
How Developmental Psychology Can Improve Understanding Influence Peer Groups Have On Children's Development

A child by nature is a social being, in need to integrate into groups that help him to create successful relationships with peers who are close to him in age and have common tendencies, goals and interests. Because these groups has a significant impact on a child or adolescent behaviours including an internal and external discipline within the classroom, sometimes its impact can equal the same role as school and home and go beyond that. Peer groups occupied a big place in children lives, the reasons for that is because it teaches them to pick their own friends, interact with them and to feel the kind of equality between peers in the group. Despite the important role that the group of peers plays in the behaviour of children, it is the only place in which the child may find himself, fulfil his demands and satisfy his desires without being subjected to the pressure of authority that may occurs in his family and school. However, there are negative things that a child may face in a group without becoming aware of it, such as a child joining a group of peers without knowing its goals and motives, and sometimes a group of peers consists of frustrated children and have a reason to destroy the child who joins them, by committing offences that society does not accept, in particular due to the lack of supervision from school and the child's family.

Before we discuss this in details, or come to the main point on the role that developmental psychology plays in this regard, we will talk first about the adolescent gang. Adolescent gang has been the focus of researchers who examined the predictors of adolescent gang membership, in which they found significant factors in the family, school, peers and also in individual domains. It was not clear if protective factors and risks are in any difference from predictive salience at various developmental period due to the lack of knowledge or information available in this regard. There is a limited research on the protective and risk factors for joining a gang differs by gender, gender differences in protective and risk factors which has been examined by studies, and may be informative. For examples in longitudinal studies by researchers, they measured all five environment domains (family, school, individual, neighbourhood and peer groups), (Howell & Egley, 2005).

The first test of the predictors of gang membership (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin Pearson, 1999), used data from a developmental project to explore childhood (age 10-11), and the risk of adolescent gang membership (age 13-18), this study examined all known 26 potential risk factors and 21 of them significantly predicted late joining of a gang, indicate that the predictor of joining a gang is the same as predictors of violence and the use of substance. A second study by (Thornberry, Krohn), et al. (2003). Longitudinal studies that use risk factors measured only once, point towards predicting that late gang membership doesn't allow for the test of proximal precursors or anything with relation to development. Another test which was conducted by (Tanner-Smith, Wilson, and Lipsey)- (in press), showed that the strengths of risk factors vary from one developmental period to another, and the strongest risk factors for crime in adolescence and also the early adulthood period for those with violence or criminal behaviours. In Kroneman, Loeber, and Hipwell (2004) study, mixed results were shown, they discovered that neighbourhood disadvantage has an effect on deviation, which were high in boys rather than

girls. And in a same direction, Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, and Arthur (2007) discovered that boys experienced more risk and few protective factors, as well as these factors were very highly associated with serious deviation in regards to boys. While, Penney, Lee, and Moretti (2010) discovered that the violent deviation's risk factors for boys were equally the same as girls. The fact that high environment factors for gang membership vary by gender remains an experimental question. Peers could be more influential in regards to boys, but other factors like family, are more prominent predictors of gang membership for girls. So, we know that boys are more likely to be members of gangs than girls, according to the (National Youth Gang Centre, 2010).

In the last few decades, there was an increase of girls joining gangs (Howell, 2012; Peterson, 2012). However, the research of the protective and risk factors for boys and girls during adolescent development is scattered, Bell, 2009). (According to: Gilman, A. B., Hawkins, J. D. et al. (2014). The developmental dynamics of joining a gang in adolescence: patterns and predictors of gang membership, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 204–19), this study tests if these factors effects is different as well as the differences of ages and gender, conducting this study, they used: (The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) sample (n=808). By age 19, 173 participants had joined a gang). A survival analysis was used, and found that unique predictors of joining a gang includes the living of a member of the gang and those who were antisocial, the statistics of time and gender interactions were not significant. Many top theories plays important roles in children's development, they did explain the human function and help to create different assumptions of children. An example of Freudian theory, who was behind the "predictable stages", as well as the regulated child's notion. He was into understanding the adult mind by following children experiences, so, he contributed to the unformed child's notion. Another theory has contributed to the education system and was very influent, that is the famous 'Piaget's theory' of cognitive development, it helped in accomplishing tasks. Piaget believed that children cognitive development was formed due to two elements: social experience and biological influences. In sociologists of childhood, his ideas represented unacceptable approaches in developmental psychology to the study of children (cf. James et al., 1998). In national identity of children development, Piaget theory found a lack of children understanding between the ages 7-8 &10-11 (Piaget and Weil, 1951), the lack of understanding at 7-8 was relevant to the child understanding of the relationship between cities and nations, while the other age group relates to the operational understanding of the concept of national group membership, so the understanding of nations and national identity develop together with the child's cognitive ability. So, despite the spread of national identity, it is reasonable to say that national identities are often invisible to children and adults.

