

**Inclusion and Exclusion in Early Adolescence:  
The Ostracism Case Study**

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**and**

**Facing History and Ourselves**

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## **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Description of the incident
3. Five girls' voices on the ostracism
4. Their teacher's perspective
5. The background: Research on inclusion and exclusion in early adolescence

## Introduction

In this workshop you will have the opportunity to read and respond to the voices of eighth grade students and one of their teachers talking about a social conflict among a group of friends that escalated into the ostracism of one of them. Their voices bring us inside their world and provoke questions about issues of inclusion and exclusion in adolescence and beyond. What is the role of young people and adults in preventing and responding to these kinds of incidents? What are the connections between these kinds of social issues facing students and the choices that teachers make in their classrooms and schools?

This workshop grew out of the Harvard-Facing History and Ourselves research on improving inter-group relations among youth funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It reflects Facing History's ongoing interest in forging meaningful connections between current, theory-driven research and the practice of promoting teacher professional development. The workshop is as an educational tool rather than a report on the research itself. It has been used in this kind of face-to-face workshop, as well as an online workshop. More information on the research background of the workshop can be found at the end of these materials and on the FHAO web-site at [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org).

## Inclusion and Exclusion: A Case Study of Ostracism

*The description of the events below is based on interviews with the students and teachers involved.*

In December of seventh grade in a public school, Sue and Rhonda considered each other best friends. They belonged to a popular group of girls, including Jill, Patty, Tina and others. All of these girls had known one another for most of elementary school, except for Tina, who had just moved to the school.

One day, Sue wrote a note to Rhonda saying that she thought their friend, Jill, was, "stupid to break up with her boyfriend." Also in the note, Sue asked Rhonda to keep the note private because she had not yet told Jill herself that she felt that way about her break-up. Nevertheless, Rhonda told Jill what Sue had written anyway. When Jill found out about Sue's note, she confronted Sue after school, and they argued in front of many peers. School staff heard the argument and broke it up.

Although the argument was brief, the fight snowballed resulting in many students joining together against Sue. Rhonda and Tina sided with Jill, and they influenced other girls to do the same.

For the rest of seventh grade and almost all of eighth grade, these girls excluded Sue from her former group of friends, teased and put her down, avoided and ignored her, spread rumors about her, wrote hurtful letters and made prank telephone calls to her home. Other students, including some boys who were not originally involved, joined in. Most students, if they did not participate directly, kept Sue at a distance and did not stand up for her. Lorna, a girl who had not been a member of this popular group when the ostracism began, was one of the few students who tried to help Sue feel welcome within her group of friends. Nevertheless, Sue went from being a very strong student to getting poor grades and not wanting to go to school.

When adults became aware of the situation, they tried to help. School administrators and a guidance counselor had many conversations with each of the girls and their parents. Some teachers addressed the ostracism directly or indirectly in their teaching. Peer mediators and their advisor from a local high school were invited to help the girls to resolve the situation. None of these strategies, however, significantly improved the situation, and some students felt the adults' involvement made things worse.

The ostracism continued when the students returned to school in the fall of eighth grade. Ms. Smith, their eighth grade Language Arts teacher, was well aware of what had been happening among the students. She gave much thought to the issues raised by Sue's exclusion and how she could touch on the idea of friendship, peer groups, power and responsibility through what she taught.

Sue and Rhonda both told us that their relationship had improved by the end of eighth grade, although neither of them appeared to have much awareness about how things improved.

### **Is this familiar?**

## **Five Girls Voices On The Ostracism Incident**

The public school where this incident took place is located in a suburb bordering upon a major city. Families living in the neighborhood surrounding the school range from working class to affluent, and a small percentage of students are bused to the school from the city as part of a long-standing desegregation program. The following descriptions of the students in the case study are intended to provide a minimal amount of contextual information for engaging in the workshop. It is not our intention to reduce individuals to a set of externally-defined categories such as race, class, and social status.

### **The Students**

(their names have been changed to protect their privacy).

**Patty**, a white girl from a middle class family, did not see herself as a leader among her friends.

**Rhonda**, an African American girl from an urban, working class family, saw herself as a leader among her friends.

**Jill**, a white girl from an upper-middle class family, did not see herself as having much influence on others.

**Sue**, an Asian American girl from a working class family, was a leader among her friends until her argument with Jill.

**Lorna**, an African American student from an urban, working class family, was not close friends with the other girls described above.

## **Patty**

Patty, a white girl from a middle class family, did not see herself as a leader among her friends.

