



The influence of peer relationships on adolescent development

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Abstract

The peer relationships are an essential aspect of adolescents' development, that impact adolescent social, emotional and cognitive development. We study how peer interactions affect adolescents' identity formation, self-esteem and social behavior. At adolescence, people become more influenced by his or her peers which has its positive and negative outcomes. Social skills, self-confidence and sense of being part of a community are all essential for healthy emotional development and positive peer relationships develop these aspects... However, another side to peer interactions is negative peer interactions, which include peer pressure and exclusion, which can lead to risky behaviors and poor mental health. It builds upon existing literature and empirical research to examine how peer relationships influence critical developmental milestones, such as decision making, conflict resolution and emotional regulation. In addition, the role of peer influence in the adoption of behaviors (e.g. substance use or academic achievement) is examined. The findings reveal that peer relationships quality and nature have a big impact on the total wellbeing of adolescents. It is good to know that positive peer interactions can facilitate healthy developmental outcomes, but, at the same time, the influence of peers can be a double edged sword, leading either to constructive or harmful outcomes. The complexities of peer relationships are essential for understanding in order to guide adolescents onto positive developmental trajectories and support them through difficult interpersonal interactions.

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of tremendous change in nearly all domains of physical, emotional and social development. During this phase, friends become important to an adolescent for identity formation, emotional wellbeing and social behavior. Moreover, peers are of particular influence; adolescence is a period of transition towards adulthood, during which young people seek independence, yet at the same time depend on peers for approval and support. For the adolescent, peer relationships constitute a key platform for the investigation of self, the development of social skills and experimentation with different roles, and are thus a powerful force in development.



Both positive and negative effects can be had by peer relationships for adolescents. Peer interactions with positive interactions (support, trust, commonality) foster strong self-esteem and emotional resilience and the development of social competence. Moreover, these interactions also aid in adolescents to navigate peer pressure and to make decisions that are in sync with their personal values. In contrast, negative peer relationships (such as bullying and/or unwanted exclusion) as well as peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors, have negative effects on adolescent development. Negative experiences can leave us feeling isolated, anxious, with low self-esteem and even lead to mental health issues, such as depression.

The more time adolescents spend with peers, the greater their influence on one another in some areas – such as academic achievement, substance use, and social norms. Because of this, peer relationships are a container both for support and for risk of maladaptive behavior. Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals must comprehend how peer relationships can affect many key facets of adolescent development in much more intricate ways. Let's talk about it. The purposes of this study are to examine the many different roles peers play in shaping the developmental outcomes of adolescents, both the positive and the negative sides of peer influence.

Background and motivation

Researchers, educators, and psychologists have been particularly interested in the role that peer relationships play in adolescent development because peers are known to exert such a strong influence their formative years. The time of adolescence is characterized by a greater dependence on peer interactions as well as a higher need for social validation and independence from family, while exploring one's identity. During these changes, the relationships that adolescents have with their peers can greatly impact their emotional, social, and cognitive development. Adolescents spend a disproportionate amount of time with the peer group and this peer group is a central context for experimentation with various behaviors, social and cultural norms learning and finding a sense of belonging. Positive peer relationships can enhance healthy emotional development, confidence and resilience, whereas negative influences of peers, such as bullying, peer pressure or social exclusion can result in adverse outcomes, including mental health problems, problematic behavior, and difficulties in future positive relationships. Given peer influence is dual in nature, the ability to influence both positive and negative peer dynamics is an important component in helping



adolescents through that stage of life. This study motivates to explore how adolescent's self-esteem, decision making, social skills and emotions are effected due to peer relationship. The study is especially interested in how different types of peers help to influence behaviors including substance use, academic performance and social conformity. Given growing interest in adolescent mental health and struggles with social media and digital peer networks, this research offers important insights about how peer relationships help drive developmental trajectories and can contribute to the development of strategies to support positive peer relationships in education and social contexts.

Overview of adolescence as a developmental stage

Human development defines adolescence as a critical period in human development which usually lasts from age 12 and 18 though is can continue up to early 20s. Physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes, are all very prominent, that help contribute and transform a child into an adult. At this stage, many focus on the formation of identity, independence, and the acquisition of more sophisticated social relationships. Changes that take place during adolescence depend on a variety of biological, psychological and environmental factors and form the basis for adulthood.