People do not think about national identity on a regular basis, even though things that are unnoticeably associated with national identity (Billig, 1995). In (1988), Aboud argues that there is a discontinuity at the age 6-7 (as Piaget claimed), but she suggested that in group favouritism reaches a peak. However, at the age 6-12 years, polarisation decreases, it was due to cognitive advances, such as multiple classifications usage and the onset of conservation (Aboud and Amato, 2001). Tajfel's 1978 theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) was approached by others to explain the developmental of children's national identity. This social identity theory considers different social groups membership (i.e.: ethnic background, gender and national groups), can be internalised as part of the self-concept, this can help in obtaining a sense of positive self-worth. However, in order for the in-group to look better than any out-groups, comparisons should be chosen. So, despite the fact that cognitive development theory can explain why there is an increase in national out-groups (during the middle childhood) and a

reduction in favouritism in national in-group, it cannot explain why some children shows in-group favouritism at 6 years, or there is deferential development of children as a result of their ethnicity, use of language or location and why national groups are evaluated significantly in a negative way from other out-groups. In early childhood, individual and demographic risk factors are associated with gang membership, in grades 5, 6 or 7, measures were used as fixed time control in analysis. Children growing desires and demands to get close with others, in particular peers relationships increased during middle childhood. During this time children starts to seek independence, this means they are more motivated to explore the world and start to depend on themselves. In order to achieve this, they need to raise their knowledge level as well as their sense of security. In regard to the attachment security role, the attachment theory itself argues for the importance of attachment security in forming the relationships between children and peers, in addition to their competence to engage and negotiate in their relationships. In order for the evidence for support, there is a finding in the Minnesota Parent–Child Project that provides some evidence for the predictive competence with peers (Sroufe, 1983). So, despite the mix results, the view that secure attachment is linked to social competence in school years, is supported by evidence. Despite the attachment theory been focusing in early years, there was a growing interest in development, transformation, which has been happening during the past two decades, and also function of attachment in the later childhood and adolescence. When reviewing the finding of continuity of attachment from infancy to middle hood, there was a similar result, for example: Bohlin et al (2000) made assessment to attachment in infancy (using the SST) and in middle childhood (using the SAT), but he failed to get any consistency of note, Moss et al. (2004) has found a great continuity from preschool to school age. Having gone briefly through these top theories, we notice the following: Societal social cognitive-motivational theory: does not make predictions about changes of age related. Cognitive developmental theory: does not explain evidence that shows variable national identity.

Traditional social identity theory: does not explain why the national identity strength is not related to attitude of national out-groups. Social identity theory: does not explain evidence for the national identity variables. The links between adolescents' identity development and their relationship with peers are not completely clear. The possible intermediate factors that could determine the relationship between adolescent identity development and their relationships with peers are discussed. Further empirical researches is needed in this aspect. The most important functions of the peer groups can be identified as follows: peer groups gives the child an opportunity on how to deal with similar and equal individuals, to find his style of equal relationships and interactions that is not provided by family or school and to be free from authority, peer groups provide its members with opportunities to develop their own experiences and expand their knowledge and interests, peer groups helps in developing recognition and observance of the other's rights which become a common or clear rules that everyone need to respect, peer groups are distinguished in its socialisation process from other bodies because it help the child to be independent from his parents, so that their authority would be lesser, peer groups correct deviation or extremism in their members behaviours (they have no authority on non-members, but their own members must respect what they agreed on by the criteria, and this can maintain and control its members), peer groups help to gain appropriate social directions which cannot be gained by other means of upbringing (in the context of the participation of the child in the activity of the peer groups, he gains experiences and learn social places and roles such as group advisor, as well as a leadership and other roles, while he observe these roles or performs them). During adolescence, peer groups changes dramatically, adolescence like to have little time with adult supervision, and instead prefers to spend more time with peers. During this period their communication is shifted, at home, they like to talk to

their parents about school and the careers ahead of them, while at school they like to talk to their peers about the relationships with other peers and also about private stuff. Generally children search for groups that can accept them as members, even if it meant that the group is not following a decent way, on the other hand, they are less likely to accept others who are different from them. In term of emotional development, children's interaction with peers gives them opportunities to experience various emotions like joy and acceptance. Peers intimacy give children skills to cope with situations as well as giving them self-esteem, which are very beneficial to their development. So, lots of experiences can be gained from wide range of emotions when joining a group, and that includes issues such as: shame, embarrassment and more. These emotions can be evolve when exposed to specific events.

