

Influence of peer groups on adolescent social identity

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This literature review will examine the influence peer groups have on social identity during the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, which is adolescence, using evidence supported by various articles to give a broad overview of the construction of identity during adolescence.

Most adolescents feel they belong to a peer group. It is well documented (Sussman et al., 2007) that there are benefits to belonging to an in-group. By belonging to a peer group, an individual is integrated into a social network by which a conception of identities and self-esteem are arranged. In addition, belonging to a social group feels a more positive sense of wellbeing than those who do not belong to a peer group. Adolescence is a time of physical, cognitive and emotional adaptation. The emotion peers give each other during this transition helps. The benefits of belonging to a peer group are well documented, however how peer groups function to do this is not understood well.

In a study by Leicester University (Tarrant, 2002) the psychological processes behind the benefits were examined in closer detail using social identities theory. The basis of this theory is that much of our self-concept is regulated from belonging to an in-group which motivates positive evaluations towards group members. By socially contrasting the characteristics of the in-group with other members outside the in-group the out-group, positive social identities are established. Intergroup discrimination can occur when members place negative attributes to an out-group and positive attributes to their own in-group. There are

not many studies which have used social identities theory as a predictor for adolescent social groups.

Identity development during adolescence is characterized by systematic maturation and substantial stability with underlining mechanisms being life events, transitions and experiences occurring every day. More effective functioning in several domains is closely related to certain and cohesive identity. Identity development is facilitated by close family relationships and strong friendship bonds (Branje, 2022).

Self-identity encompasses an individual's self-perceptions, self-concepts and self-esteem. It involves the understanding and internalization of one's own beliefs, personal values and attributes (Zhang & Qin, 2023).

In a study by Leicester University, 115 adolescents who were mostly white ethnic origin took part. In line with the social identities' theory participants rated more positive characteristics to a greater extent in the ingroup than the outgroup. The findings expanded on earlier research and demonstrated how the benefits derived from group membership in adolescence are raised through intergroup processes (Tarrant et al., 2001). Another study by Tarrant (2022) also highlighted that his work showed the benefits from group membership in adolescence were part realised through group membership.

During adolescence Erikson (1967) believed there were critical tasks to accomplish. These were to solve the identities versus role confusion crisis, find their sense of self and discover a social landscape where they can make

meaningful connections with others allowing friendships to be built. Several theories exist that have attempted to explain social identities with different philosophies on what it is. For instance, Waterman (1993) held the idea that identities reflect a person's best potential which is achieved by self-realizing the activities and energizing and empowering them to complete their goals in life.

Peer influence not only affects adolescents but can apply to student athletes too. A study by Pennsylvania State University and Western University investigated the association between social identity and susceptibility to peer influence. Athletes' conformity to teammates risky behaviors. It was hypothesized that the athletes that strongly identified with their team would be at risk of conforming to risky behaviors. Athletes from 23 National athletic associations completed surveys and reported the extent to which they would engage in risky behaviors. Results indicated that both Group and individual social identities were more likely to conform indicating that higher social identities are more prone to being negatively influence using these findings from the survey conducted could help prevent risky behaviors as the Group level processes are better understood (Graupenspeger et al., 2018).

Bradford Brown et al. (1986) studied the importance of peer groups or crowd affiliation in adolescence. There are two studies involving 1,300 7th to 12th graders in Midwestern US communities. They investigated the valuation of belonging to a crowd in addition to the reasons to support or oppose crowd

groupings. The authors found that crowd affiliation declined across age. Young adolescents liked belonging to a peer group underlining the crowd's potential to provide emotional support, improve friendships and increase social interaction. Older adolescents were dissatisfied with peer group and felt friendship networks removed the need for peer group membership.

Clasen and Bradford Brown (1985) investigated the multidimensionality of peer pressure in adolescence. In a sample of 689 adolescents in north America they found misconduct increased grade levels to conform peer groups. The authors found strong peer pressure in the schools

Another way adolescents attempt to form continuity and self-sameness is by integrating their past, present and future selves into one cohesive narrative about themselves. The friends' adolescents make could be part of this life narrative as long-lasting friendship is important in life, so it is also important in identity. What adolescents feel is important to their identity is subject to change as everyone has a different life story that changes constantly. The dual cycle identity models focus on the development of the dynamic identity processes of exploration and commitment that operate along two intercalated cycles. Firstly, in the identity formation cycle adolescents consider identity alternatives and form identity commitments. In the identity Maintenance cycle serves the function to maintain and in addition strengthen chosen commitments in a dynamic between identity and in-depth exploration of current commitments such as social responsibility to a peer network (Branje, 2022).