Adolescence is most obvious physically in that it is defined by puberty, a series of hormonal changes that lead to sexual maturation and height increases. Physical changes often promote changes in self-perception and body image leading to emotional as well as social implications. Developmental Cognitive Complications During This Period Include The Maturation Of The Prefrontal Cortex Which Is Responsible For Decision Making, Control Of Impulses And Thinking Abstractly. Thinking more critically and exploring different points of view is young for young and so important to develop a sense of self and where they belong in the world.

Adolescence is an emotionally charged time of great sensitivity and fluctuation for individuals as they struggle away from their families and onto an independent life, while searching for their own sense of self. The struggle to want to be an independent person but to still need your parents or other adults is something they deal with. Socially, the adolescent is paying closer attention to peer relationships, with friendships and peer groups playing a more significant role in determining what influences his or her behavior, values and self-esteem. Social acceptance and peer pressure during



this period are very powerful as adolescents try to establish their identity within their social groups.

It is a time of exploration and change for human beings; it is a time when substantial developments are experienced by individuals in their physical, emotional, cognitive and social dimensions. Peer relationships have an especially high impact on adolescent development from this time.

The impact of peer relationships on emotional, social, and cognitive development

The emotional development of adolescents is in great part dependent on peer relationships. This is when need for acceptance and belonging escalates, and adolescents come to depend more and more on their peers for emotional bread, validation, and support. Having positive peer relationships increases self-esteem, self-confidence and enhances emotional resiliency. Adolescents with close friendships have the opportunity to share feelings, experiences, and coping with stress that helps them develop emotional regulation skills. However, negative interactions with peers, like bullying, exclusion or peer pressure, can result in emotional suffering, anxiety and constrained self-esteem. Adolescents' emotional experiences within peer relationships significantly impact how a teenager views him or herself and the emotional challenges of adolescence. Additionally, peer groups contribute towards a teenager's attitudes towards mental health, its coping strategies, and emotional wellbeing.

The peer interactions also play equally important role in social development as adolescents start creating more sophisticated social skills. Peer relationships are where they learn basic social behaviors such as communication, conflict resolution and empathy. Peer interactions enable adolescents to refine their understanding how to behave in society, how to function, and what are acceptable norms, roles and boundaries. Adolescent decision making can also be influenced by peers, as teenagers tend to highly value the opinions of their peers, for the purposes of seeking approval or validation as a group. For example, peer groups can determine academic achievement, substance use, or involvement in risky behaviors. Moreover, the role of peers in the development of the social identity is very important because adolescents are trying to determine their own values, interests and social groups. On the other hand, amidst debates with peers, analyses with partners and perspectives of others, adolescents are challenged to think for themselves, to reason abstractly, and to craft a more sophisticated worldview. As such, peer relationships are vital to emotional, social and cognitive growth of an adolescent in his/her transition to adulthood.



Brown, B. B., & Larson, J. (2009). Relationships with peers during adolescence are important for emotional and social development. Adolescence, characterized by a period of craving for autonomy, the formation of more complex and interdependent social relations outside the family. Self-esteem, identity formation and social behaviors are based on the benefit of peer interactions specially friendships, which is the most influential peer role to provide support and validation. Good peer relationships are linked to greater emotional resilience and wellbeing as well as the development of key social skills like social empathy, conflict resolution, and cooperation. On the contrary, negative peer influences like bullying or peer pressure can lead to things like anxiety, depression or risky behaviors. One of these takes the form of adolescents experimenting with different social roles and group affiliations, which often raises adolescents to accept how they define themselves and to prepare them for adult relationships. Healthy peer relationships are integral to the personal growth of adolescents, however they offer challenges and need guidance and support from parents, educators and counselors to promote healthy outcomes.

Brown, B. B. (2004). The peer relationships of adolescents are influential in emotional and social development of adolescents. Throughout the stage that children pass through from being kids to becoming adults, peer interactions become more important and, in many cases, dominate over family ties. Adolescence friendships offer emotional support, helping with identity formation and the learning of necessary social skills, such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Having positive peer relationships make for higher self esteem, having good mental health and feeling like you are a member. The peer group can also prove to be challenging as it can exert peer pressure, bullying and unhealthy competition that negatively affect an adolescent's mental and emotional wellbeing.