### **Fall of eighth grade**

It seemed like when one or two people decided they didn't like her, then everybody else was like, "OK, we don't like her either," regardless. And I think a lot of people didn't have reasons to dislike her. They just wanted to do it because their friends were doing it also

It's sort of weird, 'cause you'd never expect somebody who was as popular as she was to, like, be sort of like, shunned from the group by everyone else, but we sort of like we all just went against her.

She talked about people behind their back ... but I think other people did that, too. ...I really don't know ...why we were so willing to jump on her and attack her more than anyone else.

People were breaking the confidence. ...She had told them stuff in confidence, and people sort of forgot that was one of the reasons why they didn't like her. And they just sort of like started doing it to her.

It sort of seemed like it was a cool thing to do ... to be mean to her. And I guess it felt good to be able to get your anger out on a person regardless of whether or not they really deserved to be the person. ...It sort of seemed like sort of exciting, like it was something you could talk about.

I figured if I stuck by her, I would probably be her friend or be friends with all the other friends that I have, and I guess I sort of like chose them over her because, like, they were more important to me.

If I sort of like became her, like, good friend, like, started hanging out with her and doing stuff with her, I would definitely, sort of like, be not as close to the friends I have now. I don't know how far it would go, but it definitely would have an effect on it.

People still say, like, might say something, "Oh, look at what she's wearing today," or whatever, but, like, I mean, I know I don't say --. I try not to say mean stuff about her anymore, but it has sort of become a habit.

What they've done has left a permanent effect on Sue. She'll never get over it. Though people feel remorse, it's too late now.

### **Spring of eighth grade**

Once we had started, it was sort of like, you couldn't stop.... It builds and builds and builds until the point where you can't sort of turn back and say we're not going to do this to her anymore.

The Holocaust or whatever, I think it started out with little things like that. Like, it didn't all happen at once. And so, I mean, that's what I think about how it connects to me personally. 'Cause it's like, we allow people to be hurt for no reason. Or because if we're there every, like every day. And, that's on like a much, a much smaller scale, what happened in the Holocaust. And that's how I connect it myself, really.

I think probably because you feel, like, if they are picking on her, they are going to leave me alone.

Some people who make fun of other kids, I think that one of the reasons they do that is out of fear that if they don't, someone would make fun of them for how they are. ...I think the people who are actually the ones making fun are also afraid of what might happen if they don't make fun of people. Because then, other people would make fun of them.

KNOWING THE THINGS THAT YOU KNOW NOW, THAT YOU'VE LEARNED THIS YEAR, DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WOULD HAVE ACTED DIFFERENTLY NOW? THAT YOU WOULD ACT DIFFERENTLY IF THIS HAPPENED? I'm not sure it would have happened. I mean, I think that like, it makes you realize that these things happen every day and you just can't sort of like say, "Oh this isn't a big thing." ...I'm not sure it would have happened. Some people would have realized this isn't right, which I don't think we did at the time.

When you realize it could happen to her, you realize it could happen to you. I think that was one point in which I lost a lot of trust for my friends. 'Cause it was like, you say the wrong thing or you do the wrong thing and it could happen to you.

I started to be a lot more careful about like what I say, what I say and what I did. I guess everybody knows it's been like, a lot harder sort of to stand up and say what you believe or say what you want to say.

There's a lot of pressure to act a certain way. To be a certain way. And, since there's all that pressure, you're like afraid to say things, you know, you want to say. You, you don't know what necessarily it is that's going to happen to you once you say them.

***What stands out for you about Patty's perspective on the conflict and ostracism? If you were an adult in Patty's life (e.g. teacher, parent) what would you want her to consider that was not apparent in what you read here? What if you were a peer?***

## Rhonda

Rhonda, an African American girl from an urban, working class family, saw herself as a leader among her friends.

### **The fall of eight grade**

#### **Rhonda's perspective on the original incident**

Last year, it was a real big thing from like December to the end of the year, where this girl named Sue like she said some stuff to me about my, like, best friend, and, like, she [Sue] was my best friend at the time, but then she was good friends with the other people too, but she went behind... She [Sue] was talking about people behind their backs, 'cause you know, there's a boy named Tony, and Jill used to go out with Tony. And Sue and Jill were like really good friends. And Jill didn't like Tony and she wanted to break up with him. And Sue was, like, helping her break up with him. But then she wrote me a letter saying that Jill was ignorant to break up with Tony. And so, I showed Jill that and Jill got mad, and then Sue got mad at me because she said in the letter don't show this to anybody, but I showed it anyway, 'cause I felt obligated to show it to her because it wasn't, like, right for Sue to do something like that. Then we all got mad at each other.

