their interpretation of teen-age status, they react similarly to the challenge of the expanded environment. After seven years with the constant and small population of one elementary school, entrance into junior high school is a frightening prospect for all. The building and population seem enormous to the newcomer, the secure environment of one teacher and one class is replaced by a variety of teachers and class groups, and the one familiar classroom gives way to the necessity of changing classes. It is probably not fortuitous that social categories, which lend a certain amount of predictability to the behavior of large numbers of people, should arise at this time. Mitchell (1969) observes that this "categorical order" of social relationships is a function of large-scale societies. All the students I spoke with recognized the need to expand their networks to avoid being lost and isolated in the larger environment, and most considered mak-

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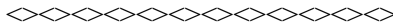
ing contacts to be the first priority upon entrance into junior high. The expansion of social networks, furthermore, is an essential aspect of the evolution from the fragmented group society of elementary school into the vast alliances and categories that make up a structured society.

Many students remember being plagued by a need to be "popular" in junior high—a need not simply to get to know people, but to confirm their emerging sense of identity through the recognition of others and a sense of place in the social structure. By and large, the core of each category was made up of people with social ambition and skills, and the categories gained membership and coherence through the networking efforts of their members. Friendship patterns changed drastically between elementary and junior high school, and again between junior high and high school, as the social requirements of the larger school created new differences among friends. Those who lacked the confidence or skills to pursue extended networks were left behind by their more aggressive friends and frequently felt that they were the victims of social ambition.

Yeah, you see it around, you know, they just—somebody'll, they'll start hanging around with somebody else and they'll just, you know, the rest of their friends or they just—they won't even talk to them anymore, you know? No matter how good of friends they were before.

WHY DO YOU THINK THEY DO THAT?

To be part of the in crowd. Definitely.



You meet a lot more people, but you lose a lot of your old friends, like you never see them any more. Like there's a few guys that you were really close to in Rover that you hardly even say hi to any more. It's different. . . . They just, when they come to Belten, I think it's more that they just don't go out and meet more people or, I don't know, with a littler school they can relate more, or something.

Many friendships broke up over category affiliation, as those who did not want to get into trouble moved away or were left behind by their more daring Burnout friends.

Once we went to this dance, and, it was me and Janet, and, um, she, she was starting to smoke, she's—you know, she just—it was a

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little peer pressure thing, and so she, um, and we went back in the back of the school, and they, like they were bringing out all these little, their pipes and, and filling them up, and I just, I couldn't believe it, drugs, it just, I mean, and so I just, I watched them, and they were smoking it and all this, and then one kid blew it in my face, and I just, oh, that made me so sick, so I, so I finally, I left. Couldn't take it anymore. But, um, that made me feel so un-at-ease. I was just so tensed up with those people. That's when I started branching off and finding my own friends. . . . Janet was my closest friend, and she really was like friends with the rest of the people, and so I always felt like I was the third wheel.

Those Burnouts who appeared the most advanced, and to be having the most fun, became the popular core of the Burnout crowd. They were frequently also the ones who had the most contacts with older Burnouts in the junior high.

They were the ones that had girlfriends and boyfriends first. They were the ones to try out everything new first. They hung around all the junior high kids first.

The Emergence of the Jocks

At the same time that Burnouts were asserting themselves as "partiers" in junior high, others became involved in school sports and the few other school activities available to seventh graders. Among these people, some who had emerged in junior high as athletic and "popular" formed the core of a popular crowd separate from that of the Burnouts. Many of these people had gained visibility and prestige in elementary school through a combination of teacher approval and ability in childhood pursuits. This association of the Jock core with school success introduced the school-based aspect of Jock identity, but also developed into a strong sense of Jock superiority—an aspect of category conflict that remains and even grows through high school and stands in constant contrast to the Burnouts' growing sense of pride in competence in the outside world.

