



# Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls

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Dirty looks and taunting notes are just a few examples of girl bullying that girls and women have long suffered through silently and painfully. With this book Rachel Simmons elevated the nation's consciousness and has shown millions of girls, parents, counselors, and teachers how to deal with this devastating problem. Poised to reach a wider audience in paperback, including the teenagers who are its subject, *Odd Girl Out* puts the spotlight on this issue, using real-life examples from both the perspective of the victim and of the bully.

## Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls Details

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## From Reader Review *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* for online ebook

### Julia says

In Rachel Simmons' book, *Odd Girl Out*, she describes some of the stories that she heard while going from school to school to talk about girls who were "bullied." The entire thing is impossibly melodramatic, including Simmons' account of her own "bullying"--one day, one girl told the other kids not to play with her. Despite the fact that this is what to normal people would be a minor incident and the fact that it happened in the third grade, this is something that apparently haunted Simmons for her entire life.

Throughout the book, I had to keep reminding myself that this book was published in 2002. I don't remember exactly what the situation was like back then, but nothing in this book is anything you probably haven't heard already. It's almost like she's describing, in exact detail, how someone might eat cereal. It's something that's not "hidden," but it's not described in exact detail in a book.

If Simmons considers the stories in her book to be bullying, then I have some personal stories that would blow her away.

This book was far too simplistic and whiny for my taste.

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### Rebecca McNutt says

I still remember the "mean girls" when I was in junior high school. There were three of them, who for some unknown reason made it their mission to make getting an education a living hell for everybody else. If they weren't throwing old food at me during recess, they'd be passing notes about me to other kids, throwing rocks at my little brother, or pushing me down the staircase on the way to class. Their proudest moment was locking me in the janitor's closet for a whole day. To be honest, I don't even think they realized what they were doing. It was just a harmless game to them. But what makes popular girls act so mean, nasty, petty and catty towards each other and towards other kids?

*Odd Girl Out* examines not only the bullying culture, but how it has evolved in recent years from paper notes and hazing, to cyberbullying and hate mail. It answers a number of questions and also looks into the psychology of the queen bee kids, why they strive to be the best even if it means destroying others in their path. Written simplistically but intelligently, *Odd Girl Out* is a great resource for parents, teachers, counselors and even other students who might be involved in this kind of behavior.

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### Rachel says

Every mother with a pre-teen or teen girl needs to read this book.

This book was disturbing for me, both as a parent and as a former girl. I clearly recognized myself as a victim of bullying throughout the book, but it also made me realize that, as a kid, I was also sometimes a perpetrator, which I had never thought about before.

Unfortunately it does a much better job of outlining the problem of girl bullying than it does at presenting solutions. That said, it is helping me better understand my daughter's interactions with her peers, and validate her feelings when things aren't going well.

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## Ciara says

this book was pretty awesome! my expectations weren't that high, so i walked away more impressed than i expected to be. it explores the uniquely girl ways that girls are aggressive to one another, contrasting against previous research on aggression & bullying that has been male-dominated & male-focused. at no point does the book devolve into making biological essentialist arguments about female brain chemistry or anything like that. it's all about the way that girls are socialized to be feminine & how that impacts their relationships with aggression & the causes of aggression (jealousy, competitiveness, etc).

the author argues that a key element of female socialization is the way girls are encouraged to be nice. this cuts them off from developing a healthy & straightforward relationship with anger & aggression. rather than throwing down & fighting each other in the streets, they bully each other by spreading rumors, using secrets to enhance their own social currency, isolating other girls socially, etc. pretty much any girl reading this book will recognize behaviors that she has participated in, as either an aggressor or victim (or both).

this book kind of opened my eyes a little bit to the reasons why pretty much every woman i have ever met has felt the need to let me know she finds me intimidating (& some men have told me this as well). even as a child, i had little interest in being "nice" in the way that niceness is traditionally defined. i've always been pretty in touch with my feelings of anger, & i've always been pretty direct about expressing those feelings. this is a departure from traditional feminine gender norms, & it has inspired feelings of intimidation in the women around me. i mean, i already kind of knew this before i read the book, but the information in the book helped me make sense of it more clearly.

the book explores the way that female socialization encourages girls that are victims of girl aggression to internalize their feelings of confusion & self-doubt, setting them on a path to continue to have dysfunctional relationships with people of all genders. the author is vehement about the possibility that girl aggression may cause victims to confuse bullying behavior with love & acceptance, setting them up for abusive adult relationships.

