

THE INNER CIRCLE

Heather Benedick
Social Work
Joliet Catholic Academy, Joliet, IL

[Assignment: Writers use description to convey a precise and vivid impression to their readers of a particular person, place, thing, or experience. As you begin to gather information, think of your subject from several viewpoints; as you shape materials, consider your own interest in the topic, its larger implications, and how you might convey these to a specific audience.]

Four years is a long time to spend with a group of people, especially when the people do not appeal to you. I did, however, spend four years with my high school classmates. Although I left the school with many valuable friends, I will more likely remember the people that judged and dismissed me. It is hard to forget these people because it seemed they were the ones that controlled the atmosphere at my high school.

I went to a school that could have been the subject of a bad teen movie. We had, like most high schools, cliques, pretty cheerleaders and popularity contests. I never won a popularity contest, I was never a pretty cheerleader, and I didn't have a clique. The bubbly cheerleaders who won these contests would not be on my list of open, friendly people. These are the people that made tears of sadness impossible to produce on graduation night.

The social arena of my high school was dominated by a group of girls that would be classified as popular were they to star in that teen movie. These girls would appear to have it all: beauty, friends, and status. When they were acting obnoxious, people said they were cute; when they said something stupid, people laughed; and best of all, they were always color coordinated. They walked through the halls wearing smiles brighter than the sequins on their shoes. I noticed early in my high school career that these smiles were reserved for the few worthy individuals that happened to meet the standards of excellence as defined by these girls. I was never one of these worthy individuals. I never knew if it was because I wasn't a cheerleader or because my lipstick was just all wrong. I was unacceptable to these people and generally avoided confrontation at all costs. My problem with my classmates was not that they were beautiful or even that they were popular, but that they were never happy with that. They had to ridicule, insult, and diminish the self-esteem of the people they viewed as socially unacceptable. The assaults were very discreet and often non-verbal: the little snicker when you spoke in class or the nasty look in the hallway. Not only did these attacks anger me, but I wondered why they felt it necessary. I always thought that if a person was happy with him or herself, the need to insult others would be gone.

Many people would say that these things can be easily ignored, but four years is a long time. I never felt the problem rested with me, but

this didn't make it any easier to deal with the fact that I had to attend a high school where I was uncomfortable in many of my classes.

The atmosphere in class was defined by these people. Although they were not the majority, they were the loudest, and like infants, they constantly demanded attention. In class they would interrupt the person speaking to shout out their opinion, and they would shout ridiculous complaints during tests in order to get attention. I remember one particular complaint. A girl stated that the words used on the test were too complex (her example was the word "intelligence"). This girl did not raise her hand and wait for the teacher, she just shouted it out. They also never failed to comment when another person made a statement in class because the spotlight was the only place bright enough for them.

I remember wishing to be like them just to escape the continual feeling of being shut out. The main goal of most of the people who were not "popular" was to remain on the good side of the popular people. Generally, there was no desire to be their friend, just the desire to be left alone. The constant desire to avoid confrontation made the atmosphere uncomfortable. Confrontation with the popular crowd people was not like confrontation with a normal person; this was worse. This group functioned more like a street gang than like several individuals; if one of them had a problem with you, they *all* had a problem with you. This situation was most dreaded. They could make your life impossible by insulting you, saying things about you behind your back, and just generally being mean. I always felt that the confrontation was not worth it.

When you are in high school people will tell you to savor these times because they are the best times of your life. I always prayed for them to be over. So much of every one of my days was spent in that school that I am depressed when I think of the ways that I behaved. I let comments go because I didn't want the confrontation, and I avoided many student activities because they were dominated by people that would not include me even if I was there. The hallways were flooded with the voices of the dominating class and mine was only heard by the person standing next to me. I always dreamed of making my mark in high school, but I never even had the courage to raise my voice.