Although the Burnouts viewed the nascent Jock crowd as "goody-goodies" and "teacher's pets," the latter were, in fact, eager to achieve autonomy in junior high school through involvement in peer society. No person who is simply docile toward adults can retain status in adolescent peer society. Those who had gained visibility through being a teacher's pet in elementary school could not retain status in peer society without

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some indication that they could stand up to teachers and parents. The difference between prestigious Jocks and Burnouts in this regard is the style in which they stood up to adults. In junior high, therefore, two separate popular groups emerged around two crowds of elementary school "stars," defining the center of the Jock and Burnout categories. The popular Burnouts were "rowdy," while the popular Jocks were the athletic and visible achievers from elementary school. By virtue of their reaction to the Burnouts, the Jocks developed an identity based initially on opposition to the Burnouts' rebelliousness. This identity did not remain negative for long—their participation in school activities became a positive trait, reinforced by the more full-blown status of the Jock category in the upper grades of the school.

In early junior high, everyone, including Burnouts, participated in school social activities. Some Burnouts went out for sports and cheerleading; many attended dances, roller skating, and athletic events. The latter events were put on by the school for the students, and Jocks and Burnouts attended them in the same consumer capacity. Both Jocks and Burnouts remember junior high school dances with particular nostalgia, although the Jocks and Burnouts behaved differently at these dances. While Jocks concentrated on the dances themselves, Burnouts organized their private activities around them.

Well, everybody was there, you know the whole school would go, dance, wow, it was a big thing, you know. I had so much fun at those. Those were just a riot. And, you know, they'd get bands in and you sat around and listened to the band and just had fun. We used to, you know, go out and drink a few beers before we'd get there, and you know, be home by 11 o'clock or you're grounded for life, you know.

Another popular activity was roller skating, organized by the school at a nearby rink. Here, off school territory but not away from school authority, the Burnouts were also eager to pursue

their private activities on the fringes of the official activity, which eventually got enough Burnouts banned from school activities that the others stopped going. Thus, as junior high wore on, Burnout involvement in school-organized activities diminished, and, with it, the Burnouts' general prestige. As they became excluded from school activities, Burnouts moved from being simply "rowdy" to adopting a counter-school ideology. Whereas at first being rowdy had been "cool," now participating in school activities was "not cool." One Burnout who had wanted to work on the yearbook in ninth grade explained why she finally didn't.

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WHY DIDN'T YOU GO OUT FOR YEARBOOK, AND STUFF LIKE THAT?

In, in, I don't know, you probably know this, you probably heard this from people too. You know, in, um, junior high everybody was stereotype, stereotype. Like, you hung around with the Burnouts. You didn't talk to the Jocks.

YEAH.

You know. The Jocks didn't talk to you. And I talk to so many girls now that I think in ninth grade we didn't talk and stuff because she was a Jock and I was a Burnout, or whatever. And, um, and they were all on all the activities, you know.

YEAH.

So that, sort of—I was the most—. Out, out of everybody, I'd always go, "Come on, you guys, let's go roller skating," or "Let's go to the dance." And we would, but every—, most everybody else was, "Oh, nah, let's go out and walk around instead," you know.

AND WAS IT NOT BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO GO TO THE DANCE, BUT BECAUSE THEY FELT THAT IT WASN'T MADE FOR THEM?

Yeah. Right. Perfect. Exactly. . . . Yeah, like, "Well, it's not cool to go to school activities," you know.

The growing conviction that school activities were not cool was based partially on the prohibition against adult behavior at these activities. Those who engaged in illicit adult behavior (such as smoking and drinking) at these activities were banned one by one; thus, those who remained were marked as not engaging in adult behavior, and the school's endorsement of their behavior labelled them as "goody-goodies."

While Burnouts were becoming disaffected from school activities, Jocks were coming into their own. As junior high progressed, the Jocks acquired a new range of roles in the school, which changed their residual status to a more positive one. Whereas as seventh graders the cohort were mere consumers of school activities, when they reached ninth grade the opportunities for active production of these activities increased. Not only were they more apt to play starring roles on athletic and cheerleading teams, but they could also work on such things as yearbook. The opportunity to control certain aspects of the environment, therefore, gave rise to a distinction between producers and consumers. Participation in production, however, was contingent on endorsement by school staff, and such endorsement was forthcoming only to those

who stood in good stead with adults. Ultimately, those Jocks involved in production of school activities acquired special status with school staff

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and began to enjoy heightened visibility and autonomy in the school. At this point, the Jocks' image as "goody-goodies" and "teacher's pets" was transformed into a more cooperative, equal relation with staff.