it closes with tips for parents on how to recognize & address female bullying, & ideas for school administrators on how to crack down on it. i had a few quibbles with this section, because it espoused an adult response that is in keeping with parenting strategies that, in my opinion, stunt a child's ability to deal with the fact that life isn't perfect & that they're going to have to learn to fight their own fights at some point. i mean, judgment calls need to be made, & when a child has been so thoroughly victimized that they have fallen into a depression (or at risk for something that serious), someone needs to step in to help. but i have noticed a trend in many adults five to ten years younger than me--they seem unwilling to confront the possibility that unfortunate things that happen to them might be their fault in some way, they seem unwilling to hear that they are ever wrong about anything, they seem to be incapable of hearing criticism without interpreting it as a personal attack. so i don't think parents necessarily do their kids any favors by validating every single emotion their kids express without reservation.

i definitely agree with the author's argument that most studies on bullying, aggression, & anger are excessively male-focused, but it's also true that playground fights are not the only ways that boys express aggression. i have seen many of the same behaviors among men & boys described here as tenets of girl aggression. i was a victim of a lot of these types of aggression when i was a kid, & it was boys who spread

the most vicious rumors about me. girls kept them going, but boys came up with them & got the ball rolling.

it's also worth noting (as the author does, to a limited degree) that these types of girl aggression don't disappear once a girl is done with school. i've been out of school for almost sixteen years, & i have still experienced all of these types of aggression in my circles of adult female friends.

i definitely think that girls are socialized to have a uniquely dysfunctional relationship with feelings of aggression, & that we all need to work on re-training ourselves to be more in touch with feelings of anger, resentment, jealousy, etc. if that's the take-away, i agree.

issues i had with the book: it was at times so relentlessly repetitive that i almost fell asleep. it read like a twenty-page final paper for college that had been expanded into a 270-page book. the writing was very mediocre. i don't expect great prose when the author is quoting an eleven-year-old, but the in-between bits where the author explored her conclusions based on interviews were gratingly tedious. & i agree with other reviewers that pointed out that most of the girls profiled in the book were largely trying to fight their way to top of the popularity heap. i think a big reason why i didn't really identify with anyone in the book (victim or bully) is because i never tried to be popular. those rumors i mentioned kids spreading about me? they were rife, & they were vicious, & i never heard about any of them myself until several years after they'd disappeared. i'm sure they affected the way kids interacted with me at the time, but no one ever actually said anything at all to my face--probably because i wasn't really trying to be friends with anyone other than kids that tried to be friends with me. even when the victimized girls described the lowest of their lows, they seemed to mostly involve being ostracized from the clique they wanted to be in, & being forced to eat lunch with social inferiors. it's hard to have sympathy for that kind of situation.

i kind of walked away thinking that most of the girls profiled in the book were just brats. not evil demons..just bratty kids whose parents let them get away with murder, maybe because their parents never really came to terms with their own dysfunctional social desires.

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## **Veronica says**

The newly revised and updated edition of *Odd Girl Out* is a must have for every person who is parenting or educating a girl.

This was the first book I grabbed once my fall classes were over. Why? I think it's because I have a daughter. She's eight and in the 3rd grade and we've already had two incidents involving bullying. The first was in preschool and the second was last year. Both incidents were handled by teachers and administrators in a manner that Simmons suggests in Chapter 12: the road ahead for teachers and administrators. That chapter gives some wonderful suggestions on how to set up a school or even a classroom to be as bully-proof as possible. Obviously no place can be bully-proof, but one thing that Simmons points out is that one way to address bullying is to have a transparent and predictable system of consequences. If a student knows that Sally and Maria are the teacher's favorite and nothing they do gets them in real trouble, that student feels disempowered to act and report bullying she may be experiencing or witnessing. Having a consistent system of consequences also sends a clear message to students who bully that it will not be tolerated.

Simmons doesn't advocate for a zero-tolerance policy that gets 7-year-olds expelled, rather a zero-tolerance policy that is just that, zero-tolerance for bullying a classmate.

Three themes really struck me as key things to remember from this book.

One is that schools have relied on girls to maintain a certain peace for years.

And second is that this peace that we see in girls is really silence. Society teaches girls to silence their feelings in order to "be good."

Bullying is not just how girls are. Not if we decide that it ends today. **HERE. NOW.** When we teach our girls to get over it, that "that's how life is, wait until your boss is a bully," we are teaching our girls to ignore that voice in their head and heart that says, "This is wrong. Walk away."

The last theme is one that a friend and I were discussing a few weeks ago. Why are women afraid to promote themselves? I know that I can look back at my childhood and know that being "all that" was frowned upon. Pride in one's work could only be taken so far. Simmons really digs into how promoting oneself breaks one of the cardinal rules of being a girl -- fit in. You can't fit in if you let people know how awesome you are.

