

A Psychological perspective of Parent and Peer Influence during Adolescence: A Critical Review of the Existing Literature

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Abstract

Peer pressure, a common nightmare faced by many parents, is a problem where the question of parents' ability (or inability) to influence their children's choices and decisions directly clash with the influence of peers. Peer pressure is often used to transmit group norms and foster loyalty to the group. However, researchers predominantly focused on negative aspects of peer influence during adolescence.

This paper discusses positive and negative influences of parents and peer groups on how adolescents adjust in different settings. Theories in relation to parenting that emphasized individual inherited tendencies and the interplay of behaviour and the environment which will determine individual development during adolescence is considered. The researcher concluded that positive parenting and prevention of negative peer pressure leads to a decreased antisocial behaviour among adolescents. It is recommended that parents should play a mediation role and interact effectively with adolescents at home to prevent negative peer group influence.

Keywords: Parenting, Peer influence, Adolescence

1. Introduction

Normally, parents try to do their best while bringing up their children, nurturing them with love, teaching them right from wrong and hoping the best for their future. However, the time spent on them has little effect on their long-term development, particularly when they leave their nest to explore the world around them. Peer pressure is most often associated with risky or problematic behaviors but what is during this phase is the unbreakable link between the influence of peers and the development of an adolescent's own personal sense of self and identity. Because of developing characteristics during adolescence, group and peer pressure is the strongest for most individuals. At that time young people are divided between dependency on parents and greater independence where they search for identity while building their self-respect.

Previous studies of peer pressure were mainly focused on the situation in which an individual is pressured and parents oppose this pressure (Brown & Larson, 2009). Over the past decade,

researchers have moved away from traditional assumptions which stated that parents lose the ability to control or guide a child during adolescence as parents lose the ability to control or guide a child's peer interactions. Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1976) ecological systems perspective holds that in order to truly understand human development, the entire ecological system in which it grows must be taken into account. For a child, this ecological system includes both the influence of their parents and their peers, which are considered to be microsystems within the child's environment. Both parents and peers may influence a child through exhibiting or reinforcing certain behaviors or attitudes or by disapproving or forbidding particular behaviors or attitudes. Parents and peers can also influence child development in unique ways either through different parenting styles or through peer pressure.

Adolescence is a critical period in human development where the individual begins to develop a stance towards the world or an identity. It is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, normally between the ages of 10-19 years. Hall (1904) claimed that adolescents are characterized by emotional instabilities and hyper-activities, which cause them to experience storms and stress. Erickson (1965), opined that identity formation during this stage of development creates tension in the adolescents to the extent that some of them become confused about their personality. It is the era of peer group when the child spends most of his days with others of his age. Adolescence is also described as developmental stage characterized by significant biological, psychological and social changes, including the physical and hormonal transformations that puberty brings and the increased importance of peer relationship (Patton, Sawyer, Santelli, Ross, Afifi, Allen & Viner, 2016). It is the transitory period the individual passes through in his or her growth from childhood to adulthood. Studies have shown that the period consists of pressure which may be either internal or external to the young adult (Adams, 2006, Schneider, 2010). Besides being a transitory period, they posited that it is a time of self-definition for the young individual.

Fox, Manning, Murphy, Urborn, Marwick and O'Shea (2008) define parenting as the skill or activity of looking after your own children. Parenting is a whole lot of responsibility, which is taken up by father and mother contributing individually their own parts which make lots of impact to the whole development of the children. Childbearing and rearing are twin major roles of parents in a home. A lot of people have argued that it takes two to bear a child and so it is only very necessary that children are properly reared by both parents. For instance Ekiran (2003) is of the opinion that as the agent of socialization, most societal norms specify that children should grow up in intact families with both parents seeing to the physical and moral needs of children. Baumrind (1996) maintains that there is the best style of parenting. As a leading authority in parenting, she believes parents should be neither punitive nor aloof; rather, they should develop rules for children while at the same time being supportive and nurturing.

It is natural, healthy and important for children to have and rely on friends as they grow and mature. Peer can be positive and supportive. Positive pressures from friends tend to motivate adolescents to engage in activities where they could excel such as athletics, music, community services, various extracurricular activities and other efficient endeavors. However, peers can also have a negative

influence. They can encourage each other to skip classes, steal, cheat, use drugs or alcohol, share inappropriate materials on line, or become involve in other risky behaviors. The majority of adolescents with substance abuse problems began using drugs or alcohol as result of peer pressure. This paper therefore focuses on the aspects of peer pressure during adolescence and parental influence.

