

Final Project: Family vs. Peer Pressure

Kabbaj Mohamed

SSK 1204 Applied Independent Learning Methods  
Catherine Owens

Thursday 11th, 2006

Identity development is one of the most controversial topics that we encounter since humanity has shown some advance in the medical domain. Such as interest is due to a certain will to know what's hidden in people's mind. The unconscious or what is more used in the scientists jargon known as the subconscious, is the real monitor of our mind. This subconscious determines our perceptions of ourselves, of the others and of our life. Our judgment, our personality, our identity changes thanks to time while the real work is done in our deepest part of mind. This development starts with the apparition of the first cervical cells of the fetus and ends until the person gives her last breath. There are three fundamental stages where the central changes are noticed: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The majority of people experience in the first stage, childhood, a tremendous amount of complexes that would follow them until they reach certain advanced sub stages. In the last stage, adulthood, human tends to make apart his complexes, and he tries to establish a solid interaction with life instead of staying only receptive. The middle stage, which is adolescence, constitutes the bridge between the first stage and the last one respectively childhood and adulthood. This stage is the shortest one, but reveals to be the most important one. Scientists and identity theorists such as, Freud, Piaget, Durkheim and many others intensely persist to say that the result of a balanced personality could only result from a successful passage in adolescence. Success implies the fact of passing from equally balanced experience with the necessity of facing the pain. Most of the time, this pain helps the person to find herself and to be able to manage all what is bubbling in her mind. As it is known, childhood symbolizes the family education and growth; however, adulthood is a stage when a person is highly influenced by society, known as the peer pressure. The most crucial factor that shapes at the same time the adolescent identity, personality and judgment, is the dilemma between the social influence known as the peer pressure that starts early in adolescence, and the family education.

The phenomenon of peer pressure is not only a belief; it has been scientifically proved by the experiments of Solomon Asch in 1950. The experiment was conducted as follow:

“ Having carefully manipulated the circumstances of the study[...] he planted fake subjects, who had been instructed to give incorrect responses to relatively easy questions, among the true test subjects[...] Asch was able to scientifically demonstrate the power of peer pressure for the first time. Half a century later, Emory University psychologist Gregory Berns has conducted a clever experiment that sheds light on the neurological basis of such social conformity. Acting without group input, subjects chose the right answer about eighty-seven percent of the time. But when notified that the group had unanimously chosen an answer different from their own, their success rate dropped to less than sixty percent. Meanwhile, the MRI recorded what was happening in the subjects' brains. The result was provocative: Confronted with an incorrect group opinion, brain activity seemed to center not in the prefrontal areas associated with decision-making, but in the areas of visual processing itself. As Berns explained, this "adds further evidence to the possibility that conformity [is] affected through a change in perception." In other words, peer pressure may have the power not only to lead us down the wrong path, but also to change the way we see that path to begin with.”(p.24)

Meanwhile, the family factor under social pressures has caught the eyes of other psychologists such as Freud and scientists such as Galambos and Sears that have supervised many experiences over surveyed patients. The University of Victoria has done a very interesting experiment over the problem behavior in young Adolescents (1995) where results

showed that no matter what the gender is, adolescents are highly affected by the stress of parents affected by pressure. The experiments, showed the less parents' acceptance and more parent-adolescent conflict (Almeida, 1995). After that, they found that the mother's stress and overwork are the principal factors that lead to a none stability in a family and precisely among teenagers. While rerunning the experience, the results changed, they found that each parent's stress or overwork wasn't significant at all, but the interaction between's the two parents' stress was noteworthy. Therefore, the stability of a family is reached in major part by the implication of the mother and father. These two experiments show the close and dilemmatic relationship of peer pressure and family asset in building someone's identity.

