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## Peer exclusion

The aim of this chapter is to present a multiaspectual discussion on the phenomenon of peer exclusion, both with respect to its nature, symptoms, forms, and causes. We assume that the mechanisms of peer exclusion are determined not only by the attributes of an individual, who is the target of exclusion and eventually is marginalised, but also by the attributes of the group. The process of exclusion is the result of individual attributes facilitating exclusion as well as the environment conducive to exclusion (cf. Kochender-Ladd, Ladd and Kochel, 2009, p. 27). Exclusion of certain individuals is, in a way, inscribed in the group life cycle, the processes within the group, and it is a natural phenomenon. It often acts in the interest of the group, however remains negative for the marginalised or parties discriminated against. For this reason, when bringing up the issue of peer exclusion we focus – to a significant extent – on the group, which is not only the context of this process but also its important element.

### The process of peer exclusion

In order to understand the phenomenon of peer exclusion, it is important to realise that it concerns the sphere of social relations. Changes occurring in this sphere are evolutionary and not revolutionary. Thus they need to be analysed as a process of changes within the individual as well as in his/her social environment.

### Peer exclusion – nature and manifestations

The human being, as a social being, needs others in order to survive. Membership is a precondition for satisfying life and developmental needs. Therefore, omnipresent aspirations for

creating and maintaining a minimal number of permanent and meaningful interpersonal relations is inscribed in a person's life (Leary, 2011).

Exclusion from a group firstly leads to strong negative emotions: sadness, loneliness, sense of injustice, feeling of guilt, jealousy, and social anxiety. Experiencing these emotions, in the first place, leads to not only to the change in the quality of life, but also to the lowering of self-esteem and social withdrawal.

The multitude of definitions of social exclusion forces us to look for syntheses and generalisations. The simplest definition of exclusion states that it is a phenomenon depriving a person of the possibilities of a constructively satisfying their psychosocial needs and fulfilling their developmental tasks. The causes of this phenomenon can be traced down to the broadly conceived attributes of the excluded (knowledge and skills, personality traits, attitudes and values), the specificity of the environment in which the individual functions and – finally – in the mechanisms of establishing interpersonal relationships.

Exclusion is not arrived at instantly, rather than that, it is a progressing process from inclusion to exclusion, from acceptance to rejection. A review of definitions allows us to assume that this process:

- is dynamic and multidimensional, it is frequently a cumulative phenomenon, which leads to a multidimensional deprivation;
- is manifested in the lack of or insufficient level of participation in the mainstream life of the peer group or community;
- can be manifested in/result in breaking peer, family, and social ties; the loss of the meaning of life and disturbances in building one's personal and social identity;
- entails the risk of mirroring the behavioural model and transmitting of certain adaptive mechanisms onto the later stages of one's life and development; the consequences of exclusion have a timeless effect (cf. Z.B. Gaś, 2006, p. 8; M. Muras, 2005, p. 232).

The human being is a social creature. He/she is born into a group, needs others to survive and develop. The need to be a part of interactions with others and to establish relationships is the operationalisation of such regularity. Due to this, exclusion needs to be understood as the opposition, or the reverse, of the need of membership.

Exclusion, and hence the disturbance of the process of building memberships in the relationship between an individual and the group leads to far-reaching consequences in the lives and development of children and youth. These emotional consequences of rejection depend on a few important factors (Asher, Rose and Gabriel, 2001):

- the way in which a child responds to the experience of exclusion entailing negative effects; attitudes that the child assumes towards this phenomenon;
- the reasons for rejection;
- the identity of the rejector;
- the presence of social support (or the lack of thereof);
- the tendency, on the part of the child, to reflect on the rejection;
- the ways of accounting for the reasons for rejection by the child (does he/she see them as a consequence of external or internal factors – who or what does he/she blame for the situation of exclusion);
- child's awareness of the influence of other children on herself/himself and other peers
- the degree to which the exclusion is experienced by the child;