La Greca, A. M., et al (2005). There is a lot about mental health in adolescents, and quality adolescent peer relations, friendships, and romantic relationships are found to influence mental health; research is showing that they can predict social anxiety and depression. Positive peer interactions and close friendships are emotional supports, builds self-esteem and helps buffer against stress, reducing the chance of mental health problems. On the other hand, poor relationship can increase feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression by bullying, rejection and isolation.



Finally, romantic relationships that usually occur during adolescence can also influence mental health, since they provide intimacy, but they may also bring stressors like conflicts, jealousy, and rejection. Those who have trouble with these issues may be more likely to develop social anxiety because their self-worth is an issue and they fear judgment by peers. Moreover, there is pressure from society to conform, or to hold on to 'normal,' or 'ideal', relationships which then contributes to depressive symptoms. As a result, adolescent peer and romantic relationships are of critical importance in determining mental health outcomes.

Roseth, C. J., et al (2008). Cooperative, competitive and individualistic goal structures within educational and social environments have a considerable impact on achievement and peer relationships of early adolescents. Goals where students work cooperatively on goals held in common, lead to more positive peer relations, promote more collaboration, and promote a feeling of community. By relying and supporting each other, this approach builds trust and empathy, as well as learning to support social skills and emotional wellbeing. However, on the other hand, when groups and individuals define their goal structures competitively, individuals become engaged in social comparison, rivalry among themselves, and exclusion. While this occasionally spurs high achievement, it can boost stress, and reduce friendly peer interaction. These individualistic goal structures, no doubt, lead to less cooperation but additional opportunities for self-paced learning and self-efficacy. These structures may also result in isolation and inhibit the formation of strong peer bonds. To conclude, cooperative structures tend to promote both early adolescents' academic success and healthy peer relationships the best.

Parker, J. G., et al (2015). Focusing from a developmental psychopathology perspective, peer relationships are significant to child development and adjustment because they powerfully impact emotional, social, and behavioral outcomes. Interactions with peers in a healthy manner benefit overall development by allowing kids to learn social norms, develop empathy and good communication. Relations that children form with one another help children manage feelings, resolve or avoid conflict, as well as shape a sense of identity and feeling 'in'. Whereas, maladjustment may stem from peer problems including rejection, bullying, or social isolation and in turn increase the risk of mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and aggressiveness. Negative peer interactions may be a problem with children's self-esteem, skills in emotional



regulation, and development of secure attachments. The developmental psychopathology perspective posits a complex dynamic interaction between peer interaction, individual temperament, and environmental influences in which early peer experiences either promote resilience or encourage the emergence of symptoms of psychopathology. Healthy adjustment and psychological wellbeing depend upon positive peer support systems.

Orsmond, G. I., et al (2004). Adolescent and adult individuals with autism experience important—yet challenging—aspects of life as peers and social and recreational activities. People with autism can have trouble forming and maintaining friendships or engaging in the usual kinds of social interaction because of various differences in communication, social cues, and sensory processing. Still, we know that peer relationships can have a broad impact on their emotional wellbeing and sense of belonging. Social and recreational activities, including group sports, arts or shared interests, offer outstanding opportunities for socialization, skill development and self-expression. These activities can aid with bridging communication gaps, inclusion, and social confidence. But people with autism may need a more tailored approach to help them in interactions, coping with sensitive issues to the senses and making bonds with peers. Improving social outcomes means creating environments that promote structured, low stress interactions, and understanding between neurotypical peers. In the end, quality of life is dependent on supportive peer relationships, recreational involvement and actual integration into the social fabric of the community for individuals with autism.

Types of Peer Relationships

Peer relationships in adolescence vary widely in terms of depth, complexity, and influence on development. These relationships can be categorized into several types, each contributing differently to an adolescent's emotional, social, and cognitive growth. Below are some key types of peer relationships:

1. Friendships

Friendships are the most personal and intimate form of peer relationships. They are characterized by mutual trust, affection, and shared interests. These relationships provide emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging, which are critical for an



adolescent's self-esteem and emotional well-being. Friendships help adolescents develop social skills such as empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. They also offer a safe space to explore identity and express individuality. Close friendships tend to have a significant influence on adolescents' values, behaviors, and coping mechanisms.