Concerning the solutions that adolescents choose in order to escape from such as family struggle, we could easily find drugs and alcohol in the first range of a long list. They are the most common illicit substances that are used in late childhood, adolescence and also by a considerable part of adults. Let's focus on children and adolescents and talk about the results of the American Journal of Public Health survey. Researcher Roy F. Oman, Ph.D., and colleagues from the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, and Texas A&M University tried to find a relationship between the fact of using drugs and alcohol, with relationship of young people and their parents. The groups surveyed were as follow: non parental adult and peer role models; and the assets discussed were: communication in the midst of the family, the way of using of time, community involvement, an existence of hope, responsibility, and health (Oman, 2004). The following data's help to understand their experiment:

“When researchers examined data for adolescent non use of drugs, they found that 89% of the 1,250 youths who responded reported non use in the past 30-day period. Younger youths were significantly more likely to report non use of drugs than were older youths. Similar to the findings regarding

non use of alcohol, the survey showed that significantly fewer youths from two-parent households reported drug use compared with youths in one-parent households. Youths who had any 1 of the assets were approximately 1.5 to 3 times more likely to report non use of drugs than those who did not have any of these assets. Youths who had the peer role models: use of time for example religion or sports, and responsible choice assets were more than 5 times more likely to report not using drugs compared with youths who had two or fewer assets.” (p.4)

In this survey, researchers think that the presence of parents and their way to communicate with their offspring combined with responsibility, good use of time, involvement in society and health lead to avoid alcohol and drug use and not to be influenced by the others judgments.

When the youth shows some identity weaknesses and finds itself confronted to the social influence including all its pressures, judgments and evanescent point of views, it seems for them that all what they have been inculcated from their family starts to belong to the past, then begins the pro-socializing quest of the adolescent. Fortunately, this peer pressure itself has tremendous benefits for adolescents, concerning their identity formation. The major skills learned while being confronted to society are risk-taking behavior, counseling, self-reflection, coping mechanisms, methods for preserving friendships, and refusal skills (Gormly, 1997). Risk-taking behavior is the most crucial skill accepted by the adolescent, because he faces a dilemma between what his parents has taught him concerning the fact of balancing what is going to be done and its repercussion in the future; when the young person accepts that sometimes it is better to take risks in life rather than ask existential questions, he/she learns to be autonomic, to have hope and understands that he/she is the only master of his future. Counseling is also important for a young person that is in quest of building his/her identity,

personality and judgment; having friends, who can show some feedback concerning your problems and anxieties about sexuality, studies, love and many other existential questions that cannot a parent or psychologist resolve them is the starting point in the socializing process which is considered the turning point to cross the adulthood stage. Self-reflection is also beneficial for the adolescent, and Piaget, Kohlberg, Eriksson, Gillighan and Freud all agree in each one's different stage on its fundamental role in the identity formation. Self-reflection implies certain criticism about the ego, education, the way how you socialize with people, respectively spotting the subconscious, family and peer pressure. Finally, it is cliché to understand tender when we hear peer pressure, but if the adolescent knows how to approach the social influence, he can easily develop refusal skills that would undeniably teach him the fundamentals of confidence and self-esteem.

Peer pressure has not always negatives contributions as it is clearly shown in the precedent paragraph. However, there is still an only persistent problem with peer influence when it concerns its no evitable linking with parents' inculcations. Most of the time when a young person, start to be involuntary confronted to the other's opinions and beliefs, a problem emerges concerning what was the precursor and the first source of his/her formation. Indeed, parents were the primary source of affection, warmth, intimate self-disclosure, monitoring, conflict, instrumental aid and of provisions of autonomy (Matza, 1995). The Journal of Research on Adolescence adds clear comments concerning the consequences of the dilemmatic problem generated by the conflict of the parental inculcations and peer pressure over children and adolescents:

“Peer-rejected children have been shown to differ from more accepted children on both behavioral and social cognitive measures. For example, they are more likely to be seen as disruptive or aggressive, whereas popular children are often viewed by peers and teachers as cooperative or as peer

leaders. Additional research has indicated that peer rejection is associated with problematic social cognitive patterns such as hostile attributional biases and negative beliefs about peers. Furthermore, peer rejection is associated with a variety of negative outcomes including delinquency and school drop out. The current study adds to our understanding of peer rejection by examining social cognitions of rejected adolescents in the context of their relationships with their parents.”(p. 245-272)