Simmons updated her book to include a great chapter on cyberbullying. If you don't have time to read the whole book, skip right to chapter four: bff 2.0: cyberbullying and cyberdrama and chapter nine: parents speak. But you really should read the whole thing.

Warning women reading this will experience flashbacks to high school. Men who read this may have a lot of WTF moments

Read the full review at my blog, Viva la Feminista.

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## **Lynn says**

I consider myself to have been an outcast and a victim of bullying through grade school, but am having trouble relating to the stories in this book. Maybe I'm part of the problem from this author's point of view, because I wouldn't call these scenarios bullying at all. The people she profiles are friends, but there is a lot of emotional blackmail in these relationships.

On page 106, the author says:

"...I'd planned to organize [the girls'] stories according to the qualities I assumed girls got punished for: the differently abled, the overweight, the poor, the haplessly uncool. I had not expected to find that girls became angry with each other for quite the opposite reason."

The fact is, people including girls, do get picked on for being different and poor (and where was gay/lesbian on that list? They get it for that, too, among the worst.) But the author seems to be writing about something else, the in-fighting among the popular crowd, or within any clique. Everyone she profiles had been popular and then became outcast, usually because of jealousy. They turn on each other and ostracize each other, or they start rumors for revenge.

So the book has a point, that there is pattern of anger and manipulation in girls' lives, within cliques. The author explains that relationships are so important to most girls, that the worst punishment is to be ostracized, so alliances and trying to be popular are very important. She explains because the culture doesn't allow girls to be aggressive or violent, girls manipulate instead. Of course, this tendency is widely known, and "mean girls" is a stereotype. There are some interesting interviews in the book with girls describing what qualities the girls think are ideal (skinny, blond and popular) and who the "anti-girl" is (she is slutty, brainy, and not skinny enough, by the way.) It is disturbing to see how girls pressure each other to act within the traditional cultural norm, punishing each other for being mean or slutty.

But I feel that this pattern co-exists with other patterns, such as 1)girls who openly bully, mock, tease, and even physically fight, and, 2)boys who are manipulative and back-stabbing, like these girls, instead of physically fighting.

This book does NOT address what I would call true bullying, the victimization of students who are different and weak, people who just want to be left alone. The author seems convinced that there are no such people, that all girls engage in bullying sometimes. She admits that she herself sold out friends to be with more "popular" girls, and that the young "bullies" she interviewed are really nice, normal girls like herself. But this is not necessarily true, and these girls are not normal. Personally, I am disgusted with almost every girl in this book, and the author. There is no excuse for behaving like that, and there are some of us who did not.

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### **Eilonwy says**

This book provided some really interesting insights into how girls carry a lot of pressure to be "nice" and "likable" (hmm, sound like critiques of fictional heroines anyone has read lately?), and how that pressure has the insidious side effect of crippling girls when it comes to handling conflict. The belief that one is supposed to be loved by everyone, all the time, is of course completely incompatible with the need to address differences or express one's own feelings or wishes. When differences or needs cannot be expressed in a safe or constructive manner, they're often subverted into something that doesn't necessarily look like what society identifies as "aggression," but which sure feels awful when you're on the receiving end of it. The author talks a fair amount about how we don't even have the vocabulary to describe the kind of clear, yet often ignored or unacknowledged (by adults), cruelty to which girls subject each other.

What this book really underscored for me was that we need to be teaching conflict management to *everyone* from as young an age as possible. Because I haven't run into the problems described in this book only as a child -- I saw a number of them, ugly and close-up, back when I first joined an internet community in 2003. It was a real struggle for me and some of the other female members to get past the clash of "I need to make myself lovable to everyone! But I also need to express myself!", and some chaos and very hard feelings came out of it all in those early days. I've developed a much tougher hide since then, and, I hope, better skills at conflict resolution and disagreeing with people politely. But it sure would have been nice to have been taught those skills in school, instead of having to figure them out in trial-by-fire as an adult.

I recommend this book to anyone who has been a girl or knows any girls.

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### **♥ Marlene♥ says**

This book did open my eyes and not in a positive way. To be honest I was kind of shocked but the author is right about lots of things. Especially how girls use each other and how they do not want to confront others. Very interesting read.

Update May 20 2014.

Changing this rating from 3 to 4 because I cannot stop thinking of this book (read in 2009!)and last year I even tried to get my bookcrossing released copy to a friend back but never received an answer. (I of course offered payment for shipping)

So I am really wanting to re read this. Really such an interesting read.