2. Concept of susceptibility of peer pressure

Berndt and Ladd (1989) define susceptibility to peer pressure as the influence that peer groups exert by rewarding those who conform to expected norms and/or punishing those who violate them. Social influence of others is a continuing process that can be seen as a basis of individuals' socialization across the life span. Arguably, one of the most important periods and one marked by remarkable and rapid changes is adolescence. During this period, the concept of peer influence is related to a mutual influence process known as peer contagion through which peers become increasingly similar over time in different characteristics (Dishon & Dodge, 2005).

During adolescence, peer relationships take on increasing importance and play a critical role in adolescents' development of intimacy, social skills and self-concept (Klarin, 2006). Through interactions with significant others, adolescents create their identity and build self-concept. Teenagers, because they want to be accepted by their peers, may willingly abandon many of the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors taught previously by parents or learnt in school. There are different mechanisms of mutual influence process, and one of the most frequently mechanisms referred to is youth peer pressure.

In the current literature various researchers made a distinction between peer pressure and peer influence. For instance, Kiran-Esen (2003) suggests that every influence exerted by a peer group is a form of peer pressure. According to them, peer pressure is defined as persuading or encouraging another person to engage in certain types of behavior. It can be direct or indirect. However, indirect peer pressure is not always as obvious to a person as direct peer pressure. According to McIntosh et al. (2003) peer pressure refers only to direct forms of persuasion, encouragement or coercion to manifest certain behaviors, whereas peer influence refers to indirect forms. Furthermore, Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) suggest that peer influence includes different aspects of peer relationships, and thus no single definition can capture all the complexity of peer influence on adolescent behavior. That is, peer pressure is just one form of peer influence.

Peers exert influence in multiple ways. Peer pressure can be direct (for instance, through direct attempts by peers to instigate or prevent behaviors), or more subtle (for instance, when peers avoid or ostracize individuals who do not conform to group norms). As members of peer groups, adolescents face numerous subtle forms of social influence, such as peer expectations. By contrast, peer pressure refers to situations when adolescent based on their past experiences or peer reactions deliberately changes one's behavior in order to avoid being laughed at, teased, or ostracized by peers.

Peer pressure is a narrower concept than peer influence. It refers to expectations exerted by a peer group to behave in a particular way regardless of one's inclinations and desires. Thus, everything adolescent does in order to gain peers acceptance i.e. positive reinforcement) or avoid sanctions can

be defined as peer pressure. According to Brown, Bakken, Ameringer & Mahon (2008) susceptibility to peer pressure is a multidimensional construct that needs to take into account different domains in which adolescents perceive peer prompting. In order to identify peer pressure domains, Brown, Clasen & Eicher (1986) asked teenagers to report on pressures they perceive from peers. Based on content analysis, five domains were identified: (1) family involvement, (2) school involvement, (3) peer involvement, (4) peer norms (e.g., to follow peers' musical tastes or dressing), and (5) misconduct. It seems that peer pressure, to a certain extent, occurs in all key domains of adolescent life. In addition, authors have also examined susceptibility to peer pressure and perception of the intensity of peer pressure in a sample of teenagers ranging in age from 12 to 18 years. With respect to different domains, the results of the study have shown that adolescents report peer pressure to engage in misconduct less frequently than other forms of peer pressure. Furthermore, gender differences were observed only in the misconduct domain with boys being more susceptible to peer pressure than girls.

Most of the current research has focused on processes related to peer pressure and its negative effects on adolescent development (Berndt, 1979; Brown, 1999). However, very little is known about the characteristics that make teens more prone to peer pressure (Allen, Porter, & McFarland, 2006). Early adolescence is dominated by peer pressure. During this period young person moves away from relationships with parents towards autonomy, independence, and development of self-esteem and identity. The need for acceptance by the peer group becomes a powerful force toward conformity. To gain peer acceptance, adolescents may need to conform to group norms, even if it implies disregard of one's wishes and beliefs. On the other hand, with maturation and identity development, conformity and group acceptance are no longer necessary for the sense of well-being. However, adolescents are not passive individuals whose behavior is motivated solely by peer pressure. That is, they choose who they want to spend their time with, and carefully select whom they want to be associated with as a way to gain social position within the peer group. Therefore, adolescent peer relations should be viewed as a process that combines number of factors, including adolescent's traits, attitudes, values and beliefs learned in the context of interactions with primary socialization sources (family, school, neighborhood), factors that affect peer selection and peer behavior in different contexts (Manzoni, Lotar, & Rihtaric, 2018).

