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The Popularity Project

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Carlyle High School

Grade: 11-12

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Honorable Mention

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On the first day of my freshman year, I had a startling realization. When I was in grade school everyone socialized with everyone, but now things were different. There were separated groups, cliques if you will. People no longer invited their whole class to their birthday parties, and that is to be expected. People are different and have different views of the world. However, I quickly realized that it was more than the lack of communication between my peers. There was a feeling of hostility between the different cliques, and I wanted to know why. I wanted to find out what made one group of people so hostile towards others in my high school. I then had the brilliant idea to stage an experiment. I interviewed many of my classmates from different groups and changed their names. The people I interviewed are stated here: Lucy (cheerleader), Kate (homosexual), Tiffany (musician), and Hank (nerd).

Q: How accepted do you feel at our school?

Lucy: Not really accepted, but do people feel accepted anywhere?

Kate: Being a lesbian, some people would think that I would get looked down upon, but people have been really accepting of it.

Tiffany: I do not feel accepted because people are always so judgmental in high school. It happens that some of our peers like to criticize our interests, but if we want to succeed, we have to put that negativity behind us.

Hank: Being the new kid, and kind of a nerd, it's very difficult to feel accepted.

Q: Do you feel like you are stereotyped?

L: Yeah, people think we are preppy and stupid.

K: Definitely. 'Oh, you're a lesbian? Are you going to cut your hair? Have you ever dated guys?' I've heard it all.

T: Of course. When people hear I'm interested in music, they automatically think I'm dumb and only good for pushing out a few notes. It's condemning, and I feel like I'm confined in a box that I can't escape from.

H: Absolutely. I get jokes all the time about never getting a girlfriend.

Q: What separates you from other cliques?

L: Drama. When people who aren't the same get together, there is drama.

K: I'm not a good athlete or good at one specific thing, so I just found people with the same sense of humor as me.

T: I am not only good at one thing. I'm a much more diverse person than that. I am not restricted to one group of people. I like to branch out and try to be as complex of a person as I can be.

H: My unwillingness to participate in teenage drama.

Q: Do you think cliques are a good or bad thing?

L: They are bad because they confine you and you can't learn new things.

K: They're bad in the sense that people won't learn from different types of people. Only one sort of person is all they'll ever know.

T: They can be good in helping you identify your interests, but as far as using your social circles to persecute other circles, it is incredibly horrid.

H: I think they are awful. We confine ourselves to a limited amount of experiences this way.

Q: If you were told someone in a different clique shared many interests with you, would you become friends?

L: Well, duh. I would become friends with a hobo if we had a lot in common.

K: Of course. I would talk for years about some of my interests.

T: I love making different friends. It helps me feel like I know my community better, as well as always having someone to talk to.

H: If our interests are truly aligned, I would for sure.

During the experiment, I had a great time talking to my different peers. They each taught me something, and we even laughed and chatted preceding the interviews. I analyzed my results for a while and came to a remarkable conclusion. If you read closely, you will realize that all of these students stated that they did not feel accepted by their peers. They all also agreed that they would be friends with someone, regardless of clique, if they had similar interests and qualities. Every one of my subjects also admitted to believing that grouping and cliques were a terrible concept, but for some unknown reason, they all partook in these to an extent. With all this information, I have come to a conclusion. Everyone wants to be accepted and make friends who will teach them, support them, and help them grow as a student and a human being, but the fear of rejection is almost strong enough to tank these desires. If I had one lesson to be taught from my experiment, it would be to never be afraid to try what scares you most because it may be the start of something great.