Update October 14 2014.

Just received a copy of this book I ordered through [abebooks.co.uk](http://abebooks.co.uk) and I also bought the sequel. Finally I have this book again and can re read. Not at the moment cause I have too much going on in my life but will not wait too long cause it was so interesting.

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### **Ellyn says**

This book was recommended to me by my supervisor at my field placement at the Shaker Heights schools. It suggests that girls in our society -- particularly white, middle class girls -- have been socialized to believe that they must be nice and sweet at all times, and consequently, a culture of hidden, silent aggression has developed, often called relational aggression. The author interviewed hundreds of girls and adult women, and their stories are told throughout the book. It was painful to read at times and definitely reminded me of some of my own experiences in junior high and early high school. Highly recommended for anyone who spends time around preteen or teenage girls.

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### **Devon says**

Anyone who has survived middle and high school years has had some direct experience with how girls negotiate relationship conflict. It's vicious and covert. Simmons does a very comprehensive job laying out all the ways in which this happens and how we set them up with this conflicting message that they must always be "nice". No wonder they take all their aggression underground.

Somewhere along the line girls are taught that conflict will result in relationship loss, which is the worst outcome, so they are set up to have friendships in which there is not to be any conflict. The conflict goes underground and takes root, resulting in the psychological aggression that can devastate someone on the receiving end of it. Simmons gets to this point half way through the book after many lengthy and detailed examples of real life experiences from girls across socio-economic and racial spectra (the racial differences are very interesting).

The rest of the book presents practical solutions for dealing with bullying behaviors--especially cyber bullying--training educators and parents to recognize and deal with the covert behavior effectively so that all parties are treated respectfully and problems can be resolved to reach a better outcome. There are excellent step-by-step tips for parents who are trying to help their daughters through this too. (Oh, if my parents had this resource when I was a kid, then I would(n't).....sigh...)

It would be interesting to read a book that addresses negotiating conflict among kids across the gender spectrum. While boys negotiate their relationships differently from girls, they are also on the receiving end of girls' bewildering behaviors that are meant to be decoded when often no one but the girl(s) knows the code. With two daughters, I am always wanting them to be around boys and connect with them positively and understand how their natures deviate, but mostly to understand that they are all human beings with the same needs to have connection and belonging.

I'll definitely be hanging on to this book as a reference resource. I'd recommend this book for anyone who has children or works with them.

## Andrew says

Rosalind Wiseman's book is far better.

Simmons performs a whole bunch of interviews, but fails to develop anything more than a shallow theory of stunted expression-of-aggression that ticks all her ideological boxes. The purple prose and emotive language made the book seem like a tendentious polemic.

Simmonds filters the information through her theories and personal experience; I've tried to keep an open mind but don't trust that she's given all of the information. Furthermore her theories are rooted only in the interviews and her particular feminist theories - as they say "the plural of anecdote is not data", and there is no reference to other psychological, sociological, economic or biological material.

It is as if Simmons has the answers and the book is but repetitions of them. There's nothing to engage in; you can only agree or disagree.

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## Reader says

I picked up an audio book at the library the other day; primarily for my wife. On my way to work on Monday, I realized I didn't have anything cued up in my shuffle, so I grabbed Odd Girl Out on my way to the car. As the father of a new baby girl, I thought it might be interesting to find out about female "alternative aggression". Interesting is not the word. I am down right frightened. It isn't popular to say this, but I had a relatively idyllic childhood. I wasn't one of the Popular kids, but I had good friends and I got to do cool things. I had a few run-ins with bullies, but nothing a few brief moments of violence didn't cure (admittedly, after 3 weeks of fear).

The stories of non-violent bullying among girls contained in this book make me very (that is very in italics, underlined, and bolded) worried. I had no idea how traumatic, life altering, and pervasive this alternative aggression is for girls. I tried to listen to it with my wife in the car and she asked me to turn it off because it made her too uncomfortable.

Along with Gift of Fear, I recommend this book to all fathers of daughters.

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## Pia says

I grew up reading stories about (and trying very unsuccessfully to emulate) girls sent to live in attics by evil boarding school head mistresses, but who nonetheless made the very best of their circumstances and were steadfastly good and angelic--never bearing a grudge that they lived in a cold attic with rats as their only friends, wore rags, ate gruel, and performed hard labor. So, this study about girlhood aggression was a refreshing change; disturbing because the aggression is more often than not against other girls and can turn vicious, but interesting nonetheless.