In a three-way longitudinal study, Sugimura et al. (2024) investigated the interplay between personal identity and social identity among vocational high school students. It examined the relationship between adolescents' personal and social identities over three years of vocational school. 4,264 high school students in Japan took part. A random intercept cross lagged panel was used. The results indicated that social identity predicted increases in personal identity one year later. The results demonstrate the importance of social identity as an important resource for personal identity development among vocational high school students (Sugimura et al., 2024).

Peer influence is a pervasive force during adolescence which shapes adaptive and maladaptive attitudes and behaviors. The conventional view is that peer influence results in negative behaviours. The influence compatibility model integrates converging views about early adolescence as a time of increased conformity. Evidence supports peer influence functions to increase affiliate similarity. Together the developmental forces sustain friendship and promote intragroup and interpersonal compatibility, incoherence's are eliminated that could cause social exclusion Laursen & Veenstra, 2021).

Peer groups are critical socialisation agents for the development of social behaviour in adolescence (Bushing & Krahe, 2020). The authors studied 16,893 students and showed that adolescent behaviour was affected by peers in the classroom. They noted that children and adolescents spend many hours a day interacting with those of same age and that aggressive behaviour may spread in peer groups.

Identity has several fragments such as political, achievement, ethnic background and physical identity. Peers play a role in shaping identity in many cultures, the approval they receive becomes increasingly important. A study examined the correlation between identity status and how it relates to peers, using the concept of four statuses devised by James Marcia (1999) which are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement. Using a correlational study using a sample of 156 participants from Bandung West Java Indonesia, a significant correlation was discovered for relationship identity. There were less correlations in other identity statuses. An important function of peer relationships is to provide information concerning the world outside the family. They receive responses about their abilities from peers in addition to this feedback they also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their peers in comparison to their own (Quadirah and Pebriani, 2017).

Another study explored the relationship between peer social support and self-identity. The participants comprised of 123 students were chosen using the proportional random sampling. The method used was a questionnaire using two measuring scales. The results found that there was a positive correlation between peer social support and identity (Vransisca, 2022).

An important part of the lives of adolescents is music. A study examined how music is used as a resource in small peer groups. Using social identity theory, the study wished to discover how music maintains group dynamics, how it is used to stereotype adolescents outside of the in-group, how it contributes to positive self-concept and how peer groups influence the enjoyment adolescents find in music. Three adolescent peer groups were interviewed comprising of

students from years seven and eight. During the discussion they explained how music plays a role in their lives. They explained their peer groups in the context of the school, describing self-categorization and stereotyping, ingroup and outgroup distinction and how their self-concept was formed from the outgroup. They discussed school music courses, advocating for the integration of new classes that included nontraditional instruments and the inclusion of new music styles (Zanardelli, 2021).

Ozturk and Sumbas (2023) study focused on the ending of friendship, why some friendships last and others do not was investigated. Conflict was an important element which arose when key responsibilities within friendships are not met accordingly, such as trust. A study by Hashmi and Fayyaz (2022) explored teenage emotions and success using phenomenological research, there was a correlation between teenagers' emotions and academic performance influenced by both peer and academic influence. Immediate responses to emotional turmoil are essential to mitigate detrimental effects on academic achievement.

Ji-Hoon's (2024) study found serious social problems in Korea such as misbehavior, violence and student dropout rates connected to stress in the academic environment. Activities outside of the school environment, recreational activities such as sports and creative activities enhance students' wellbeing, in addition to leisure activities done on an individual basis. Reducing stress levels by doing these activities improved academic performance in middle school students in Korea (Ji-Hoon, 2024).

Studies have delved into the effect peers have on individual pro-social behaviour. Using a two-way multi-level data set. Students from 1,308 took part from 252 schools in Germany. Main effects of the classroom level of pro-social behavior, cross level interactions between the classroom and the individual levels of pro-social behavior at time 1 and the moderating role of gender was examined. Results showed adolescents in classrooms with high levels collective levels of pro-social behavior at time 1 reported more pro-social behaviour at time 2 two years later demonstrating a class-level main effect. A significant cross level interaction indicated that a high level of pro-social behavior affected adolescents with lower levels of pro-social behavior at time 1. The influence of same gender peers was larger compared with opposite gender peers. During adolescence primary caregivers become less important and social agents began to influence individuals. Pro-social behavior is defined as any behavior that benefits another individual such as sharing, donating, comforting and comforting others. Pro-social behavior and aggressive behavior are inversely related however, they do represent independent dimensions underlining adolescent social relations (Busching and Krahe, 2020).

In conclusion, this literature review has given a broad overview of the influence of peers on adolescent's social identity using several studies by many authors.

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