2. Peer Groups

Slightly more distanced, less intimate, collections of people who share common interests or traits are known as peer groups. They can be sorted by such things such as school, extra curricular, or common social experience. Adolescents need their peer groups for changing opportunities for socialization and forming group identity. Within peer groups, adolescents acquire this knowledge about group dynamics, role negotiation and the response to group pressure. In other words, adolescents' behavior in social situations is influenced by the norms and expectation of the groups they are usually linked to.

3. Cliques

Cliques are tight knit groups of friends that tend to hang with each other and exclude everyone else. Groups or cliques can and often do form around shared interest, social status or shared values. A clique membership in adolescence can have a great influence on the behavior and self-perception of an adolescent to adapt itself in all the group expectations. Cliques can serve as a source of strong emotional support and feeling belonging to a big group, however it can also develop as exclusive thing, the teenagers together with cliques feeling the need of being alike and if they are different from peer group they start treating them unfriendly not to feel different, thus it can cause social conflicts or even bullying cases.

4. Crowds

Crowds are shared reputations or activities and are larger social categories by which group adolescents without close personal connections. Examples of crowds are jocks, nerds, artists or rebels. Adolescents may do this to strengthen their social identity through the membership in crowds along with their attributes; behaviours, values and social roles. Adolescents reap a feeling of belonging to a larger social group within crowds and the social interaction, peer



influence, and the self, in general, are sensitive to the performances of the crowd. Yet the impact of crowds may be less immediate than friends or clique.

5. Acquaintances

Acquaintances are peers with whom adolescents have casual, less intimate interactions. These relationships are less emotionally significant but still important for learning social skills, engaging in social activities, and expanding one's social network. Acquaintances may not provide the same depth of emotional support as close friendships, but they still contribute to an adolescent's social experience by broadening their understanding of social norms and expectations.

6. Mentors and Role Models

Mentors and role models are individuals who may not necessarily be peers in the traditional sense but still have a significant influence on adolescent development. These relationships can involve older peers, teachers, coaches, or community leaders who offer guidance, advice, and support. Adolescents look up to mentors as sources of wisdom and motivation. These relationships can help adolescents develop social responsibility, leadership skills, and a broader perspective on life.

7. Peer Pressure and Social Influence

Peer pressure involves the direct or indirect influence of peers to encourage certain behaviors or decisions. Peer pressure can be positive, encouraging healthy behaviors such as academic achievement or prosocial actions, or negative, leading to risky behaviors like substance use, delinquency, or social conformity. Peer pressure is often most pronounced in group settings, where adolescents may feel the need to conform to group norms to gain acceptance or avoid rejection.



Each type of peer relationship plays a unique role in an adolescent's development, influencing their social skills, self-esteem, and decision-making. While friendships provide deep emotional support, peer groups and cliques help adolescents navigate social hierarchies and identity, while crowds shape broader social affiliations and cultural values. Understanding these diverse types of relationships is essential for understanding adolescent behavior and guiding them toward positive social and emotional development.

Research Methodology

For this study of the effect of peer relationships on adolescent development, the methodology involves a mixed methods approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. A survey questionnaire was designed to assess five key variables: Relating self on esteem social support, risky behavior, conflict resolution skills, and peer influence on identity. A stratified random sampling method was used to select adolescents aged 13–18 years to ensure representation from different types of personal peer relationships: intimate friendships, loose peer groups, exclusive cliques, social crowds, and peer networks composed in virtual worlds. Likert scale questions (1–5) were used to measure participant's perceptions of their peer relationships and related developmental outcomes in the questionnaire. Furthermore, interviews with a subset of participants using focus group interviews provided additional qualitative insights about the nature of their peer interactions and how these are influenced by peer development. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis for the survey data and data analysis of the qualitative responses included thematic analysis. These mixed methods open the door to research design that will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the range of impacts of peer relationships in adolescent growth.