Both researchers and practitioners have predominantly focused on negative aspects of peer influence, i.e. antisocial behavior. However, the role of peer relationships can be viewed in two ways: (i) Negative influence-could lead to antisocial behavior, poor working habits, neglect of schoolwork, and others types of behavior that neither parents nor public consider acceptable.

(ii) Positive influence-helps young people during transition period from a dependent childhood and protection given by parents towards greater independence in thought and action.

Moreover, peer groups can be helpful to young people in many ways. For example, peer groups have positive influences on how adolescents adjust to different settings. They also serve as a safe haven for sharing both successes and failures. Through interaction with peers adolescents learn to evaluate themselves through the eyes of their peers, learn communication skills, and increase empathy. In addition, peers confront adolescents' about their (negative) behavior by giving them positive criticism or feedback. Furthermore, peers support each other in periods rife with new

challenges and development of autonomy. Given this sense of shared experiences (i.e. pressures and stressors), adolescents feel most understood by and connected to their peers. During adolescence supportive friendships boost adolescent's self-esteem and promote adaptive strategies for coping with stress (Kaplan, 2004). Contrary to common opinion, peer groups provide support and encouragement for adolescents to develop new skills and abilities.

3. Parenting styles and influence of peer group

Parenting styles are divided into four major forms; the authoritarian, the authoritative, permissive, and rejecting/neglecting parenting styles. In Baumrind (1991) introduced one of the most influential theories of parenting styles, suggesting that parenting styles can be classified under four general patterns that differ along two dimensions: parental *responsiveness* and parental *demandingness*. Parental responsiveness entails the ability to respond to a child's evolving needs in a warm and flexible manner while parental demandingness entails the ability to set rules and standards that a child has to respect and follow. Parents who are both demanding and responsive are characterized as *authoritative*, while parents who are demanding and directive but not responsive are characterized as *authoritarian*. Parents who are responsive but not demanding are characterized as *permissive*, and parents who are neither responsive nor demanding are characterized as *rejecting/neglecting*.

Parenting styles play a significant role in shaping the personality and behaviour of children, therefore each of these parenting styles have been found to have different effects on children and their behaviour. Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart, and Cauffman (2006) found that children who have authoritative parents appear to be socially mature, less likely to be influenced by peer pressure, and more likely to be successful in school. Children who were raised under neglectful parenting styles were found to be less mature and more likely to be influenced by their peers (Steinberg et al., 2006). Those who were raised under either authoritarian or permissive parenting styles were found to be somewhere in between the characteristics of authoritative and neglectful parenting styles (Steinberg et al., 2006).

Neglectful and permissive parenting, who often involve in very few disciplinary actions, lack supervision, and lack support, were found to have the strongest links to anti-social behavior (Schaffer, Clark & Jeglic (2009). Researchers have consistently hypothesized that authoritarian parenting would lead to higher levels of anti-social behavior, but it was found in contrast that styles that were based on non-involvement (i.e. neglectful and permissive) have more of an effect than the styles that include harsh punishment, coercion, and high levels of support and control (Schaffer et al., 2009). In the same vein, they opine that although authoritarian parenting styles do have a negative effect on children, neglectful and permissive parenting styles have a longer lasting negative effect on the growth and development of adolescents, which can relate to the formation of anti-social behavior, as well support, empathy, protection, supervision, and affection are often needed in order to develop as a psychosocially mature, competent, and responsible individual (Steinberg et al., 2006). Loeber (1990) concluded that there is a special time in every child's life, which is typically the critical period during an individual's early childhood that a bond is formed with a primary caregiver.

4. Need Theory in Parenting

Roe (1956), a clinical psychologist propounded the needs theory in relation to parenting styles and occupational choice. She maintained that every individual inherits a tendency to expand his energies and psychic in some particular way. She further opines that the inherited tendency together with childhood experiences determines the manner an individual develops to satisfy his/her needs throughout life. The theorist claimed that needs development to a great extent, was a function of parenting practices.