#### **Rhonda's perspective on the aftermath of the original incident**

All these people started taking sides and, like, the teachers took Sue's side because they thought we was being, like, really mean to Sue when she really was...they wasn't, what they did was they, they always said "Sue what happened?" they never said "okay, Tina, Jill, and Rhonda what happened?"...The teachers never heard our, they heard her side, but they didn't, like, they felt sorry for Sue and so they made, and around, like, all that during that time period from December to June the teachers was mean to us and they didn't like listen to us, and they held grudges against us because what happened to, and the teachers, like, they held grudges against us because Sue told them or Sue was crying about this, Sue was doing that, never, they never said Sue did things to us and we did things back to Sue, but Sue never seemed to tell them what she did to us...To everybody who was part of our group, everybody who was on our side got degraded, everybody who was on Sue's side got, like, they was sympathizing for Sue, so they sympathized for them and was more lenient towards them.

The groups changed significantly. There was more people on our side than on Sue's side, but the teachers was on Sue's side, so then it seemed like teachers were, like, the teachers together would probably be more than as many kids as was on our side, so that the teachers had more, they have more power than us, so they can do whatever they want. Not whatever they want, but they would do a lot of things. But there were still people who, like, wasn't even in it that got into it anyway, and so, but it, it just, it, it was a real big problem last year and we had, like, mediation and all these other things.

What they was doing is putting parents into it and our parents had nothing to do with it and like I got in trouble because [the guidance counselor] called my father and told him that I was helping in part of this little grudge held against Sue or stuff like that and she never said anything about what Sue did, which really made me mad and I got in trouble

for that. And like I guess everybody else like got talked to by their parents about whatever, and nobody never, nobody never said anything about what Sue did, so that's how we figured everybody was on Sue's side, and people... I still don't talk to her now, 'cause I don't like to forgive and forget, I don't like to forgive something that wasn't resolved at all, so I ...

### **The spring of eighth grade**

#### ***Rhonda's point of view on the incident and its aftermath***

What we did was really, really wrong...I regret it now...because I think it was stupid...Well, I treated Sue really, really bad. And I don't think it's right now but I can't do anything to change that, but were friends now. So, it's kind of changed how it was. I didn't change it, really, but I kind of made it better...

And, cause we were good friends before, and so, we shouldn't have wasted a good friendship just because of that.... We're friends. I don't know, we just started talking... we just talked in the classes together... I don't know. I can't really explain it. It's just, we're friends now. DID YOU AND SUE EVER TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED? Yeah. It's funny now. We find it pretty funny. We laugh at it now but, it wasn't funny then."

#### ***Rhonda's perspective on the adult's role in relation to the incident***

There was not need have parents involved, so you might as well - that made me, at the time, made me more, like, I would say, it made me mad again, like over. Because, teachers got parents into it. And, parents had nothing to do with it. And at the time, it just made me go, like it just made me go and do stuff. Worse.

#### ***What stands out for you about Rhonda's perspective on the conflict and ostracism?***

***If you were an adult in Rhonda's life (teacher, administrator, parent) what would you want her to consider that was not apparent in what you read here?***

***What if you were a peer?***

## Jill

Jill, a white girl from an upper-middle class family, did not see herself as having much influence on others.

### **The fall of eighth grade**

#### **Jill's perspective on the precursor to the incident and the incident**

Sue and I were friends, and Rhonda and Tina were all friends with Sue, and then she started being really rude to me, and just like, I didn't like it anymore. Like, she would try and tell me what to do and everything, and when I wouldn't, she'd get mad. WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DID SHE TRY TO TELL YOU? Like, to go out with certain people, and, like, if I didn't, she'd be mad, and, like, she'd talk about me behind my back, and she'd try and make me, like do things for her or whatever. So, when I stopped, like, talking to her and stuff, Rhonda showed me letters that she'd written about me and stuff.

She was kind of controlling. Like, um, she would write letters to me, and if I didn't write back in time, she'd get upset, and it was, like, it was all focused on her, and it was, I just didn't like it, and she would, like talk about me behind my back and then say I was her best friend, and stuff like that....And she read my diary, and so I really didn't like her anymore.

#### **Jill's perception of her own role in relation to the incident and its aftermath**

It was kind of – I honestly did not plan for this to happen, but as soon as I got mad at her, everybody else did, too. And I don't think it was just – it wasn't because I was mad at her, but she kind of – after we got in a fight, her and Rhonda got in a fight, and then her and Tina got in a fight, and then the group that I hang out with, she started being cold to them, so they didn't like her anymore. And, so she had to make friends with the people who she – the other group, kind of, and so now she was mean to them, and they don't like her either. So, I don't know, that kind of divided the grade. Also boys and girls, so...it was really awful, because I didn't want it just to be everyone against her, but I guess everyone sort of realized that she was being really, like, stupid.