### Forms of exclusion

We wish to follow Leary (2001, p. 5) in thinking that establishing membership is a process which can be seen as a continuum: from the maximal inclusion in interpersonal relationships to the maximal exclusion (rejection). The following parts of the continuum are presented in table 1. The highest form of inclusion is a situation where people, on their own, seek to establish a relationship with an individual – they make the effort and initiate the relationship. At another level there is a situation when people encourage and invite the individual to establish a rapport. The lowest level of inclusion is the consent to establish a rapport by an individual. In turn, the middle level in building attachment is the state of indifference: the group neither encourages nor discourages building a relationship. However, we need to notice that in some situations, even indifference can be perceived by an individual as a form of exclusion. It happens so as the individual draws comparisons between their unsatisfactory relations with what he/she experiences around themselves; for instance, with the close ones and the permanent relationships among other peers. This dissonance results in discomfort.

**Table 1**

Levels of inclusion in interpersonal relations

Status	Definition
Maximal inclusion	Others make the effort to seek out the individual
Active inclusion	Others welcome the individual
Passive inclusion	Others allow the individuals to be included
Ambivalence	Others do not care whether the individuals included or excluded
Passive exclusion	Others ignore the individual
Active exclusion	Others avoid the individual
Maximal exclusion	Others physically reject, ostracize, abandon, or banish the individual

Source: Leary (2001, p. 5)

Other levels of establishing membership can be characterised as exclusion and range from ignoring, through avoidance to physical rejection and ostracism, which is translated into a strong feeling of psychological hurt.

Describing rejection in interpersonal relations, Asher, Rose and Gabriel (2001, p. 128) identify six major rejection categories and as many as 32 rejection types:

1. Excluding and terminating interaction:
  - Leaving – terminating the interaction in an abrupt manner and without the consent of the other party;
  - Refusal – refusing an offer, e.g. an offer to play;
  - Sending away – persuading to leave without the will of the other party to do so;
  - Expressing dislike or reluctance to maintain further relationship;
  - Ignoring – intentional ignorance of others' comments or behaviours;
  - Ignoring content – ignoring the content of what the other party is saying, e.g. by changing the subject
2. Denial of access:
  - Denial to access of self or self and others – denial of identity attributes and/or hindering access to playmates;
  - Denial of access to others;
  - Denial of access to resources, e.g. physical resources (toys, snacks, games);
  - Taking object or location away – taking resources away from a child who is already in possession of them;
  - Assign less desirable resource or position – giving a peer an object of less value than that received by other children;
  - Denial of access to information – refusing to tell a child something he or she wants to know;
  - Denial of access to assistance – peers refusing to help a child;
  - Refusal to comply – limiting cooperation.
3. Aggression:
  - Physical aggression – physically attacking a child;
  - Flicking or throwing – flicking or throwing an object at a child (e.g., a paper, food item);
  - Damaging possession of child -- deliberately damaging a possession that belongs to a peer;
  - Gestural aggression -- making a hostile gesture to a child (e.g., shaking a fist or giving "the finger");
  - Verbal aggression -- calling a child names or verbally insulting a child's characteristics;

- Insulting friends or kin -- making negative comments about child's friends or relatives;
  - Mocking or taunting -- mocking child's characteristics with the use of sarcasm or sneer;
  - Reminiscing/repeating -- talking about and/or repeating previous rejections the child has suffered;
  - Aversive noises -- directing obnoxious vocalizations (not words) toward a child, e.g. booing;
4. Dominance:
- Ordering -- telling a child in a hostile tone to do something (or stop doing something)
  - Contradicting -- telling a child in a hostile tone that something the child said was incorrect
5. Moral disapproval
- Moral disapproval – aggressive telling a child that the child's words or behaviors are morally unacceptable, humiliation in front of others;
  - Blaming -- blaming another child for something negative that has happened, or could happen to the blaming child, the blamed child, or a third party;
  - Predicting negative outcomes -- predicting that a negative outcome for a child will result from the child's actions or statements;
6. Involving a third party:
- Telling Authority -- Telling an adult about another child's perceived inappropriate behavior
  - Praising a Rejecter -- Praising, congratulating, or supporting a rejection made to a child by a third party
  - Relaying Negative Message -- Serving as a messenger of a negative statement about a child from a third party
  - Third Party Rejection – Making negative comments about a child to a third party in the vicinity of the child being rejected (i.e., so the comments can be overheard by the rejected child) (Asher et. al, 2001, pp. 128–130).