Whereas Jocks and Burnouts had both been in a subordinate relation to staff, differentiated by docility and rebelliousness, respectively, now the Jocks entered a coordinate relation with staff by virtue of shared interests. The increasingly disciplinary nature of Burnouts' relations with staff kept them subordinate, and the new relation of the Jocks with staff gave them an appearance of ascendancy over their Burnout peers. At this point, the possibility of school-endorsed power relations among peers added a new dimension to the opposition between the Jocks and the Burnouts. At the same time, the Burnouts' monopoly on adult behavior weakened as Jocks began to date also, to hang out in heterosexual "crowds," and to enjoy the new exclusive adult prerogative of autonomy within the school. Passage through junior high, with its increasing managerial possibilities for Jocks and the associated exclusion of Burnouts, introduced new and varied material for the opposition between the categories and heightened the need within each category to differentiate itself from the other. As the more clearly class issues of management and subordination entered the category definitions, the initial issue of rebelliousness became symbolic of a more threatening opposition.

Polarization

The development of Jock and Burnout ideology organized the expansion of social networks and united these networks into categories. Behavior originally associated with individual groups became associated with categories, and many aspects of behavior acquired global symbolic status. Category symbols served both to unite disparate groups and networks under the aegis of a category and to promote the differentiation of the two categories. A range of overt behavior was incorporated into a tightly interwoven system of symbolic oppositions that included clothing and other kinds of adornment, demeanor, language, territory, and substance use. As the categories became increasingly distinct on all levels, category affiliation began to dictate individual behavior in all areas of life.

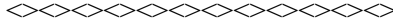
Cigarette smoking at school, the initial issue in the development of the Jock-Burnout split, acquired symbolic status as groups of smokers evolved into a social category. Smoking took on a more general symbolic value, identifying the individual not only as daring and grown-up, but as a member of a social category that was more generally daring, grownup, and opposed to school norms. Smoking became public group behav-

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ior, and other kinds of symbolic behavior were adopted to correspond to the emerging global Burnout image.

I suppose, like the Burnouts are the people, like they would start, you know, smoking in the johns in Rover, you know, stuff like that. And, you know, like I thought, why can't they wait until they get home if they want to do that, you know, because they're just going to get in trouble here. And people did that, and they started wearing like the, you know, the, the T-shirts that say, you know, "smoke dope," and "Black Sabbath," you know, stuff like that, and um, you know, they would stay, like

wearing the same thing day after day. People, you know, thought that was pretty cool, you know, and not washing their hair.



SO HOW DID PEOPLE GET LABELLED AS BURNOUTS?

Um, they smoked. They wore Levi big bells. The Jocks used to say this in ninth grade, that all the girls that were Burnouts had long hair, scaggly, you know, which none of us really were, you know, and they just—we didn't carry books. We didn't carry big bags, you know, just stuff like that. We didn't get along with the teachers.

SO IT WAS BASICALLY SORT OF—

Just the way you carried yourself in school, pretty much. How much you got into it.

In this fashion, the two categories drew apart in mutual opposition as experience in junior high fleshed out their differences, and as differences in personal behavior gave way to power differences within the school. As the Jocks' position in the school undermined the Burnouts' prestige, hostility between the two categories became more broad-based and bitter. In addition, the coalescence of Burnout groups into interlocking networks, increasingly defined by an overarching category identity, lent them a new visibility and vulnerability at the hands of the school. The distinctive Burnout clothing and hair styles made them easy to identify, and as the category developed, guilt by association became an increasing danger. Burnouts began to feel that the school stereotyped and discriminated against them.

IS IT HARD NOT TO BE LABELLED?

Um, back at Rover it was. I mean, no matter what. If you, I mean if you hung around a Burnout crowd, you were considered a Burnout. Even if you didn't, you know. If you hung around a Jock

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crowd and you got high and stuff, you were considered a Jock. It's just the way the teachers are, I guess.

THE TEACHERS?

Mm hm. OK, see I hung around the Burnout crowd, but, well, back then, I guess I was, but, but I didn't smoke cigarettes, and you know how everybody used to go in the john and smoke cigarettes, you know, in between classes and that. Well, I had this one teacher, Mr. Gray, and no matter what you said he would not believe you, you know. And I'd walk in class and after being around a bunch of girls smoking, you, you smell like smoke, you know. I walk in and he'd go, "Next time, um don't smoke before my class," or something like that. And I said, "I don't smoke," and he said, "Oh, don't lie to me. I know what you do." He goes, "Do you think I'm stupid or something?" and I go, "Well, you can believe what you want, but I don't smoke, you know." And he goes, "Oh, yes, you do. If you hang around with such and such then you do."