I know it had a lot to do with me, and there was a lot of teasing that went on that I was involved with, and I don't think that was right. She was put out, outcasted, and I don't think that was right at all. And I know I was teasing her to stay, to fit in, but I also did not feel comfortable saying, "Oh, I'm not going to tease her." But I guess I did just to kind of have the respect and I don't think that was right, but I guess I was really immature last year, and I don't think – she's not my friend, but I don't think that was right.

### **Spring of eighth grade**

Yeah, that was basically a gang-up against Sue and stuff like you know, but now, I mean she has different friends and we're not like enemies but we're not friends, we don't talk to each other. I mean like we say hi but. Um everyone, everybody got mad at her. She I mean, she had a couple friends that, but hardly anybody. But there was a good reason for it. When she was really rude to all of us, she treated me very badly so. So as a friend I stopped liking her. And it didn't have to do with anyone else not liking her. It was just that I didn't like her and then everyone else stopped liking her.

I think a lot of people stopped because no one else did, no one else liked her. DO YOU THINK YOU WERE THE FIRST TO STOP LIKING HER? Yeah. No, I really do, I think that like I remember the day that it started and I was the one that told her that I was mad at her (UH-HUH) and like then everybody else stopped liking her. AND DO YOU THINK THAT HAD TO DO WITH BECAUSE YOU WERE MAD AT HER? No I think, no I just think people started to realize how, how rude she was.

I think like I realize how mean we were to her but at the time I didn't think that it was that big of a deal because she was mean to me, she had been mean to me, she was getting what she deserved. But now it's just like I was childish.

WHAT HAPPENED OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR DO YOU THINK TO MAKE YOU CHANGE ABOUT WHAT YOU THOUGHT ABOUT THAT? Well she really felt, I didn't, I left her alone and I stop talking about her behind her back and just like let things cool off. It was like, it was like she wasn't there kind of, and so I stop being angry and everything just calmed down and then this year, um, I think we had to work together on a project in a group and I just like forgot it all. I just like talked to her, you know, we had to work together and I didn't feel like going through that.

WERE THERE ANY APOLOGIES MADE? No, No.  
AND NOW HOW WOULD YOU SUMMARIZE THE WAY YOU FEEL ABOUT HER?  
She's nice. I really don't want to be friends with her anymore. I think it would be too weird. And she's just not my type, I guess. She's just not anyone I want to hang around with.

***What stands out for you about Jill's perspective on the conflict and ostracism?  
If you were an adult in Jill's life (e.g. teacher, parent) what would you want her to consider that was not apparent in what you read here?  
What if you were a peer?***

## Sue

Sue, an Asian American girl from a working class family, was a leader among her friends until her argument with Jill.

### The summer after eighth grade

#### **Sue's perspective on what happened and why**

I used to be friends with a really cliquy crowd, a really, like, a really popular crowd too, but then like um, last year, around December we got into a fight and then like, I was like in a fight with like ten girls against me, and it was like really bad, and we had to go to mediation and I had to go to therapy and everything cuz, like, the fight got really bad. At one point it even got physical where like this girl came up to me and was like grabbing me and like threatened me, and stuff

It started because, like, Jill was going out with her boyfriend, and he liked her a lot, but like she didn't like him that much, she was afraid to get involved, like, into love or whatever, but like, um, I mean, this kid, his mother committed suicide and I felt really bad for him and I thought how it was so sweet how he like, liked someone after like, all that happened to him, that's like so hard, and I just thought, like, Jill should be much kinder. Like, she didn't like him, and I mean, but like, I like said something in a letter that, we used to pass notes all the time and I wrote something in a note like, about how it was like, wrong of Jill not to like Tony, or like ditch him like that kinda, 'cause like Tony liked her a lot and they were going out but she didn't want to do anything with him. And then, like, Rhonda told Jill or something and then like, they both got mad. Jill got mad at me and then Rhonda got involved and I don't know how Rhonda got involved, like, and I don't know how Tina got involved but they all got involved. Like the fight is so unclear how it started. I don't know how it turned into something that huge.

I know it's partly that the fight started as my fault and stuff but it shouldn't have gotten as bad as it did with like, ten girls against one.

Rhonda and Tina had all these girls to back them up. It was, like, caused out of fear, I mean the reason they have back up. Fear that like, since other kids were picking on me, they were afraid to get picked on so they backed them up and picked on me more.

It was like, so gradual. I had never thought it would go that far. One day they had found out I told [a teacher] or something, and they got really mad. From that point on they, like, hated me a lot because I had told. They just thought that telling, like snitching was like, the worst thing. So then from then on they it became, like, so bad. They would like, um, say stuff in class, like make comments or laugh at me if I made a comment in class or anything. From then on I just like lost any self-esteem I had or anything. I mean, bit by bit I lost it but, like, now I am regaining it.