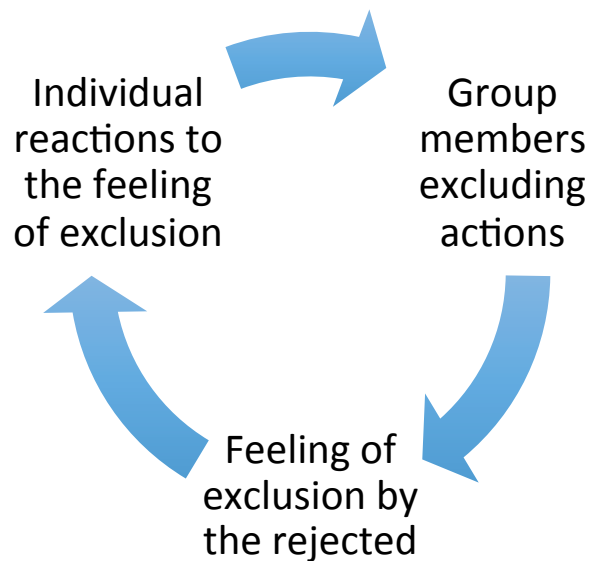
## **Mechanisms of exclusion**

As has been noticed above, group exclusion is a process which is composed of several indirect factors. The specificity of this phenomenon is well rendered by the so-called vicious circle of social exclusion (Gaś, 2006).

Gaś (2006) assumes that the process of exclusion is composed of three basic elements (figure 1):

- 1) Actions leading to exclusion of group or community members,
- 2) Personal attributes of the excluded individual,
- 3) Individual reactions of the excluded to the experienced perception of exclusion

**Figure 1**  
Vicious circle of social exclusion



Source: own elaboration based on: Gaś (2006).

The first element, group or society members excluding actions, which stem from personal experiences, views, beliefs, etc. The following variables can be found in this group:

- social self-defence against dysfunction,
- social fear of dysfunction,
- social helplessness towards people in crisis,
- indifference towards issues experienced by others,
- group stereotypes,
- limited possibilities of satisfying personal needs,
- ruthless rivalry for rights and privileges.

Personal attributes of the excluded individual are the second element that is conducive to the feeling of exclusion. The following belong to this group:

- psychosocial maturity deficits,
- destructive experiencing of crisis,
- dysfunctional behaviour,
- pathological behaviour,
- subculture membership,

- physical ability,
- membership of specific groups, e.g. age groups,
- learning difficulties of low level of education.

The third group of factors determining group or social exclusion are individual reactions of the excluded to the experienced perception of exclusion. Among others, these variables can be enumerated:

- aggression and hostility towards people – beginning with close people, through the broader environment, to the society in general,
- seeking refuge in dysfunctional behaviour
- creating social enclaves
- learned helplessness
- social isolation
- social passivity
- physical or mental self-destruction
- taking things for granted,
- feeling of social harm and injustice (Gaś, 2006).

### **Reasons for exclusion from a peer group – exclusion as a dysfunctional way of satisfying developmental needs**

While searching for the causes of peer exclusion, we need to be aware of the fact that we are dealing with a heterogeneous sample, both in terms of psychosocial and developmental functioning. Consequently, we need to analyse the phenomenon of exclusion both from the perspective of the excluded and the excluding. Furthermore, all corrective measure should be preceded by a reliable diagnosis. Only then can we hope for effective educational and preventive measures.