One girl was convinced that she was excluded from a team because of her category affiliation.

I tried out for [the team]. I didn't make it. I made it right down to the last line, but . . . but see, back then you were considered a Burnout, and you didn't make it because of that. . . . The Jocks made it even if they weren't good. Teachers even admit it over there. . . . Mr. Jackson . . . we talked and everything, and he was like, like he would watch the practices and that, and he goes, "Yeah," he goes, "Judy, I think you were one of the better ones." He goes, "I think you should have made it," he goes, "but just because you're labelled a Burnout you didn't make it." And I go, "Right." He's one of the honest teachers, you know. He just tells it like it is. And I go, "Well, you know. Gotta live with it, I guess." And the team sucked all year anyways. So it didn't matter.

According to the reports of virtually all those I spoke with, the salience of social categories peaked during eighth and ninth grades. At that time, students felt the greatest pressure to affiliate and to conform with one or the other category, and at that time hostility between the categories was at its height. This development is no doubt related to statistics showing that the onset of smoking, a key Burnout symbol, peaks in the eighth and ninth grades (Johnston, Bachman, and O'Mal-

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ley, 1982). Category affiliation, therefore, came to constrain individual choice in areas with lasting consequences:

But like we got along with everybody and we partied every day and that was the cool thing. And, uh, we'd smoke in school and that was cool. We used to get E's in classes, that was cool.

The rigidity of social categories also seems to have stemmed from a still immature ability to deal with the need for identity. In junior high, social identity was narrowly defined by affiliation with one of the two categories, and the unaffiliated were assigned no status in the oppositional system.

I was never a Jock and I was never a Burnout. I hung around with most, you know, or like there was the Jocks and the Burnouts who'd sit and give each other dirty looks in the halls, you know. For no reason, you know. And I just thought that was dumb as could be, you know. So I associated with everybody. So that kind of left me right in between everybody else, you know. And so I kind of felt, you know, I was kind of—little bit—I mostly hung around with, I guess you could say the Jocks, because most of my buddies were in that group, you know, or classified there. And uh, but I had some friends that like hung around with the Burnouts too, you know. And kind of left me right in between, you know . . . and so that kind of made me feel like a slight outcast, you know. Somebody left in between the realms, you know.

A girl who eventually came to regard herself as a Burnout gives this account.

That's, that's where all the Jock–Burn, or the Jock–Jelly thing started, because I didn't hear anything about it in elementary school. But once I hit Rover, you know, that's all you heard was, "She's a Jock," "She's a Jell," you know. And that's all it was. You were either one. You weren't an In-between, which I was.

The Passage to High School

The cohort's developing ability to categorize and abstract no doubt plays a role in the elevation of previously unstructured personal differ-

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ences to more abstract social organizing principles in junior high, but the still-immature resources lent a special rigidity to these abstractions. Adherence to a rigid category system is a useful strategy for dealing with large numbers and a large variety of individuals, as the cohort makes the enormous leaps in size from elementary to junior high, and from junior high to high school. Indeed, the social category system serves an important purpose in the transition from junior high to high school, in organizing the population's mutual conceptions. The extreme overt differences between the categories provide a way of predicting the behavior of others, and the sense of affiliation with a category that has its equivalent in the high school decreases some of the anxiety about entering high school. In fact, the categories facilitate the merger of junior highs in tenth grade.

Like the types of groups that [are] at Belten, you find at Finley. They come together, and usually those types find each other. And then, that's where you get your groups, your cliques, your networks, your gangs, or whatever, you know, things like that . . . it's like, they just come together, they fit in, like, just a puzzle, you know? The pieces fit in, because you find who's like you and things like that.

This process of merger is also facilitated at the entrance into high school by the specialized mobility and information provided by the Jock and Burnout networks. A certain amount of high school networking begins before tenth grade. While Burnouts are still in junior high, they learn about their counterparts in other schools through their older peers who have moved into the high school, and Jocks get to know those from other junior highs through participation in school-run summer activity camps.

The summer before I started school here, between ninth and tenth grade, I met pretty much my friends that I hang around with now.