I think it was because Tina came it made it all worse... Because the girls I had been friends with I had been friends with since fourth grade. That's a long time. And then after three years some girl comes with new views and everything, and a new attitude, and stuff, and they start looking up to her and she changes everything. And so, she was able to do that, which is, like, powerful, I think.

When you have the ability to pick on someone or like make fun of, like that's power and stuff. But like, it's not good power, it's like, the worst kind of power you could have. It's like Hitler's power. You know how Hitler was able to, like do everything, you know, like, make people do stuff, like, that's, like, bad power, and to kill that much people, that's like, powerful to be able to do that, but it's, like, bad. And Tina was, like, able to get everyone to gang up on me. But that's cause she caused fear, you know.

I think [the fact that I am Asian] has a lot, actually, to do with it. Not *why* I was being picked on, it was more to do with *why the fight got as big as it did*. I think, I mean, because I was a minority it was easier for them to pick on me. Like, there was even like, times, like my parents would always be like, um, "Yeah, um, the reason why, like, now you have to go to therapy and not them, the reason why the guidance counselor was saying that there's something wrong with you and not them, is because you were probably the minority, and stuff."

And the thing was, they were all rich. Which is also like, the thing, I am poor, I live in the projects and stuff, and I was, it's surprising to me now that I fit, I actually fit in that crowd, you know? I don't know how like, I did. I don't know how that ever was, you know... I think it's surprising that I went from being at the top, like coming from, like starting from a low background or whatever, to getting to the bottom again and now being in the middle, kind of.

### **Sue's point of view on the impact of the incident and its aftermath on her**

I learned that you can't just trust everyone just because they say they're your friends. And like, you have to be careful of what you say and you can't go around saying stuff just cause you feel like it. Now, like, when I make friends I am more cautious, I am also, like, paranoid, cause I am afraid of this happening again, you know, and then just like, before the fight I was like, I was probably like, so clueless, you know, thinking I was like, all that and, like, not caring about other people. And I was, like, always prejudice against other people - it was just my crowd and no one else could come into it. And I would pick on other people too. I guess what goes around comes around. And it was probably partly, one of the reasons it happened to me. Like I would always pick on other people that were different, but like, so I mean, now I wouldn't, you know, I think. I understand more like, why people get picked on and stuff.

I always hoped that I would have someone to talk to and I didn't. And that was the thing that hurt the most.

Actually, I was so driven. Cause that was like the only way I could block my mind off and everything. And I actually got like, good grades for a while, but then afterwards, everything just like was the pits, you didn't want to go to school, you didn't want to do homework, you didn't even see the point of like, living, it was just so bad.

When I came into the 8th grade this year, I was like, I'm gonna drop everything that happened last year, I'm gonna be as nice as I can. 'Cause I try to improve and try to change a lot because, I mean, and I try to be as not like I used to... I would always love to be the leader, you know. I used to love to be the leader, but now I wouldn't. I try to stay in the shadows more. So people wouldn't notice me and stuff. But, like, this year, I

didn't say anything, I never told a teacher if anything happened to me, I would try to ignore it.

I wanted to transfer, there were so many times that I wanted to transfer. There were actually some days when I would miss school just because I couldn't face it for that day.

### **Sue's perspective on the teachers' role in relation to the incident**

This isn't a fight you could ignore. And it wasn't a fight that you could confront, either, in a way.

You should be able to feel safe in a classroom because there is a teacher, a supervisor, I mean, like, but now you can't. You don't feel, like, you can't feel safe at all even in the classroom. Cause they would say stuff to me inside of class.

I really had hoped, I wish that like, I don't know, I wish, I felt like [the teachers] should have been able to stop it. But, I mean, I shouldn't have expected it, because they couldn't have.

I got mad at [a teacher] kind of because she couldn't keep the class under control. Like when they made snide remarks, even though, it shouldn't, like, I should try to ignore, it, it hurts, you know.

Teachers started putting into their lessons about friendships and fights and stuff. And they would always mention something about the fight, because the fight was so big, everyone knew it. Also because my guidance counselor e-mailed all the teachers and said, you know, to try to look out for me in a way. They mentioned it, but the thing was, like, partly it made it worse, because Rhonda's crowd or Tina's crowd...they hated the fact that they were all being ganged up on by teachers, but I hated the fact that they were ganging up on me, you know. And I was thankful so much for even like the least help, you know, that they could do. And the teachers would incorporate that into our lessons. Like, "You shouldn't do what you don't want others to do to you," but it never taught them anything. And the Facing History unit I related a lot, like, from last year I related a lot of stuff, like the books we read and...you know, those surveys we took. I've been a bystander, a victim and a perpetrator. In a lot of ways I can relate to a lot of those stories.

