

RACHEL SIMMONS
BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, ODD GIRL OUT

Rachel Simmons is the author of *The New York Times* bestseller *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. Simmons grew up in the suburbs of Washington, DC, and graduated from Vassar College. Following graduation she worked for Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani as an Urban Fellow. Recipient of a Rhodes Scholarship in 1997, she worked for New York's Senior Senator Charles E. Schumer, and after the election attended Oxford University, where she began studying female aggression.

Simmons is a pioneer in the exploration of schoolgirl cruelty and treats the subject in a thorough and illuminating manner. Over the course of a year, she spoke to 300 girls from 10 schools across the US, some with middle-class white student populations, others with students of various races and from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The girls ranged in age from 9 to 15. One of the reasons her book is so revealing is because of Simmons's strengths as an interviewer. As she explains, her method of discussion involved moving from where the girls led and emphasizing their voices rather than her own. Instead of telling them not to bully and to be nice, like most adults would do, she assumed that many of them could be mean. In this way she was able to draw out not only the victims of bullying but also the aggressors.

Simmons contends that incidents of bullying could be avoided if girls were encouraged to assert their negative feelings more directly. She believes this would empower them to negotiate conflicts and to define relationships in "new and healthier ways." Parents, she says, should show their daughters that conflict-free relationships don't exist. Instead of thinking conflict ends relationships, girls would then learn that they can't survive without it and would not let fear control them. "I believe our task now," writes Simmons in her book, "is to give every girl, every parent, and every teacher a shared, public language to address girls' conflicts and relationships."

Odd Girl Out is both an exposé and instruction manual for treating girls' aggression. As such, it treats its subject with both clinical objectivity and experiential empathy. Simmons relies heavily on her interviews with girls and other research, but she intersperses enough of her own personal anecdotes to make the book striking for both its intellectual and emotional accuracy. Simmons released her latest book, *Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write about Bullies, Cliques, Popularity and Jealousy* in January of 2004.

Through countless interviews, Simmons constructs a sometimes-disheartening narrative of contemporary female relationships in America. On the one hand, Simmons says, the influence of feminism has raised the bar for women, allowing and expecting them to assert themselves, to be strong and aggressive. On the other hand, as Simmons' interviews and research show, girls are brought up to find these very qualities undesirable and even antithetical to their own ideas of femininity. Girls feel pressure to please everyone, to always appear carefree and to look perfect. The result is competition and aggression waged beneath the radar through darting glances, note-passing, ignoring your friends, and innumerable other covert forms of bullying.

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Though focused on the plight of today's girls, Simmons's insight often cross gender boundaries. It is an important and timely work for women reliving their past or men interested in learning about the nature of female relationships. Simmons is the founding director of the Girls Leadership Institute and a consultant to schools all over the country. She is writing her latest book about leadership skills for girls and is co-writing a new film for Lifetime Television about aggression between women. For more information please visit www.apbspeakers.com.

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls
- Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write about Bullies, Cliques, Popularity and Jealousy