An interesting classification has been suggested by Rolf, Sells and Golden (1972; after Dep-  
tuła, 2013, p. 21). Here, attributes of the excluded form the criterion of division; five categories of rejected children have been differentiated on its basis:

- 1) aversive and dominant behaviour towards peers,
- 2) disrespecting authority,
- 3) showing rebellious behaviour,
- 4) intensified social withdrawal and aversion or hostility towards peers,
- 5) adaptation to the peer group requirements but characterised by serious deficits (low IQ, mental impairment of low physical attractiveness).

Deptuła (2013, p. 22), in turn, has performed an outstandingly detailed review of literature concerning the characteristics of rejected children. This synthesis concerns three spheres: cognitive, perceptual, and behavioural.

In the cognitive sphere, children rejected by peers have the following characteristics (as seen in the majority of studies):

- lowered intellectual efficiency;
- difficulties in understanding intentions of other people (processing social information);
- lowered ability of predicting the consequences of one's behaviour;
- conviction that aggression is an effective way of achieving goals (it can stem from taking as a role model an authority from their environment: parents, tutors and peers);
- focus on the negative elements of interacting with others, and – at the same time – ignoring and neglecting aspects of positive relations;
- low level of awareness of social relations and ways of behaving in difficult social situations;
- inappropriate self-esteem which is related to the functioning in interpersonal relations

In turn, in the emotional sphere, children who experience rejection are characterised by (Deptuła, 2013):

- greater frequency of being affected by negative emotions, especially anger or sadness, but also feeling of loneliness, social fear, and even symptoms of depression;
- difficulties in emotional self-control – hyperactivity, impulsiveness, inability to postpone gratification;
- lowered level of sensitivity towards the needs of others, low sense of humour;
- difficulties in coping with educational failure and adopting immature ways of approaching them

The last sphere pointed out by Deptuła (2013) is the behavioural one. Research shows that children experiencing rejection are characterised by:

- contradictory tendencies in establishing relationships – from withdrawal to hyperactivity;
- low level of social abilities, and the tendency to breach basic social norms as well as lower frequency of positive interactions with peers;
- higher frequency of destructive, antisocial and rebellious behaviours, including improper way of addressing the teacher, disturbing classes, not doing their homework and truancy;
- tendency to play games alone.

Depending on the age of children and youth, causes of rejection can be seen in different environmental mechanisms. Therefore, at the stage of early childhood, the relationship with



parents and their parenting styles play a key role (cf. Pyżalski, 2012; Deptuła, 2013). During the next developmental stage, when the child begins his/her education, of crucial importance in establishing interpersonal relations is the schooling environment (Pyżalski, 2012, p. 117). It can exert influence on the child through:

- peer group,
- functioning of the school as an institution (especially concerning the social climate and ensuring safety),
- generating frustration stemming from educational failures.

A different perspective on the issue of group exclusion is offered by developmental context. Children and youth, at different stages of development, take measures which enables them to satisfy needs, including developmental needs. Thus, exclusion can also be considered in the adaptive context. Jessor and Jessor (1977) enumerate six fundamental functions of problem behaviour, which are aimed at satisfying important developmental needs and goals. They include:

- 1) instrumental measures,
- 2) demonstrating opposition,
- 3) reduction of fear and frustration,
- 4) solidarity with authority figures, membership in a group,
- 5) demonstrating one's own identity,
- 6) apparent social or age promotion.

**Exclusion as an instrumental measure** is expressed through an alternative means of satisfying needs or achieving a goal in a situation when for the interested party, these are unavailable or unachievable, once measures characteristic of this group have been undertaken.

**Exclusion as a measure demonstrating opposition towards authority persons and society** takes the form of rejecting norms and values conventionally used by the society or peer group. An instance of this might be the emergence of prison subcultures or pathology enclaves, with whole families as members, and the criminality being transmitted from generation to generation. A young person is socialised into this social climate without the influence of other values, or he/she insufficiently experiences them.

**Exclusion as a measure taken towards reducing fear, frustration and anxieties** is a set of behaviours aiming at limiting or eliminating the emotional discomfort related to the inability to cope with challenging life goals.

**Exclusion as a manifestation of solidarity with authority figures**, search for the feeling of group membership or the feeling of identification with the group. A typical example of

this type of measures is establishing environments accepting social norm violation. In such groups, rules of group loyalty, hostility towards other group members, and mutual support are introduced.