It [FHAO] helped me, like, know that I wasn't the only one that had gone through stuff like that, which helps a lot, to know that, you know? To know you aren't the only one and, like, that it happens. Like, reading those stuff was, like, it happened to teenagers, but also reading, like, the Facing History, learning about the Holocaust made me realize that what happened last year wasn't as -- to me it was big, you know, cause it's my life -- but there is so many other worse stuff that can happen in the world you know, to kids my age, like what happened to Sonya Weitz at her age.

But now, like there were two times when I really didn't want to live and stuff and I would never think about, well there's other worse stuff happening to people, I would just feel like I have to just show them that I am not weak. But now I feel like I have to because look at, I mean look at other situations, why would you kill yourself over something like that, you know? Sometimes, like, you lose your perspective like that.

**Sue's perspective on some positive outcomes of the incident**

Before I couldn't go anywhere by myself, I couldn't even walk down the street by myself, it was like, oh, I needed a friend ... but now like, I don't know, you know. It's like, I've learned to be more independent and stuff.

Back then I probably would have just been like, if I saw someone being picked on [by them] I'd probably go back them up, you know, like the more stronger people, but now I mean I try to stand up for the person.

***What stands out for you about Sue's perspective on the conflict and ostracism?  
If you were an adult in Sue's life (e.g. teacher, parent) what would you want her to consider that was not apparent in what you read here?  
What if you were a peer?***

## Lorna

Lorna, an African American student from an urban, working class family, was not close friends with the other girls in the case study.

### **The fall of eighth grade**

#### **Lorna's perspective on the incident and its aftermath**

I saw something happen to another girl in the school that I didn't really approve of. WHAT HAPPENED? Well, there was, like a lot of people - Sue, she was like a center for a target, or whatever. People like to make fun of her because of past things that happened, like the sixth grade. So, I just - like, she didn't do anything to me. She said - people said that she said something about me, but she didn't say it to my face. So, I just, like, I mean, I'm friends with her - it's nothing - but she's not like buddy-buddy, she's just like, we're just friends or whatever.

I think it was because of, like, not a survey - like, a rumor that happened. People said that she had said something about them, and that she had started saying something, she had told everybody, and that she wasn't really a good friend, she was a liar and stuff like that. DO YOU KNOW WHAT SHE SAID? No. Whatever it was, it had to be pretty bad, because everybody's mad at her still, and it's eighth grade now.

Well, they probably made her feel like she was - I don't know - she had some, like, incurable disease that she would die from, and that if anybody would come near her, they would die, too. I mean, a lot of people are just that mean that they would just make somebody feel like that, cuz a lot of people prank called her house, I mean, they wrote mean letters to her and stuff. ...I have an idea of who was doing it, but it was mostly boys, like, the girls would say something nasty about her or whatever, like, behind her back, but they wouldn't go to that extreme, to call her up or write letters or whatever like that.

People are just still, like, making fun of her, and they're just still not hanging around with her. Well, she has friends, but they've been her friends all along, so I think that's pretty good.

#### **Lorna's perspective on her role in relation to the incident and its aftermath**

...I didn't really know her, so I, like, kind of stayed away from her, but, like, this year I just got sick of all the stuff that was happening to her, so I just more or less became more of a friend than I was last year.

AND DID YOU DO ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED? No. I just wasn't a part of it. OKAY. AND HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT? Well, if I had been a part of it, then I know that a lot of rumors would have been said about me, that she would have probably not have said, but other people might have said that she had said.

**Spring of eighth grade**

Like, nobody thinks about it - well, they think about it but it's like, they laugh it off or something. So, like everybody's friends now. So, she like sits at our table sometimes. And like, I mean, everybody's friends now. SO EVERYONE WHO WAS AGAINST HER BEFORE IS FRIENDS WITH HER NOW? Yeah.

IT SOUNDED LIKE FROM WHAT YOU SAID, A LOT OF KIDS WERE AGAINST HER? BUT YOU CAME FORWARD AND YOU WERE FRIENDS SO, I WONDERED WHAT WAS GOING ON FOR YOU? WHY DID YOU MAKE THAT DECISION? Why not? I mean, she didn't do anything to me -didn't say anything about me. (YES). Just because she said something about my friend doesn't mean I'm going to jump in every time they have a problem. Like, I don't think it's fair for, like, a whole group of people just to pick on one person. That's just not fair.