Roe (1956) recognize three primary parenting styles namely: emotional concentration (autocratic), avoidance prone (permissive) and accepting (democratic) parenting models. Emotional concentration parenting ranges from over protection to over demanding. Parents expect much from their children but generally do not explain the reasoning for the rules or boundaries. They are less responsive to their children's needs and are more likely to spank a child rather than discuss the problem. During adolescence, the child may have less social competence as the parent generally tells the child what to do (Digest, 2007). On the other hand, avoidance prone (permissive) parenting ranges from neglect to rejection.

Within limit both physical and psychological needs of the child are ignored. Parenting adolescents here tends to be more impulsive and may engaged adolescents in behaviour misconduct and maladjustment. In the better cases they are emotionally secure, independent, and are willing to learn to accept defeat and also able to live life without the help of someone else. While accepting (democratic) parent sees to it that, the physical and psychological needs are met. Independence and self-reliance are encouraged in an active supportive way (Santrock, 2005). Adolescents with these parents tends to grow up to be independent and having a higher self-esteem because of their give-and-take nature of democratic parenting.

Roe (1956) emphasis the need for adequate parental care and understanding of the growing child. In contrast, he sees a deeper need for the total acceptance of the child, in order to assist the individual in his/her developmental process as parents and caregiver. The theory focus on the parent-child interaction, that has to do with mixture of attention, acceptance and avoidance by parents or authority. This theory is relevant because it emphasized total acceptance of the individual person, with no personal attachment, which is the basis in guidance and counselling situation, to help the client come out of his/her numerous psychological and emotional problems.

5. Social learning Theory

Social learning theory Bandura (1977) and Lou (2013) proposed the concept of social cognitive theory. A general contention is that much of the development in human cognition is explained by the interplay of internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavior; and environmental events. According to Nabavi (2014), Bandura in 1961 conducted his famous experiment known as the Bobo doll experiment, to study patterns of behaviour, by social learning theory, and that similar behaviors were learned by individuals shaping their own behaviour after the actions of models. Bandura's results from the Bobo Doll Experiment changed the course of modern psychology, and were widely credited for helping shift the focus in academic psychology from pure behaviorism to cognitive. He demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviors

which they have observed in other people. According to Banyard & Grayson (2000), Bandura believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning, and that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. In a similar vein, Shaffer (2005), suggested people learn from one another, via: Observation; Imitation; and Modeling. These three parameters have been carefully examined by Lou (2013) as follows:

Observational Learning: According to Lou, in his famous Bobo doll experiment, Bandura demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviors they have observed in other people. The children in Bandura's studies observed an adult acting violently toward a Bobo doll. When the children were later allowed to play in a room with the Bobo doll, they began to imitate the aggressive actions they had previously observed.

Imitation Process: This has to do with the ability to replicate a behaviour or action. The child who observes a certain behaviour repeatedly is expected at some point to be able to imitate and reproduce said behaviour.

Modelling process: It is important to note that not all observed behaviors are effectively learned. For the process to be successful, the model and observer must pay attention, must be able to remember, replicate the behavior and be able to demonstrate what they have learned.

6. Conclusion

Peer relationships become increasingly more influential and important as children begin to enter adolescence and as a result, risky behaviors such as engagement in sexual activities, substance abuse and crime may exert more of an influence than parental behaviors or attitudes.

Parents and caregivers should learn to accept, guide and be concern over their children's or adolescents' need to avoid their behavior misconduct, health, emotion and social problems.

To reduce negative peer influence therefore, parents should, as a matter of necessity inculcate right values in the children early enough so that it becomes the way of life, before peer age. However, positive parenting and prevention of negative peer pressure may lead to a decrease in anti-social behaviour. This could create better environments in school, homes, and society at large in general. By providing a warm, encouraging and safe home environment, future negative peer influences may be less likely to have an impact on adolescent development.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the review of the existing literature on parenting and peer group influence during adolescence:

- i. Parents should always plays a mediation role at home to prevent adolescents' negative influence
- ii. Parents should create adequate time to interact effectively with adolescents in order to prevent negative influence on adolescents
- iii. Parents should attend counselling session with trained counsellor to learn child rearing practices and how to exhibit adequate care, love, warmth, unconditional positive regard, acceptance, empathy and genuineness to children at home which will go a long way towards ameliorating the anxiety and stress parents experienced in parenting adolescents

- iv. Future research on this subject could consider empirical investigation using a larger random samples from various communities so that the results can be generalized. Parenting styles for future research should compare peer influence and parents' parenting styles based on social-economic-status of families, place of living-urban and rural.

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