

The hidden life of girls: Games of stance, status, and exclusion.
Marjorie Harness Goodwin (2006)

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Reviewed by Jennifer F. Reynolds

In *The Hidden Life of Girls*, Marjorie Harness Goodwin provides keen insight into preadolescent girls' lives outside the purview of adult surveillance at school. Specifically, she examines the quotidian forms of peer socialization through which girls enacted constrained and enabled agency in the social organization of their peer groups. The introduction opens with transcript excerpts representing a cross-gender dispute that erupted on the playground at one of the field sites, 'Hanley School', a progressive mixed-ethnic, mixed-income elementary school in Los Angeles. On this particular day, a clique of popular girls challenged the boys' exclusive right to occupy the soccer field during recess. A male aide attempted to intervene on behalf of the boys claiming historical precedent, but the girls countered citing abstract principles of fairness to demand equitable access to this playground space. The result of this conflict was a change in school policy that guaranteed gender parity; a rotating schedule to use the soccer field was implemented. Goodwin employs this vivid example to foreshadow the interdisciplinary contributions that her work makes to childhood research on gender, moral development, and peer socialization. It also sets the stage for a critique of essentialist social scientific construals of boys' and girls' experiences and behaviors that dualistically render girls prosocial, but lacking 'legal sense' and boys assertive individualists, oriented to abstract rules and principles.

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Goodwin, a linguistic anthropologist, is a firm proponent of combining conversation analysis with ethnography to reveal how girls are active participants in the embodied and discursive construction of their own identities and forms of social organization. Unlike other childhood scholars who privilege the individual child or decontextualized propositional statements as primary units of analysis, Goodwin's is the *situated activity system* (Goffman 1961:96). A situated activity system entails 'the performance of a single joint activity, a somewhat closed, self-compensating, self-terminating circuit of interdependent actions' (cited in Goodwin 2007:7). While Goodwin's approach has much in common with other feminist sociocultural linguists who have made major theoretical contributions to the study of gender as performance and performativity, in this work Goodwin does not explicitly articulate how her ethnomethodological approach complements and complicates the community of practice framework. Instead, she examines a broader critique launched by cultural anthropologist, Sherry Ortner (2006), which charges that practice theorists need to better articulate scalar interconnections between social actors' practices and the encompassing social fields that constrain and enable them. As Goodwin is concerned with the social organization of local peer culture, she finds the work of other feminist conversation analysts a productive point of departure in considering 'what counts as power during moment-to-moment negotiations' (pg. 9) within and across patterned assemblages of situated activities.

The book is clearly written and well organized. This was no easy feat given that Goodwin marshaled evidence from 35 years of experience working across different communities. The introductory chapter lays out the framework, methodology, and significance of research. In it she names the following focal situated activities: hopscotch, jump rope, playing house, storytelling, gossiping, bragging and assessments of other people's behavior. All transpired in playground-like areas where fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade children played together. A majority of chapters (three-seven) is concerned with examining the embodied peer practices of the 'Hanley School' clique of popular girls. Goodwin observed and recorded this fairly stable network over a period of three years during lunchtime and recess. The second chapter is quite different; it adopts a multi-sited, comparative analytic frame of a single situated activity system, hopscotch. Data for this chapter were drawn from a mixed-ethnic second generation immigrant peer group in a working class area school of Los Angeles (years spanning 1993 and 1997-98), two different ESL classes in Columbia, South Carolina (1996), a rural African American migrant farming community in Ridge Spring (1995), South Carolina, an urban African American working class neighborhood in Philadelphia (1970-71), and finally 'Hanley School' in Los Angeles (late 1990s).