***What stands out for you about Lorna's perspective on the conflict and ostracism? If you were an adult in Lorna's life (e.g. teacher, parent) what would you want her to consider that was not apparent in what you read here? What if you were a peer?***

## **A Teacher's Perspective on the Ostracism Incident and its Relation to Her Teaching**

**Ms. Smith taught a ten-week Facing History and Ourselves unit as part of her eighth-grade Language Arts course at the school where the conflict took place. The students involved in this case study were in her class. The interviewer's questions or comments are capitalized.**

Ms. Smith: This eighth-grade is a class that has gone through a lot of social, friendship upheavals. There's been a lot of, especially last year, but it's flowed over a little bit to this year, some tension in the break up, particularly in girls' group of friendships that kind of broke apart last year, it was very painful for some girls and there was definitely victimizing, and the victim and all that sort of thing going on and so in that case it's been a very interesting class to watch and yet that seems to have leveled off and that seems to have pretty much taken care of itself, so now, again, it's interesting to watch the different groups as they move around, making friends, that sort of thing. It's a fascinating group.

Interviewer: THE INCIDENT THAT HAPPENED LAST YEAR.. DO YOU THINK IT INFLUENCED THE KIDS IN THIS CLASS IN PARTICULAR, IN TERMS OF THE KINDS OF DISCUSSIONS YOU ARE HAVING AT ALL?

Um, I think, um, when we talked about The Crucible when we talked about victimizing, there are a number of times in the discussion without saying outright, you know, using the example of what happened last year because it would have been too painful or too personal, I did talk a lot about why certain people in certain situations seem to have a power over other people and it's a really, for me anyways, it's something that we will talk about as we do more of Facing History, but we have talked about it as a group, how people get a certain amount of power and kids, through the discussion of The Crucible, they were very aware that sometimes the totally incorrect person has the power, and with The Crucible we did talk about it a bit and it's something we are going to pursue more, and when I do that I really am definitely hoping some of them, and I think they are, are making the connection to what happened in the school.

YEAH, I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU - DID YOU GET A SENSE THAT THEY DID MAKE THAT CONNECTION?

I, yes, again, I. Yes I did. I got a sense that they kind of knew what I was talking about without stating it 'cause I never would, because it's just too, too close to home.

DID ANYONE RAISE THEIR HAND AND SAY, "WAIT A MINUTE. THIS SOUNDS A LOT LIKE...?"

No, no. But I think again, it's too, I think, partly because there is still a person in that room with power, or, not in that room, but in that class with power who kids are still afraid to go against. REALLY? Yeah. I think kids, I think that one thing that happened last year and I think it's kind of a negative, a sad thing, is that kids realized how quickly depending on the outside, how quickly you could be isolated, how powerful a group, in this case a group of girls can be and in fact, when I was filling out the questionnaires I said a lot of kids have had the experience of standing by and not getting involved with someone else who was a victim. And this was the class, that because of that, there

were very few kids who tried to jump in and help out in that situation. They all, I think, were afraid that they would be the next victim. It was really an interesting situation.

CAN YOU JUST OUTLINE IT? YOU DON'T NEED TO NAME NAMES, BUT...

It was basically a friendship, a very intense, close friendship of a few girls who had been friends down through the years. A few things happened, and, again, I don't think any of them were major, but enough different things happened amongst the girls and then there was a new girl that came into the school, this is part of it too, and when that happens, you know, people are, kids, other girls are curious, for whatever reason this girl tends to wield a lot of power. THE NEW GIRL? The new girl. And, all of the sudden, not all of the sudden, but slowly but surely, one of the girls that used to be a very close member of this girls' group became isolated. She couldn't understand quite why. Um, there was a lot of cruelty, a lot of backstabbing, a lot of just meanness. And a, definitely shut off - this girl is not any longer a part of this group. And, it eventually involved teacher intervention, not myself, I mean, I was concerned about it, but it was really something that the counselor really had a part in and the principal and some parents were called in and even then it wasn't resolved because some kids just couldn't see it. They just couldn't see that this was, you know, something that teachers should be involved in or parents should be involved in, some parents thought it was silly and foolish that, you know, it was really an interesting situation, and yet, one girl was tremendously hurt by it.

...This happened last year, I mean this girl is very bright, the one who was isolated, um, very talented, always gets A's, although a few of the other girls who were doing this to her are pretty much in that same bracket, so I think there might have been some of the jealousy issue. She might have, you know, she might have turned them off in some ways and maybe her attitude was a little, she might have come across a little too sure of herself, a little too, you know, sort of cut her down a little bit sort of thing. But I also think, you know, I'm not the only teacher who thinks the um, the idea of this new young woman coming to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and just, again, having the kind of personality that draws people to her and then she can do things with that personality that, you know, it's really fascinating. We'll talk more about it as time goes on. It may come out in some of the discussions with the Facing History, I hope it will, you know some of the issues surrounding what happened last year...