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## **Bora says**

As someone who has bullied and been bullied the book was a fascinating look and visit back to the world of teenage girls. Many factors and theories have been given as drivers of female bullying and this book goes into depth about how we as a society do not allow girls to adequately and healthily express their anger. And moreover that we perpetuate antiquated notions of how girls should behave despite fighting on a daily basis for women's rights in the workplace. Though well intentioned and well researched I found the writing to be mediocre and the chapters started to mesh together which happens to be a big pet peeve. Certainly a must read for parents and educators but also for adult women who simply believe in the potential of today's young women.

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## **Jane says**

I honestly think everyone should read this book – especially parents of girls. It's about the ways in which girls deal with anger and aggression, as opposed to the ways in which boys do. The premise is that boys tend to be more direct in their aggression - physical confrontation - while in contrast, girls use an indirect approach known as relational aggression. Wikipedia's definition of relational aggression is a form of aggression where the group is used as a weapon to assault others and others' relationships. It uses lies, secrets, betrayals and a host of other two-faced tactics to destroy or damage the relationships and social standing of others in the group. [wikipedia article:] To be honest, reading this book has brought up a lot of memories. The following is the most vivid.

When I was little, I was an incredibly outgoing kid. I would talk to just about anybody, anywhere. I didn't worry about making friends; it was just something that happened as I went along. I was very outspoken, too.

That all changed in the third grade. Even though I'm now 28 years old, my third grade year still ranks as one of the worst in my life. Third grade actually started off quite well. T. and H., girls who had been two of my best friends for several years, were in my class. There were also other girls in my class whom I easily befriended. One of these girls was K.

K was a year older than the rest of us; her mother had requested that she be held back, that she repeat the third grade, because she didn't feel her daughter was mature enough to enter the fourth grade. If only her mother hadn't made that decision, I probably would have turned out to be a very different person. At the beginning of the year, K became friends with H., T. and me. My birthday was in September, and that year I had my first ever birthday party. I invited six girls, and K. was one of them. We all had a great time.

One day in early October, during recess, as I was approaching T. and K., I heard them talking; they didn't notice me behind them. K. was asking T. to play with her that day, and specifically asking her \*not\* to play with H., and T. agreed. I didn't say anything to them; instead, I went and found H., and repeated the story to her. We concocted a plan to have T. and K. overhear H. asking me not to play with K. We put our plan into action, and that act of retribution was how one of the worst periods of my life began.

Immediately, K. began turning the rest of the class against us. She made up stories about us, told lies to other students about us, and once even told lies about me to my mother (who was a classroom volunteer). Instead of playing K's game and trying to turn others against her, we simply defended ourselves; yet her campaign of hate was successful. Within a week, my third grade experience had gone from being great to being hell. Additionally, H. and I were enrolled in our school's Gifted program. This meant that once a week she and I went to a special Gifted class, instead of to regular class with everyone else. For this, K. denounced us as nerds, and said that because we were "Gifted", we thought we were better than everybody else. In addition to

being nerds, she claimed that we were weird, strange, and not the sort of person one should be friends with. Suddenly no one in my class liked me and H. People whom I had liked now refused to talk to me – or if they did talk to me, it was only to call me names or to threaten me. Then, to make matters worse, I got glasses. I certainly need glasses – and I needed them back then – but nothing gives third graders ammunition like glasses. I was taunted relentlessly, and called Four Eyes more times than I could count. I had my glasses snatched off my face during recess. I had them held over my head, just out of reach (I have always been short).

I don't know if my third grade teacher knew what was going on or not. One thing was certain: K. was one of my teacher's favorites. K. had been in that class during her first time through third grade. As I mentioned above, she hadn't failed the third grade; in fact, her grades had been quite decent. As such, she didn't need to learn the third grade curriculum. Instead, the teacher drafted her to be somewhat of a teacher's aide, a classroom watchman, and all about helper. Several times I was lectured by my teacher for various actions (both real and imaginary) reported to my teacher by K. The few attempts I made to convince the teacher that K was the one causing problems were met by disbelief and/or the advice of "Don't be a tattletale."

I had started the third grade outgoing, friendly, willing to strike up a conversation with anybody, and always willing to speak my mind. By the end of the year I was quiet, introverted, speaking only to my closest friends, and often only when spoken to.

I'm 30 now; the events that happened above occurred a long ago, and yet I still think about them periodically. I wonder what my life would have been like had K gone into the fourth grade that year. Or if H. and I hadn't gone through our retaliatory charade. Or if my teacher had done something to stop K's behavior. Would I have continued to be gregariously outgoing all through my school years? Would I have lived my life differently? Would I still have become the socially anxious oddball that I am now?

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