Family is an important part of the adolescent’s life. The situation of the family economically, educationally, geographically, and values are major issues, contributing to the status of this family in society. But a crucial question is under the spot: How the family functions on the inside? Is it solid and encouraging of its children, or it is none unified materialistically or spiritually throughout separation or divorce or even death? It would not surprise someone that the catalyst factor for a young person in taking decisions is due to family events. Rachel Brett & Irma Specht stated from the testimonials and interviews they gathered in their book ‘Young Soldiers, why they choose to Fight’ that: “Sometimes the catastrophic loss in the conflict of all or most of the immediate family precipitates the decision to take irreversible decisions.”(p68). This is to show the extreme influence that has parents over their child. As a result, without parents, a young person tends to be lost all his/her life being a prey in the society starting to adopt non-ethical behaviors such as delinquency and alienation (Freud, 1912).

During the tormented period of adolescence, the youth tend to see themselves as invulnerable and nothing can touch them. As a result, they have propensity to have unprotected sexual rapports, to become alcoholic, to have unwanted pregnancy, to have an automobile accident, to get mugged or injured in an explosion or to become ill due to the exposure to an environmental toxin (Quadrel, Fischhoff. & Davis, 1993) Adolescence is a

stress-free stage of development (Gromly, 1997) High expectations of parents concerning the school achievement and the conformity that they have to obey to lead to establish an antagonistic relationship between parents and their child (Steinberg, 1987). Therefore, parents start to play a role of social pressure over the adolescent, leading to a progressive disconnection between these two parts (Gromly, 1997). The adolescent starts to seek for other ideals, and soon after he begins to understand that the person he/she was looking for is himself.

The adolescent faces many challengers during this stage. The first one is peer pressure that has both benefits and disadvantages. The second is parents that are in the same time alter-egos and members that tend to set up barriers against the emancipation of the child behind fear factors. The last one is the dilemma between the two precedent ones when the adolescent finds himself unable to make satisfactory choices fearing the reaction of either his family or the society. In front of a similar situation, he finds refuge in drugs, alcohol; risky behaviors such as driving at high speed or under the effect of illicit substances, having none protected sexual relationships, and even become suicidal by doing unfeasible acts. In the other hand, while facing such extreme amalgamated conflicts, the youth starts to be aware that the bubble where she was living would not persist anymore. Then, they start to establish their autonomy, and after that if some of them succeed on crossing the course they become independent.

Although teenagers do not share the same interests concerning the esthetical and physical aspects of their parents, they are predisposed to adopt their parents' opinion about the society and even politics (Gromly, 1997). Then comes the following question: If the offspring tends to follow the beliefs and views of his parents, then why he is so affected and influenced by this society that he was always aware of its problems that he will encounter and this since his early age? Freud has answered this question by making under the spot the role

of the deep hidden subconscious and its incensed reasoning, saying that adolescents who encounter this problem, during their first months of puberty, they have a physical-chemical change starting by that to mistrust their parents considerably, because they become aware of their ability to give life (p.106). Some adolescents, therefore doesn't live the dilemma between parental pressure and peer pressure, but only chemical changes that change their perspectives.

Freud said once: "The child is the adult's father." (1901) Adolescence is the bridge to the Freud's quote considered as a confusing stage where unexpected factors contribute to the development of the teenager identity. Social pressure and the family assets are the fundamental factors that contribute to the normal course of formation of the adolescent. Other minorities tend to experience religious, cultural or even chemical factors that work on this development. Each theorist came and will come with various interpretations and explanations to the causes and factors for the identity development. But, most of them have a unique common point is that they agree on the existence of a conflict between family and society. They emphasizes the dilemma which subsist between these two agreeing on the fact that this interaction must persist in order to forge ethical judgments, well-balanced personality and a sane identity. This conflict can only emerge benefits for the adolescent. It would allow him to reach a highest stages discussed in Kohlberg's theory which leads to the interest in the welfare of the community. Furthermore, it would allow him to avoid stagnation and create a certain independence in all its aspects which is the real step toward adulthood.

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