SO THAT'S DEFINITELY IN THE ROOM?

Oh, yeah. That's part of this class' history. It's a big part.

...And what breaks my heart is some of the brightest, some of the most insightful, some of the most mature students in the class still seem to need her approval. Still seem to, it's just fascinating. And, you know, they will kind of, there is a little adoration there that I would've thought wasn't necessary for them, that they were self-assured enough not to have to do that. But, I think everyone is afraid of not being on her right side. Because if you're not on the right side you could be isolated or you could be not one of the in crowd. It's pretty interesting. She is also the kind of kid who will tease other kids. She'll be supportive of other kids and she'll also tease.

...So, you don't want to do anything to jeopardize your position in the group. You don't want to be one of the kids who doesn't have a group. You don't want to be one of the outsiders,

...We're taking a great leap here, when we talk about what happened in Germany, how willing are you to go against what your neighbors are doing, what your neighbors are joining, you know, what country, you know, people are advocating, I mean, how many of us are willing to take a stand against that even if we feel morally that, you know, we should, and then, you bring that down to in our school. How many of us would morally be willing to take a stand against some of our friends if they were doing something that we think [is wrong], and I hope to get into that discussion with the girls and the boys. So, we'll see.

***What stands out for you about the teacher's perspective on the conflict and ostracism?***

***If you were a student in this teacher's school what would you want the teacher to consider that was not apparent in what you read here?***

***What if you were a colleague or parent?***

### **Background of the Workshop: Research on Inclusion and Exclusion in Early Adolescence**

From 1996-1998, a group of researchers and FHAO staff studied the impact of FHAO on eighth grade student's (an outcome study) and the connections students made between their FHAO course and their lives (a qualitative case study). In the outcome study we found that Facing History promoted what the researchers call "relationship maturity," -- the interpersonal awareness, strategies, and personal meaning-making deemed necessary for participating actively and respectfully in a pluralistic society. The core competency underlying all three aspects of relationship maturity is the capacity to coordinate social perspectives. FHAO students showed their strongest gains relative to comparison students in the personal meaning component of relationship maturity, which is the individual's capacity to make connections between their personal and cultural relationship histories (the individual's sense of who they are and where they come from) and their current relational world.

In the qualitative case study the researchers examined the perspectives of students in one FHAO classroom in order to gain insight into how FHAO may have promoted such development. The interview excerpts used in this workshop session are drawn from this case study. The research took place in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts class in an elementary school in a transitional urban/suburban community near a major metropolitan area. The teacher had been teaching FHAO for 16 years, and infused her entire language arts course, from September to June, with FHAO themes. The nineteen students in the class included twelve girls and seven boys. The students identified themselves as African-American (2), Burmese-American, Hmong-American, Chinese-American, an Japanese immigrant, an Tanzanian immigrant, biracial, Russian-American, and white students who identified their Australian, Austrian, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, and/or German ancestries and their Christian and Jewish religious backgrounds. The socio-economic status of the students varied widely, with some students from poor families living in subsidized housing, some from very wealthy families, and most being middle to upper-middle class.

Students were interviewed before and after their FHAO course, were observed in class throughout the year, and were asked to fill out questionnaires and a writing assignment. Interview questions focused on the students' perspectives on social issues in their own lives, specifically issues of inclusion and exclusion, including views on identity, belonging, stereotyping and prejudice, and the connections they saw between these issues in their lives and their FHAO course. In addition, the teacher was interviewed and completed questionnaires about her students' social awareness and participation.

#### ***Experiences in peer group relationships were key to understanding FHAO***

The analysis of the interviews as a group revealed that the eighth graders' own peer relationships were their frames of reference for understanding such FHAO themes as membership, power, conformity, stereotypes, bystanding and the risks involved in standing up for others. The students described how everyday choices in their peer relationships, and the consequences of their choices, taught them powerful lessons about these themes. They emphasized their need for acceptance

and belonging and to avoid social isolation. In general, the students portrayed their relationships as precarious, even with those they identified as their friends.

Particular controversial incidents and dynamics in their peer groups were, in many cases, the key points of reference for students to connect with the themes of FHAO. Notions of social injustice, for example, were understood in relation to personal and often painful experiences in peer groups. Abstract conceptions, such as the roles played by bystander, victim, perpetrator, and resister, came to life for individual students as they struggled to make sense of, and act in relation to, these common socio-moral dilemmas. The Ostracism Case Study describes one of these incidents that took place among the girls in our research.