

The Hidden Lives of Girls: Games of Stance, Status, and Exclusion

Marjorie Harness Goodwin (Anthropology, UCLA)

Central to girls' activity is their constant involvement in the task of monitoring or policing what is going on in their social environment. In this paper I examine how talk-in-interaction is articulated by girls (ages 10-12) across an array of face-to-face encounters to focus on three primary concerns: (1) how stances with respect to appropriate behavior are produced in the midst of particular activities (such as games, assessments, and stories), (2) how claims to social positions are negotiated, and (3) how behavior of those who are felt to violate local norms of the group is sanctioned – all as ongoing accomplishments in the pursuit of practical activities. I look at how girls dispute actions in the midst of games of hop scotch and jump rope, how they position themselves with respect to other girls during storytelling or descriptions they are elaborating, and how they critique girls who attempt to place themselves above others or fail to demonstrate knowledge of or access to symbols of middle class identity. In the midst of going about their work of creating social organization, while playing games, gossiping, storytelling, and assessing one another's behavior, girls make explicit the criteria in terms of which they evaluate one another, elaborating for themselves as well as analysts the tacit norms that underlie their social order. Data analyzing displays of stance consist of videotaped interactions of girls playing games on the playground across an array of different groups, while my analysis of games of status and exclusion is informed by videotaped interaction in a three-year ethnographic study of a particular clique of girls in a progressive school that included children of various social class and ethnic backgrounds.