Peer Influences and Interventions

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What do we Know about Peer Influence?

- Why are youths’ and peers’ behaviors similar?
- What behaviors are influenced by peers?
- Who are the sources of peer influence?
- When is peer influence likely to occur?
- How does peer influence work?
- Which youth are most/least susceptible to peer influence?
Why are youths’ and peers’ behaviors similar?

Homophily

Youths’ Attitudes and Behaviors

Peers’ Attitudes and Behaviors

Selection Effects

Socialization Effects
What behaviors are influenced by peers?

- **Externalizing Symptoms**
  - Illegal/violent behavior
  - Aggression

- **Substance Use**
  - Alcohol, nicotine use
  - Marijuana use
  - “Hard” drugs

- **Sexual risk behaviors**

- **Internalizing Symptoms**
  - Depressive symptoms
  - Suicidality

- **Other Health Risk Behaviors**
  - Weight-related behaviors
  - Nonsuicidal self injury

- **Prosocial and Health-Promotion Behaviors**

**Substantial Empirical Support**

**Emerging Empirical Support**

**New Area for Research**
Who are the sources of peer influence?

- Very best friends
- Popular youth
  - Social Preference (“Liked Most” – “Liked Least”)
  - Social Reputation (“Most Popular” – “Least Popular”)
- Friendship Groups (Cliques)
- Members of Similar Peer Crowds
- Romantic Partners
- “Peers” (undefined)
- Aggregated Peers (e.g., within group therapy, classroom placements, prison inmates)
Who: Future Research Needs

- Negotiating converging/diverging messages from various sources of influence
- Study of “anti-conformity” effects (i.e., from enemies; negative role models)
When is peer influence likely to occur?

• Developmental considerations
  • Adolescent transition
    • Identity development; reliance on peer feedback
  • School transitions
    • Navigation of new social milieu, expansion of peer network
  • Relationship stages
    • Friendship initiation vs. in later stages of relationship
When : Future Research Needs

- Longitudinal data needed to examine critical periods of:
  - exposure to
  - susceptibility/conformity to

…peer influence
How does peer influence work?

- Overt/Explicit Peer Pressure
- Social mimicry/response evocation
- Identity-based Theories
- Deviancy Training
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Identity-Based Theories

Youths’ Attitudes and Behaviors

Youths’ Perceptions of their Peers’ Attitudes and Behaviors

Peers’ Attitudes and Behaviors

Intervention Target
Biased Perceptions of Peers’ Attitudes and Behaviors

- Erroneous estimations of social norms (descriptive norms)
  - Aggressive-rejected youth
  - Prior engagement in the health risk behavior (i.e., false consensus effects)
  - Social norms interventions
100 SMU students will go out tonight.

93 of them will remember it tomorrow.

According to a recent survey, very few SMU students classify themselves as heavy drinkers. Most of us realize that having fun doesn’t have to mean throwing your head down a toilet after partying. Drinking responsibly is actually the most popular student activity. That’s worth remembering.

Congratulations. And welcome to the Majority.
Biased Perceptions of Peers’ Attitudes and Behaviors

- Erroneous estimations of social norms (descriptive norms)
  - Aggressive-rejected youth
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- Erroneous estimations of social norms (injunctive norms)
  - Pluralistic ignorance
  - Attitudinal interventions
FIVE DRINKS IN A SINGLE NIGHT IS CRAZY.

Most of us realize this and don't party insanely.

A 2002 survey of SMU students showed that 75 percent of us average five or fewer drinks when we party. This shows that we are part of a growing national trend: We enjoy partying with friends and do so responsibly. The survey shows that the vast majority of us drink once a week or less. We haven't missed a class due to drinking, haven't gone into a light process of drinking, don't drink and drive and have never been in trouble with authorities due to drinking either on or off campus. The best news you can get: Over 90 percent of students believe that drinking responsibly is actually the most popular student activity.

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Dyad Arrest Status | Dyad | Reaction
---|---|---
Nondelinquent $n = 126$ | Rule-Break | Laugh
Normative | Pause

Source: Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996.
Dyad Arrest Status  Dyad  Reaction

Nondelinquent  
\[ n = 126 \]

- Rule-Break
  - Laugh: 5.27
  - Pause: 2.48

- Normative
  - Pause: 5.81

Delinquent  
\[ n = 10 \]

- Rule-Break
  - Laugh: 5.52
  - Pause: 3.68

- Normative
  - Pause: 2.72

Source: Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996.
Dyad Arrest Status | Dyad | Reaction
---|---|---
Nondelinquent | Rule-Break | Laugh
  $n = 126$ | Normative | Pause

Mixed | Rule-Break | Laugh
  $n = 49$ | Normative | Pause

Delinquent | Rule-Break | Laugh
  $n = 10$ | Normative | Pause

Source: Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996.
Which youth are most/least susceptible to peer influence?
Which youth are most/least susceptible to peer influence?

- Aspects of the influence target
  - Social anxiety, low self-esteem
  - Low peer status
  - Poor family relationships
Which: Future Research Needs

Other Potential Moderators of Peer Influence Effects

- Aspects of the influential agent
  - High status

- Relationship-oriented moderators
  - Close, reciprocated friendships

- Contextual moderators
  - (e.g., presence of allies, size of peer group, risk/meaning of the behavior in that context).