REALLY. HOW DID YOU MEET THEM?

Basketball clinic. They were there, and I was there. And, I remember the last day of the clinic, we sat in the weight room talking for about some two-and-a-half hours just about different people from our school, different people from their school, and just, you know, talking about things we like to do and stuff, and we became really close. . . . I only saw them like once or twice after that, but once

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the year started, we really were close, and we had things in common.

The power of the category system may be a result not only of the increased size of the cohort, but of the early adolescent's cognitive limitations in functioning in a large group. The strict interpretation of categories, and rigid assignment of individuals to categories, could be said to reflect the kind of black-and-white, right-and-wrong view of the world characteristic of earlier stages of cognitive development. Adelson's (1971) characterization of the early adolescent's view of human motivation corresponds quite closely to what appears to have been the junior high school view of social categories.

The youngster enters adolescence with a remarkably thin repertoire of motivational and psychological categories available to him. He is like a naive behaviorist; he does not look beneath action to its internal springs. There is little sense of inner complication. Men act as they do because they are what they are. A man acts selfishly because he is selfish; the crime is committed because the man is a criminal. The vocabulary of motives is both impoverished and redundant. Character—character seen simply—*is* destiny. (p. 1018)

With maturity, however, the adolescent learns to examine the motivations behind actions and thus to be more relativistic. Furthermore, the older adolescent is less willing to be led by categories set out by others. Adelson (1971) found that older adolescents were less willing than early adolescents to accept either/or alternatives in questions about politics.

He breaks set—that is, he challenges the assumptions, tacit and otherwise, contained in the inquiry. Should the government do A or do B, we ask. Now he may say "neither," and suggest amendment, or compromise, or some entirely new solution which bypasses or transcends the terms of the question. (p. 1021)

This willingness to "break set" is reflected in the evolution of adolescent social categories as the cohort moves through high school. As their perceptions of social identity develop, adolescents struggle increasingly with the rigid definitions imposed by the categories, and the later evolution of the adolescent social system reflects a changing orientation to social categories. Entrance into, and progress through, high school brings a gradual decrease in the discreteness of the two categories, in individual affiliation, and in simple relations between category opposition and the world. As the cohort advances to high school, the bounda-

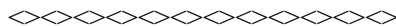
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ries between the categories soften, and it becomes more respectable to be an In-between. High school students recall the category system of junior high as particularly rigid, and many of them feel that the ability to make judgments independent of category affiliation is a sign of maturity.

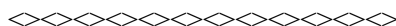
Back in Finley, there were the Jocks and then the Burnouts. No In-between, even though we were in-between you weren't classified as In-between.

WHAT WERE YOU CLASSIFIED AS?

Jock. It was just, if you were a Burnout, you're a Burnout; if you weren't, you were a Jock. So I always thought that that's how Belten was, and that I wouldn't be going out in the courtyard. That's not how it is at all.



I think like, in the junior high schools, um, you're not as apt to, like, fall in or out of another group. It's really an oddity if people do that, you know? But here it's, um, a little more accepted, like, you're, you seem to be more of a person here, not just like a, you know, a piece of paper someone shuffles away somewhere. You know, you seem to, it's a little more understandable that you, you want to change.



Throughout junior high, there was a big difference between Jock and Jell. Then all of a sudden you hit, like high school, and Jells like kind of, back off, you know, and Jocks, you know, Jocks and Jells are mostly, you know, they're friends, you know, you talk to them, you know, and you don't have no grudge, you know, against you know, the Jells. . . . It's like now, once you're into high school, you know, they're all, you know, you're like friends with them all. You know, you leave them alone, and they leave you alone, you know. It's not, no more like the Jellies are hassling the the Jocks, and when you walk by, you know, they don't say, "Oh, you Jock." They just don't say nothing.

Many juniors, and particularly seniors, in high school pride themselves on their ability to transcend the category system and to perceive people as "individuals," as opposed to junior high, when they saw everything "in black and white." They claim impatience with the many people whom they consider to be still bound by these categories.

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It's easy to do, yeah, it's easier, it's an easier way to deal with people. Because you don't have to think about them that much. You don't have to think about, well, "I wonder why they're doing that?" you know, it's just, so, "Oh, they're pigeonholed," you know, everybody's nice and compact.

