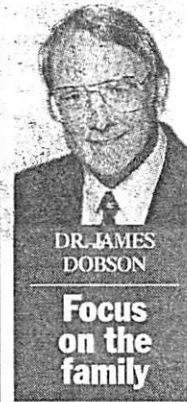


331-9

How power rules in adolescent world

Q: Why are teens so vulnerable around their peers? How do you explain the social fear that seems to paralyze them at an age when they are notoriously gutsy? Teen-agers drive their cars like maniacs, and the boys make great combat soldiers. Why is it that an 18-year-old can be trained to attack an enemy gun emplacement or run through a minefield, and yet he panics in the noisy company of his peers? Why are they so frightened of one another?

A: I believe the answer is related to the nature of power and how it influences human behavior. Adolescent society is based on the exercise of raw force. That is the heart and soul of its value system. It comes in various forms.



For girls, there is no greater social dominance than physical beauty. A truly gorgeous young woman is so powerful that even the boys are often terrified of her. She rules in a high school like a queen on her throne, and she usually is given some honor with references to royalty in its name

(homecoming queen, homecoming princess, all-school queen, etc.). The way she uses this status to intimidate her "subjects" is in itself a fascinating study in adolescent behavior.

Boys derive power from physical attractiveness, too, but also from athletic accomplishment in certain prescribed sports. Those that carry the greatest status are usually skilled in sports that exhibit sheer physical strength (football) or size (basketball).

Do you remember what the world of adolescence was like for you? Do you recall the power games that were played — the highly competitive and hostile environment into which you walked every day? Can you still feel the apprehension you experienced when a popular (powerful) student called you a creep, or a jerk, or put his big hand in your face and pushed you out of the way? He wore a football jersey, which reminded you that the entire team would eat you alive if you

see DOBSON, page D2

DOBSON

From page D1

should be so foolish as to fight back.

Does the memory of the junior-senior prom still come to mind occasionally, when you either were turned down by the girl you loved or were not asked by the boy of your dreams? Have you ever had the campus heroes make fun of the one flaw you most wanted to hide, and then threaten to mangle you on the way home from school?

Perhaps you never went through

these stressful encounters. Maybe you were one of the powerful elite who oppressed the rest of us. But your son or daughter could be on the receiving end of the flak. A few years ago, I talked to a mother whose seventh-grade daughter was getting butchered at school each day. She said the girl awakened an hour before she had to get up each morning and lay there thinking about how she could get through her day without being humiliated.

Typically, power games are more physical for adolescent boys than girls. The bullies literally force their will on those who are weaker. That is what I remember

most clearly from my own high school years. I had a number of fights during that era just to preserve my turf. The name of the game was power — and not much has changed for today's teen-agers.

Q: What are the most common causes of depression in women?

A: I asked that question of more than 10,000 women who completed a questionnaire titled "Sources of Depression in Women." The most frequently reported concern was low self-esteem. More than 50 percent of an initial test group placed this problem at the top of the list, and 80 percent put it in the top five.

These were primarily young,

healthy women with seemingly happy marriages, which should have produced greater contentedness. Nevertheless, the majority struggled with feelings of inadequacy and a lack of confidence. That finding is rather typical of American women in all age categories and in various economic strata.

Send your questions to Dr. Dobson, c/o Focus on the Family, PO Box 444, Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903. His Web site can be found at www.family.org. Dr. Dobson is the president of Focus on the Family, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the home.

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