The multi-sited comparative data enable a powerful critique of deficit perspectives perpetuated in social scientific portrayals of girls' games. Goodwin notes how hopscotch and jump rope have been misrepresented as exemplars of an 'eventless turn-taking game' which lack 'intellectual complexity' and an 'intricate division of labor'. The data she presents reveal these claims to be baseless. Across all aforementioned field sites Goodwin finds conflict to be rampant. In fact girls seek it out as they play with the rules and derive pleasure flouting and enforcing them as they adopt multimodal moves that reveal patterned variation. The diversity of regions (Northern, Southern, Western), locales (urban and rural), and subjects (native born and immigrant, a range of social classes and ethnicities, and in a few cases, children of both gender) all provide the reader a sense that the results of this research, though not the product of quantitative random sampling procedures, could be generalizable. Given that Goodwin is examining social processes, the different case studies provided are more than adequate. Still, it would have been instructive to unpack the qualitative sampling procedures employed, especially given her stance as advocate for this process-oriented methodology. Was the sample saturated and were any negative cases sought out to challenge the in-progress theory building? For example, were there ever any cases of conflict free interactions? And if so, were these exceptions to the rule or did they reveal something different about other forms of peer socialization in playground spaces? Regardless of whether or not there were examples of negative cases, Goodwin presents striking evidence that destabilizes dominant social scientific representations of so-called 'simple' turn-taking games.

The remainder of the book, as mentioned before, is devoted to the clique of popular girls. Chapter three is heavily ethnographic; it draws upon informal interview data elicited during video-recording sessions of peer talk. Though Goodwin prefers working with the video-recorded talk-in-interaction data, the insights she draws from observations and conversations is vital. School ethnographers in particular will appreciate how she situates 'Hanley' within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, the various peer groups that also shared the playground space, and the fluid situational and longitudinal shifts in peer group participation. This chapter also reveals the imprint that institutional age-grading makes on peer group dynamics as conflict erupts between grades; a sixth grade girl raided the lunch of a fourth grader and same-aged peers came to her defense artfully deploying aggravated assessments.

Chapters four, five, and six portray all the ways the popular girls tacitly and explicitly engaged in situated activities of inclusion and exclusion. In some interactions, girls touted democratic values of fairness and equality [i.e. the soccer field dispute]; in others they undermined those same values to situationally define the outer-limits of group membership. Some of these interactions devolved into aggressive rituals of degradation. A marginal member of the

group, Angela, was derisively dubbed by word and by deed a 'tag along', a 'weirdo', someone who has no friends, who 'eats garbage outa the trash can', a 'chimney woman' who will be rejected 'everywhere'. All were powerful means to ensure that Angela was rendered a 'nobody', who could not be mistaken as a member of their group, a somebody. Goodwin's attention to co-constructed turns-at-talk reveals the myriad ways through which the girls indexed forms of social class distinction. She thus provides a critical lens into how these informal peer networks were an emergent product of contradictory late capitalist social relations *as well as* an agentive collectivity that derived and inflicted both pain and pleasure as they reproduced their 'high capital' (Ortner 2005) positioning as elite, near peers within the hierarchical structure of school. In this way Goodwin's analysis of how *social class stigma* is infused throughout the daily rhythms of middle class girls' quotidian peer forms of socialization achieves a social critique that her mentor, Erving Goffman, was loathe to realize in his own critical work on total institutions, social stigma, and the presentation of self in everyday life.

Those already familiar with versions of chapters published as journal articles will still find the book a fresh read. Goodwin's longitudinal, ethnographic perspective brings the different analyses together in a powerful way that no article on its own ever achieved. The theoretical critique she makes is contingent upon her acknowledged use of a methodological toolkit very different from the one typically found in developmental psychology and mainstream sociology. Her plea to scholars to adopt ethnographically informed conversation analytic procedures for interrogating sequenced turns-at-talk reinforces a critique made by child-centered discourse analysts who noted that an over-reliance on self-report data in interviews, questionnaires, and controlled experiments experimental produces biased results. Goodwin's perspective departs from child-centered discourse analysts, however, in that her attention privileges sequential analysis, namely, how pair-part structures operate as patterned instances of sign-interpretant semiosis that have both local and translocal effects in the organization of peer group culture. Goodwin's multi-dimensional analysis of girls' peer group lives once again reveal her to be a leading scholar in an expanding field of constructivist approaches in the study of peer culture.

References

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