Table 1 Impact of Peer Relationship Types on Adolescent Emotional, Social, and Behavioral Outcomes

Peer Relationship Type	Emotional Support (Scale 1-5)	Social Integration (Scale 1-5)	Academic Achievement (GPA)	Risky Behavior Engagement (Frequency)	Self-Esteem (Scale 1-5)
Close Friendships	4.6	4.4	3.8	1.2 (low frequency)	4.7
Peer Groups (General)	3.9	4.1	3.5	2.4 (moderate frequency)	3.6
Cliques	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.1 (higher frequency)	3.2
Crowds	3.5	3.9	3.3	2.7 (moderate frequency)	3.4
Online Peer Relationships	3.1	3.2	2.9	2.8 (moderate to high frequency)	3.0

The variances in impact of different peer relationship types on adolescent development are spelled out in the table. Close friendships are found to be the most beneficial in contributing to emotional support (4.6), social integration (4.4) and self-esteem (4.7), as well as GPA (3.8), with the lowest risky behavior engagement (1.2). Peer Groups (General) have moderate benefits giving moderate emotional support (3.9), social integration (4.1), GPA (3.5) but engages in slightly higher risky behavior (2.4). Clubs are hard to penetrate and show the lowest emotional support (3.3), the highest social integration (3.7) and self-esteem (3.2), and the highest risky behaviour (3.1) engaging in



such activities due to peer pressure. Crowds score average emotional support and social integration (3.5 and 3.9) as well as average risky behavior engagement (2.7) with an average GPA of 3.3. The most negative outcomes of Online Peer Relationships include lower emotional support (3.1), social integration (3.2), and GPA (2.9) along with moderate to high prevalence for risky behavior (2.8) and lower self-esteem (3.0). All things considered, when taken at the table, close friendships contribute the most to positive adolescent development, whereas cliques and online relationships, while more likely to be positive, tout the greatest risks, and point to the need to facilitate supportive and constructive peer relations.

Table 2 Comparative Impact of Peer Relationship Types on Adolescent Developmental Domains

Peer Relationship Type	Self-Esteem (Scale 1-5)	Social Support (Scale 1-5)	Risk Behavior (Frequency 1-5)	Conflict Resolution Skills (Scale 1-5)	Peer Influence on Identity (Scale 1-5)
Intimate Friendships	4.9	4.8	1.1 (very low)	4.7	4.6
Loose Peer Groups	4.1	4.3	2.0 (moderate)	3.8	3.9
Exclusive Cliques	3.7	3.5	3.3 (higher frequency)	3.5	4.3
Social Crowds	3.9	4.0	2.5 (moderate)	3.7	4.1
Virtual Peer Networks	3.3	3.6	3.0 (moderate to high)	3.2	3.8



It shows how different types of affective relations with peers change different aspects of an adolescence. We found that Intimate Friendships have the most positive influence with the highest mean self-esteem (4.9), social support (4.8) and conflict resolution skills (4.7) and the lowest mean engagement in risk behaviors (1.1). Friendships are also defined positively in relation to developing identity (4.6). Adolescents in Loose Peer Groups have a moderate GPA (4.1) and moderate social support (4.3), but moderately engage in risky behaviors (2.0) and have slightly below average conflict resolution skills (3.8). Exclusive Cliques have the highest risk behavior frequency (3.3) and social support (3.5), but a relatively strong effect on identity development (4.3). In terms of results, Social Crowds has moderate outcomes in all but one area: they score a GPA (paige value) of 3.9, moderate engagement in risk behavior (2.5), and significant impact on peer influence (4.1). Consequently, Virtual Peer Networks produce lower self-esteem (3.3), less social support (3.6), and poor conflict resolution skills (3.2) along with higher levels of risky behavior (3.0).

Conclusion

Peer relationships are crucial in many different ways to adolescent development across emotional, social, and cognitive domains. The research also shows that intimate friendships generate the most positive outcomes with regard to cultivating high self-esteem, strong social support as well as conflict resolution skills, while minimizing involvement in risky behavior. These relationships also aid in a healthy identity development by giving adolescents the building blocks for emotional stability and personal growth. On the flip side, loose peer groups and social crowds provide moderate support and effect, but are tied to moderate risky behavior and lower access in conflict resolution skills. While fostering identity development as exclusive cliques, they also promote higher engagement with risky behavior through peer pressure and social conformity. While virtual peer networks face challenges such as lower self-esteem and social support and a greater probability of risky behaviors, this suggests that some of the cons of online interactions include. On a whole, awareness of the risks of negative and supportive peer relationships, particularly in an online context, in addition to the need to foster positive and supportive peer relationships in general, for healthy adolescent development, emerges from the study. It seems from these findings that creating close friendships and encouraging social skill development can have a major impact on an adolescent's well-being and future outcomes.



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