**Exclusion as a measure whose purpose is to show oneself and other authority figures important attributes of one's identity** is a form of behaviours which is manifested by the strength of ego. This happens particularly in the case of people who have difficulties in setting boundaries and issues with the coherence of their own "I". Such demonstration of identity attributes serves to compensate for the unachieved developmental goals. It often assumes forms of egocentric or egoistic behaviours.

**Exclusion as a measure leading to an apparent higher level of development or higher social position.** An unambiguous indicator of the social position, according to the excluded, is the access to goods or behaviours reserved for the chosen community members.

### **Peer exclusion as a group process**

In this part of the chapter, our aim is to underline some discussions on the groups of problems connected with peer exclusion: starting with the question of the significance of a group in the life of a young person through the questions of the stages of group development, to the group roles.

### **Peer group as a context of development**

Drawing on Rupert Brown's (2006) definition, we can state that a group is a set of people mutually connected through common experiences or aims or interconnected in some kind of social microstructure, or remaining in interaction (Brown, 2006, p. 19). It is said that interactions and interdependence are the two core features of groups (cf. Bruhn, 2011, p. 17). Exclusion, then, can be defined, from the group perspective, as depriving somebody of interaction, common aims, goals, and interests. It is equivalent to depriving a group member of these experiences, which are paramount to proper development, and substituting them with ones that are traumatic and distort this development or – at least – significantly alter it. The group, and a peer group in particular, is one of the most crucial contexts for development. In groups, children develop not only their social skills (becoming a leader, subordination to rules, establishing friendship, etc.); the group is also a facilitator of cognitive development – cooperation, discussions, and the possibility of exchanging views make group problem solving more effective than facing them individually (Herzberg, 2012, p. 9).

As early as during the childhood, vertical relationship (with adults) are most important, with time horizontal relationships (with peers) become of primary importance (Schaffer, 2006, p. 350). Peer groups exert very strong pressure on young people, frequently stronger than other groups, such as the family (Brown, 2006, p. 64). People's problems and joys do not occur in isolation, but always have some kind of social context. While the change of context from adults to peers occurs, the need to be a part of the group is intensified and the level of identification with the group increases. Identification is "a mental operation, through which an individual (un)consciously attributes oneself the characteristics of another person or group, a process of establishing connections between oneself and another person or group" (Reber, 2005, p. 277). When we identify with something or somebody, we collectively experience successes and failures of the object of identification, and eventually rejection or other negative experience in this relationship hurt most because they directly concern the "I" of the involved person. The level of identification with the group is in a strong relationship with psychological wellbeing (Hutchison, Abrams and Christian, 2007, p. 38). It comes as no surprise, then, that the youth, especially adolescents, is characterised by intensified conformism, i.e. surrendering to peer pressure (cf. Brown, 2006, p. 129). Such persons can go to lengths to please the group in order not to fall prey to ostracism. At the same time, at this stage of developmental stage, it is natural to intensively seek oneself, to experiment. Young people tend not to cope with life, but at the same time they want to make independent decisions. Therefore, the susceptibility to processes of marginalisation increases (the group is not merely an observer but also an active participant of successes and failures of its members). Their negative consequences intensifies. Exclusion usually entails serious, lifelong repercussions. The unfulfilled need of being a member, one of the basic needs for correct development (Hutchison et. al., 2007, p. 29), has an impact on human functioning in various domains. Importantly, however, in childhood and adolescence, the consequences of exclusion are particularly severe, as group membership is one of the fundamental elements of development, and the defence and coping mechanisms in troublesome situations are still being developed.