The softening of category boundaries is also due to changes in accepted behavior as the cohort matures. Jocks and Burnouts split in junior high over issues such as smoking and staying out at night: issues of "good" and "bad," "right" and "wrong." Burnouts are seen as trying to grow up too fast. Over the years, as the rest of the cohort catches up with the Burnouts in their claims on adult prerogatives, the apparent differences between Jocks and Burnouts begin to disappear.

Seems like the crowds diminish, I think, a little coming into high school. They still exist, you know, but, uh, some of the Jocks are more into drugs than some of the Jellies. Now that's very true, you know.

But the categories remain long after plenty of Jocks are smoking pot and plenty of Burnouts have given it up. However more sophisticated the population becomes about categories, they remain tied into them. What probably changes more is their way of talking and thinking about categories than their reliance on them in making individual decisions about their own behavior and judgments about others. A wide range of differences remain between Jocks and Burnouts throughout high school, in spite of the many apparent contradictions that indicate strain in the system. And the definitions of the categories retain an important hold on the way that members of the adolescent community view themselves, each other, and the world. Of course, the relative violence of the process of affiliation in junior high school creates divisions that are difficult to overcome and sets up social networks at the point of merger of several elementary schools that make further change of category problematic. By the time the cohort is into high school, the two categories have become separated not only by behavioral differences and hostility, but by sheer isolation.

The ability to see social reality in all its complexity appears to diminish as the cohort becomes larger. The intensity of the alienation between Jocks and Burnouts varies considerably from school to school, and within one school from era to era: Some schools are the scene of violence between the categories; in others, Jocks and Burnouts enjoy a certain amount of mutual respect. School size seems to be an important

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factor—one principal reported to me that he could observe the opposition between Jocks and Burnouts decreasing as the enrollments in his school declined. Barker and Gump's (1964) report clearly shows that a large proportion of students are excluded from activities in large schools. This would naturally foster alienation from the school, bringing greater separation between students participating and students not participating in the school. Barker and Gump point out that in a smaller school, the greater demand for people to fill roles, and the consequently small number of people without community functions, leads to greater sensitivity to, and closer evaluation of, differences between people. In the larger school, "the person is in the position of a figure against an undifferentiated background, where small differences are clearly seen. Individual differences become important, and the innumerable ways of sorting and classifying people become prominent" (p. 26).

The extent of categorization may also be related to the range of socioeconomic difference among the student body within the school. In one rural community that has recently become an affluent suburb of Detroit the schools have a considerable poor population along with a large body of children of professionals. The difference between these two groups is so great that they know virtually nothing about each other. Both these factors—social estrangement and population size—contribute to the general tendency to stereotype, to respond to the other group on the basis of externals, and in short, to categorize rather than to know personally. In the small school, where most individuals have personal experience of each other, they are less apt to react to each other on the basis of stereotypes, and thus less apt to feel the need to rely on categories either to define themselves or to predict the behavior of others. By the same token, each school staff member, knowing a greater proportion of the student body, is less apt to respond to individuals in this way.

But even in the most personalized schools, differences arise among the student body in their relation to the school, which will be reinforced by the school's mission. The Jock and Burnout categories are no doubt inevitable in our society, where the school dominates so many aspects of the lives of adolescents. The intensity of differentiation between Jocks and Burnouts stems not simply from their differences, nor simply from the fact that the Jocks are favored over the Burnouts in school. The importance of the Jocks' enhanced position in the school is intensified by the fact that the school is hegemonic in American society: So many of the opportunities that the community offers adolescents are funnelled through the school, and failure to conform to school expectations in one realm tends to put the individual in disfavor in other realms. The mechanisms and effects of the hegemony of the high school in adoles-

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cent life, which will be discussed at length in the following chapters, represent an important problem in our society, particularly as schools become larger and fewer people are reaping fewer advantages from them.

The persistence of categories through high school is not simply a result of lingering habit or convenience; rather, the social categories "Jocks" and "Burnouts" represent divisions that go far deeper in the community. The following chapters will explore two interacting factors that are responsible for the persistence of social categories right through to graduation day. The first of these is that adolescent social category is the adolescent interpretation of, and to a great extent determined by, parents' socioeconomic class. The second is that the school that houses the

adolescent community institutionalizes and thus encourages these categories in its formal and informal political structure.