

Story by Mike Latona

Illustration by Linda Jeanne Rivers

It's a natural instinct



"If you don't wear name-brand clothes, you're nothing," she said.

Pamela added that she has friends who belong to various cliques, but if those people begin picking on individuals who are not in their cliques, she always sticks up for the victims. She said she chooses friends not by their standing in cliques, but, rather, because they're "the people who are nice to me."

Liz, also, said that compassion is important regardless of social status. "I try not to put people down if they're not in my own clique," Liz said.

Liz admitted that she has wished from time to time that she belonged to the "popular" cliques, but has come to realize that it shouldn't be her top priority.

"Just because they have a certain social standing doesn't mean they're better," Liz said.

Cliques are here to stay, according to Gerald Pashby.

"It's a phenomenon that exists; always has. It's a natural instinct to be attracted to people who have similarities," said Pashby, who serves as psychiatric social worker at three Catholic high schools in the Rochester area: Aquinas Institute, Bishop Kearney and McQuaid Jesuit.

This attraction to a group, Pashby said, is extremely common among teens in their freshman year — the newcomers to high-school life who are anxious to fit in somewhere.

"Some kids will come in (to me) very discouraged because they can't make friends. I've run across kids who are ready to call it quits after a week," Pashby said.

A clique's biggest attraction, he said, is the sense of identity and belonging it provides for teens. "It's a mutual kind of thing. It's something they can all rally around," he said.

Pashby observed that cliques tend to become less important for teens as they grow older and acquire more self-confidence.

"I think it's part of the maturity," he said.

On the other hand, he observed, some people never outgrow the need for affirmation through cliques.

"It's not uncommon to want to be seen and heard with the 'right' people. There are adults, also, who do it; they want to be seen and heard at the country club," Pashby remarked.

Pashby said that many teens aspire to be in the most popular crowd, which is often the athletes or "jocks." Unfortunately, he said, people who are considered "brains" usually don't enjoy the same social status.

"You get kids who are very bright, quite intelligent. And they're almost ashamed that they have all these smarts," Pashby commented.

Other teens, he said, have complained to him that no clique will accept them. He often advises them to examine their own social skills and attitudes, rather than blame the cliques.

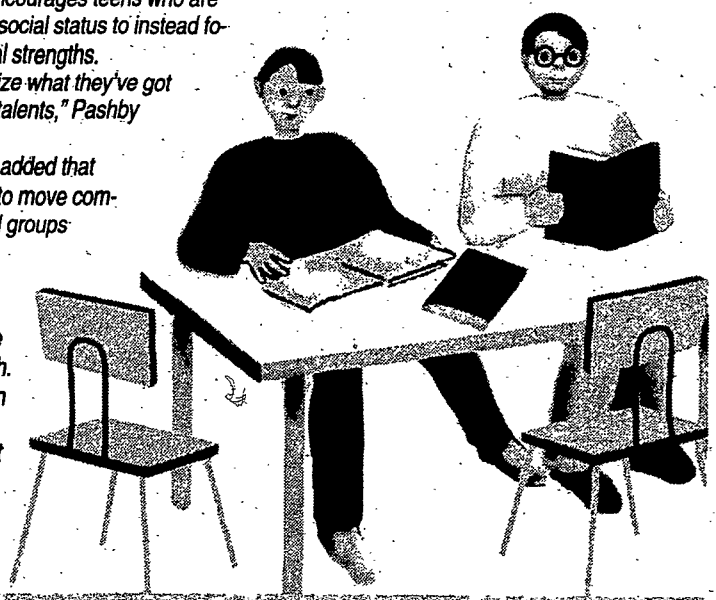
"There's more to it than that. Boys or girls who aren't successful in cliques often have to take a look at themselves," he said.

Pashby said he encourages teens who are sensitive about their social status to instead focus on their individual strengths.

"I tend to emphasize what they've got going for them, their talents," Pashby said.

However, Pashby added that teens will only begin to move comfortably among social groups when they decide they're ready to.

"You can't legislate who kids are going to hang out with. You can't sell them on the idea that you can make a lot of different friends," Pashby said.



The need to belong

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