At this point, it is worth emphasising the question of the interrelationship between an individual's peer group membership and his/her self-knowledge and self-esteem as well as, only in passing, identity alterations characteristic for this stage of development. "For the majority of people, self-knowledge constitutes a centre of experience. It is impossible to understand our behaviours, including social ones, without reference to self-knowledge: something we know about ourselves, something that we want to know or what we think we should know about ourselves" (Kossowska and Śmieja, 2009, p. 232). Igor Kon (1987) wrote about "I" in one's own imagination, which is present in youth in adolescence. The appearance of abstract thinking and the ability to reflect on oneself and on one's thinking is thus expressed in the cognitive maturity to self-evaluate. Self-knowledge, if we decide to analyse it from the perspective of cognitive psychology, is a structure of knowledge about

oneself which is build on previous experience (Neckar, 2009, p. 25). Hence, dysfunctions, which can occur as a consequence of exclusion from a peer group, become a certain type of negative behaviour models, especially in the area of coping with negative situations, and a trigger for negative self-evaluation.

Knowledge about oneself enables us to take measures oriented towards “managing impressions” of the interactional partner, which in psychology has been termed self-presentation (Szmajke, 1996, p. 25). As E. Goffman (1981) writes, “the individual acts in order to deliberately or unintentionally express oneself, so that others are impressed” (Goffman, 1981, p. 25). Adolescence is a period of comparisons (most important elements of self-knowledge are connected with social attraction) (Białecka-Pikul, 2009, p. 46), of constant deliberation over how we are perceived. More than seeing ourselves as others judge us, we see ourselves as we think that they see us. “It is not others who shape our self-knowledge, but the self-knowledge influences what we assume that others think about ourselves” (Kossowska and Śmieja, 2009, p. 218). During interactions with people, images of an individual about himself/herself undergo crystallisation. Forming an identity is based on recognition, defining and interpreting of ourselves and others during interactions. A relatively permanent conception of oneself emerges. However construction of identity is never a finished project. We constantly experience identity transformations (cf. Strauss, 2012), and such transformations are particularly intensive at turning points in one’s biography (many of these are related to the membership in a peer group; this can be, for instance, a time of joining a new group). Under the influence of new conditions a change consisting in redefining oneself can occur, as when we are a group members, the group (social) identity becomes a part of our self-evaluation (Killen and Rutland, 2011, p. 62). Conception of oneself as a member of a given social unit is immensely important for the correct development of a person (cf. Brown, 2006, p. 19; Stets and Burke, 2014, p. 53). The group constitutes a reference point in defining oneself, in becoming oneself, and discovering what we are (Hutchison et. a., 2007, p. 40).

Important, from the point of view of a threat of exclusion, and at the same time related to the themes of self-knowledge and self-evaluation, is the social comparison theory by L. Festinger (1954). According to its assumptions, the natural human aspiration is to evaluate one’s abilities and skills (Kruglanski i Mayselless, 1990, p. 195). In case of a lack of objective means of measurement of some traits<sup>38</sup>, we gain access to self-knowledge by comparing ourselves with other (similar) people in different aspects (Brown, 2006, p. 79). Similarity is determined by collective experience, similar level of education, age, etc., which allows us to conclude that a given trait, which we are interested in, is also comparable. An axiom in Festinger’s theory is that we look for similar rather than dissimilar people to us, as they are the most desired comparative standard (for example, a peer group) (Kruglanski and Mayselless, 1990, p. 195). The

<sup>38</sup> An example of an objective measurement is body or height measurement, although these would not be much telling of a person were we not able to compare them with parameters characteristic of other people.

outcome of this comparison enables us to define the situation in which we find ourselves and sets a direction of our actions (Festinger, 1954, p. 118).