There is also what is called "peers pressure", which interferes in children's development, such pressure can encourage teenagers to involve in various activities, such as sport or helping them to avoid dangerous behaviours, it can also lead to those involve to trying other things, such as: drugs, smokes or alcohol, as well as getting them in troubles with behaviours issues or school absence, so, it is really depending on the group that a child or a teenager involve with, the behaviours can be from moderate to extreme. So, from the above, it is clear that peer groups has got advantages and disadvantages in the development of children, these advantages includes: teach unity and collective behaviour, identity information, help as a practicing path to adulthood, help in teaching gender role and also help as a source of information. While the disadvantages includes: troubles and problems in the future, risk factors, aggression and antisocial behaviour and peer pressure. The family has an important role to play here by guiding the child to avoid the negatives and risks of the group of peers, and can do so as follows: establishing a relationship based on trust between the child and family (so the child does not hide any secrets such as harmful events from them during his participation in the group), the family need to visit school occasionally to talk to teachers about their child's behaviour and also to get to know the behaviours of his peers, talk to the child and guide him by explaining the rights and wrongs (and talk to him realistically, honestly and objectively as that would be his internal discipline), teach the child that each culture has its own distinguishes and characters by introducing him to the most important rules of behaviour in society that make him accept the traditions and customs of other children, act in front of your child with a good manner and respect to be his role model, provide behaviour model in front of him by dealing with others politely and with respect (because children often copy their parent's behaviours), give an opportunity to the child to assume social responsibility and to depend on himself, using a reward points (if you like) and also punishment when necessary to encourage or deter the child to improve his behaviour, build a trust between you and your child (so he always feels that he can come back to you for advice if there is a pressure on him). These guidance are very essential in order to help your child to cope with his peers, as it is obvious that the influence of the group of peers in the process of socialising the child is determined by the assemblage of social roles, behavioural standards' clarity, and the presence of general direction and values, that children work to achieve and follow them in their behaviours. So, it is clear how important the role of peer group plays in the process of socialisation and in bringing up a child and in adolescence, develop the child's sensitivity and values as well as working to form the directions of children, and it is also clear that developmental psychology's role improve the understanding of those peer groups role that they have been playing in the child's life (as we explained above). If the family, media...etc., plays an important part in raising a child, the peer group has its influence (in general) on social development, and (in particular) its impact on childhood's socialisation.

In conclusion, developmental psychology is identified as the scientific study that explains the

changes of human during their life (i.e. feeling, thinking and behaviours), it was originally focusing on infants and children developments, but later it involved adolescents and adults. It also involves a wide range of fields, including: child psychopathology, educational psychology, forensic developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, cultural psychology, ecological psychology and child development. Many psychologists contributed to developmental psychology and some were very influential, for examples: 'The societal-social-cognitive-motivational theory', provides a framework which integrates the influences which impact on children's intergroup attitudes. Another example is the 'Piaget constructive theory', we learned that his proposes includes: cognitive development draw four qualitatively different stages, Piagetian theory which was challenged by researchers who stress the effect of cultural and social factors on the children's thinking's development, children develop their conceptual understandings through problem solving and active engagement. However, despite their important roles (which we have been explaining in this essay), traditional theories have overlooked the extent of the developmental variability that occurs, and have underestimated the extent to which environmental factors impact upon the development of national identifications and attitudes. Through the reading of various theories we learned that no clear evidence was shown in regards to the assumption that protective factors and environment risk of gang membership do vary by gender. Also, we learned that every environment domain showed to be equal in predicting the joining of gangs for boys and girls. However, in regards to proximal risk factors, also no evidence was found that interventions for boys and girls need to focus on various environment domains. This essay has gone through many of the theories and discussed how developmental psychology improve the understanding of the different peer group's role on children development, and more importantly this discussion was in a critical way