A group is a collective of people of different status. Research on social comparisons points to the clear tendency for an individual to compare himself/herself with people of an equal or minimally higher status, which testifies to the fact that we naturally create spaces for improving ourselves. We compare ourselves with people of a lower status only when we are affected by aversive stimuli (usually strong) as others who are in a worse situation can be seen as a 'solace' (cf. Brown, 2006, p. 83; Stets and Burke, 2014, p. 40). From the vantage point of development, such comparisons are, however, destructive (they constitute a type of superficial solace and are not a drive force behind real changes). Yet sometimes it is the only possibility of protecting the threatened self-evaluation (Wills, 1991). It is natural to aim at being a group member, where participants are similar to us when it comes to expressing opinions and manifesting abilities (Festinger, 1954, p. 136). We want to be part of these groups whose status is high – it increases our need of belonging, and intensifies identification (Shi and Xie, 2014, p. 2189). Persons who are excluded from a group do not only compare themselves with people of the same or lower status but frequently aspire to establish contact with them (and communities). For this reason, excluded members of one group tend to become members of other groups whose status, or at least the average age, is significantly lower. It also happens that they become leaders of these groups. They can – by transferring their own negative experiences – also take the role of an aggressor. Naturally, such a state is not desired. Neither superficial comforting oneself by comparison with persons of lower statuses, nor compensating for the lack of peer relationships by substituting them with others (children rejected by peers can also maintain toxic relations with adults who can seemingly substitute peers) are not conducive to correct development and building self-esteem. Everybody makes social comparisons, however low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence are the traits which intensify this tendency (Homan and Lemmon, 2014). People pay more attention to such comparisons, which are unfavourable for them. And, conversely, they attribute less importance to these which portray them in positive light (on average, negative emotions connected with a negative self-esteem are stronger than the positive ones when the evaluation is advantageous) (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 183). Therefore, low self-esteem goes hand in hand with the above-average need to compare oneself with others, intensive negative emotions connected with evaluating oneself in the context of the group, as well as the threat of exclusion from the group. All these issues drive one another – one becomes the cause of another. A type of vicious circle emerges, from which escape is not easy. Other group mechanisms work in a similar fashion; it stems from the fact that group development is a process of both a gradual and cyclic character. Now we turn to this issue in more detail.

## Stages of group development vis-à-vis the issue of peer exclusion

Groups are constantly in the process of becoming, and changing dynamically. This group development process can be presented in a form of subsequent stages. Usually the initial stage, the forming phase or the orientation phase, commences at the moment when a new group is establishing (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 184; Jedliński, 2000, p. 29). At this stage, norms, rules and group roles are set. It is worth pointing to some characteristics of this phase in the context of group exclusion. Firstly, group members are characterised by high emotional tension. They are only getting to know one another, they do not know what to expect from the group in the process of formation. The atmosphere is “stiff” and “tense” (artificiality, exaggerated politeness), people probe one another (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 185). Most prominent group roles appear: leaders along with the group clown and kamikaze<sup>39</sup>. The first stage of development, then, seems to be the beginning of the process of exclusion. Here, the group is especially sensitive to people who, for different reasons, intensify the perceived fear (it is a characteristic feature of the first stage) (Jedliński, 2000, p. 30). Appreciation is granted to those who reduce the initial feeling of fear (the group joker relaxing the atmosphere in difficult situations, the navigator who points to ways of solving such situations). Should somebody increase anxiety, the group will want to eliminate him/her as they introduce an additional stressor.

The second stage is termed the rebel phase. Here, conflicts start accumulating with regard to the norms established by the group. Leaders clash by competing with each other and fighting a battle of ideas; other roles are sharpened as well. Disappointment, boredom, and opposition to the leadership become noticeable. When solving these problems, the group consolidates strength, accepts certain solutions and rejects others, and finally begins to cooperate – a conflict becomes a trigger for cooperation (cf. Jedliński, 2000, p. 31). A group able to cope with conflicts becomes more united (M.S. Corey and G. Corey, 2002, p. 173). At this stage, the members who are most prominent and are egocentric are threatened with exclusion. The group ceases to invest their energy in the quest for power, games, and intensive integration. It concentrates on the aim, thus individuals who are not conforming to this pattern, can be threatened with exclusion.

Some researchers enumerate two further stages of group development – the final phase where the main aim is to finalise current activities and projects, as well as dissolving the group and ensuring its positive image (M.S. Corey and G. Corey, 2002, p. 302).

One of the elements of the group development process is the emergence of group roles. It is important to analyse this question as intertwined with the mechanism of peer exclusion.

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39      Categorisation after K. Jedlińskim (2000). Discussion on group roles will follow.

## Peer exclusions vis-à-vis group roles

Role diversification is a common attribute of group life (Brown, 2006, p. 73). Different roles provide different privileges, duties but also influence over the group. Group roles determine participation of individuals within the team, their place within the group, their laws and duties (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 196). Literature offers different division of these roles (e.g. roles connected with fulfilling a given task or those connected with achieving goals of group members) and terminology. We can talk about leadership roles, the joker, and the aggression triggering group clown. We also come across the group outsider, the radically open, the norm transgressing kamikaze, and diligent student who fulfils the tasks set by the group leadership (Jedliński, 2000, p. 196).

When searching for the reasons for the emergence of group roles, we need to bear in mind that this process is conditioned by the individual group members and their expectations as a whole (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 196). People are predisposed to fulfil certain group roles. Some, for instance, have the tendency to take up leader roles, while others – due to their personality – assume spectacular roles (the group clown, kamikaze) or stay at the sidelines. Individual's experience is important. If he/she previously fulfilled certain roles as a member of various roles, most likely this person will transfer this experience to the new group. Importantly, there is a tendency that these experiences will determine their behaviour to the extent that they will be taking up the same role, should the group not object to it. It needs to be pointed out that individual groups require certain roles to a different extent, thus certain behaviours can be praised, while others ignored. It determines the emergence of these and not any other roles, and it is the basis for determining their significance for the group (Adams and Galanes, 2008, p. 199).

Adopting group roles can be a situation triggering an exclusion mechanism: let us assume that a group is focused on work and achieving aims. If somebody, who is used to fulfil the role of a group joker wants to continue doing so, his/her taking up this role will be contested, and if he/she does not abandon it, he/she might be facing group ostracism. The following question also appears: if somebody who has always fulfilled a certain role within a group, enters a group where this role is rejected or already taken up, can this person inhabit a different place in the structure of the group? Group assimilation, in this case, can be a difficult – or even impossible – process.

Some roles can be inscribed in the mechanism of exclusion more than others. The taboo transgressing kamikaze or the clown revealing their vulnerabilities frequently are marginalised – the group stops tolerating them. It is worth mentioning the role of a group scapegoat. The best candidate for this role is a person who is a new-joiner or somebody who is sceptical

about the group (Brown, 2006, p. 206). It is usually adopted by somebody who – from the perspective of the group – is deviant, the other, and thus induces aggression (Jedliński, 2000, p. 20). Frequently, this person is unable to defend himself/herself against this aggression which cements their very bad position within the group. Most groups require the role of a scapegoat as their presence helps to discharge the tension in many situations. Aggression is relocated and the scapegoat takes all the consequences of group failures or the frustrating experiences, even if he/she is not the reason. This mechanism works out when the genuine reason for frustration is a strong person or situation which the group is unable to cope with in a different – i.e. constructive – way.

The scapegoat is somewhat in the centre of the group's (negative) attention, but with time the group ceases to require this role, at least temporarily, and this person may be excluded.

## **Conclusions**

Establishing peer relationships is a prerequisite for satisfying basic psychosocial needs, and – at the same time – constitutes a fundamental developmental task in adolescence. Both teachers and tutors should see it as an issue worthy of reflection.

Peer exclusion is a process with two extremes: from maximal inclusion to maximal exclusion. Assuming this perspective, we need to analyse peer relationships through the prism of how these are established and where problems appear. The sooner we intervene in the disturbed process of inclusion, the less effort it will require and the more effective it will be.

Peer exclusion takes different forms. In order to introduce an effective correction of negative behaviours we need to consider this phenomenon in a broad context including not only the perspectives of the excluded and excluding but also taking into account the quality of functioning of the schooling environment (other peers' behaviour, social climate of the school, functioning of teachers and tutors, parenting skills).

Peer exclusion, although acute for the person experiencing it, is one of the natural mechanisms of groups. The group can draw on exclusion as one of the ways of achieving balance, unity, and unanimity, which are prerequisites of the correct course of other group processes.



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