



*Barkadahan: A Study of Peer Group
Norms and Values among
Filipino Adolescents*

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Participation in peer groups plays a critical role in adolescent development and experience. The significance of peer groups in human development is likely salient throughout the lifespan, but there is reason to expect peer group interactions to most significantly influence adolescents and their growth trajectories. Adolescence, as a period, has always been a point of significant biological, cognitive, and social development, beginning with the onset of puberty. It is this transition from childhood to adulthood where adolescents face identity confusion (Erikson, 1968). It is also during this stage when they slowly try to relinquish their dependence on parents and, instead, shift their attention to peers as their primary source of appraisal and recognition (Steinberg, 1988). Spending most of their time with their peer group allows them to experience a new sense of belonging, connection, and concern in such company (Newman & Newman, 1976; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Since this is also a time when adolescents experiment with a variety of choices, roles, identities, and behaviors, peer groups represent a normative, comparative reference by which adolescents construct and re-organize identity (Rabaglietti & Ciairano, 2008).

DYNAMICS OF THE PEER GROUP: FORMATION, MEMBERSHIP, AND SELECTION

The seemingly ubiquitous quality of peer group membership in adolescence lends evidence to a sort of impetus to form and join peer groups. Roy Baumeister expressed this dynamic in terms of the Belongingness Hypothesis, whereby “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995 p. 497). The hypothesis posits that adolescents form and join peer groups because of a drive to belong as fundamental as the drive to eat and sleep.

This drive can be slaked only through recurring interactions of positive affective valence and with expected continuity. In the context of the peer group, adolescents repeatedly engage in these happy interactions, expecting them to continue in the future.

There are, however, alternative hypotheses that attempt to clarify the impetus to engage in peer group interactions. Newman and Newman (1976) hypothesized that, during adolescence, peer interactions become essential to the development of affirmative self-concept and identity. This is just as Social Identity Theory posits a strong sense of group identification helps one to develop greater self-concept and self-esteem (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the same vein, peer group selection appears to be contingent on how esteemed one is by peers (Brown & Lohr, 1987), such that general peer approval guides specific peer group membership. This sentiment has been echoed in seminal social psychology theory. Charles Cooley's Looking Glass Self is an early sociological hypothesis stating that one's identity is borne from perceptions of how s/he is seen by other people, a hypothesis that still finds empirical support in recent years (Cook & Douglas, 1998). Indeed, there is evidence that the impetus to peer group membership is borne of a need to belong and the development of self-concept and identity.

Members of peer groups tend to be similar to each other in many aspects such as age, gender, physical appearance, hobbies, interest, personality, attitudes, and values (Crandall, Schiffhauer & Harvey, 1997; Degirmencioglu, Urgberg, Tolson & Ricahard., 1998; Feingold, 1988; Ellis, Rogoff & Cramer, 1981). The similarity-attraction hypothesis explains that when one finds similarity with a person, there is a certain attraction that comes in; and when there is a certain attraction, it is most probable that one would find similarity with the other (Crandall, Schiffhauer & Harvey, 1997). This is the premise behind Social Categorization Theory that peer

group normative behavior strengthens similarity to other members of the peer group (Verkooijen, de Vries & Nielsen, 2007). Increased normative behavior and similarity to the group archetype serves “to validate one’s own status as a group member and to enhance group cohesion” (Verkooijen, de Vries, & Nielsen, 2007 p.56).

PEER GROUPS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES

Participation in peer group dynamics has been associated with a vast range of such psychosocial benefits as greater self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987), scholastic achievement (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008) and adjustment (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008), and positive developmental outcomes in general (Rabaglietti & Ciairano, 2008). It can also satisfy one’s need for safety and security (Newman & Newman, 2001). In particular, feelings of belongingness in a peer group are associated with reduced internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). As previously mentioned, the inverse also applies such that deprivation of peer interactions has been associated with depressive affect (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Indeed, while peer group interactions typically start out with activity-centered pursuits, they later reach a rather personal level where companionship and emotional support are reciprocated (Hays, 1985). Levinger and Snoek (1972, in Hays, 1985) explained that as the friendship progresses, one begins to be more comfortable opening up, giving way to increased mutual concern and interdependence. Peers provide a context for expression and regulation of positive and negative emotions (La Freniere, 2000; Crandall, Schiffhauer, & Harvey, 1997; Hays, 1985). At the same time, it provides a source of validation beyond what the family offers (La Freniere, 2000).

However, peer group interactions may also lead to greater incidence of risk behaviors like substance use and violence (Sussman, Unger, & Dent, 2004). This tendency is not consistent across peer groups. The crowd in which the peer group is contextualized better predicts the likelihood of engaging in risk behaviors. For example, affiliation with pop, skate, techno, and hippie crowds was positively associated with substance use, whereas affiliation with sporty, quiet, computer nerd, and religious crowds was negatively associated with substance use (Verkooijen, De Vries, & Nielsen, 2007). In a similar vein, research has shown that both self-reported and teacher-reported ratings of antisocial behavior are positively associated with perceived peer group antisocial behavior (Laird, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 1999).

NORMS, VALUES, AND IDENTITY

Group norms are “emergent properties of group” that are likely to arise due to regular interaction among a group of people (Wellen, Hogg, & Terry, 1998, p. 48). Interactions within a peer group crystallize a set of norms that are then internalized by peer group members, particularly so for newer members (Macdonald, Leary, & Tangney, 2002). Peer group membership tends to be assorted according to similar individual attributes (Crandall, Schiffhauer, & Harvey, 1997) and to be stable across wide spans of time (Degirmencioglu, Ulberg, Tolson, & Richard, 1998), which may make agreement upon a set of group norms more likely to occur within a given group.

The role of peer group relations in identity development is extensive. During adolescent years, one seeks to construct an identity that is independent from the family, but defined by the peer group (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). These relationships can contribute to individual, personal identity construals and to behavior. By aligning one's identity development

with group values, one achieves a greater feeling of belongingness in the peer group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Illustrating this further, longitudinal research has shown that prosocial behavior in peers contributes to one's own pursuit of prosocial goals (Barry & Wentzel, 2006).

Peer group interactions also contribute to a group identity (Newman & Newman, 2001) that factors into an “extended self-concept” (Brewer & Gardner, 2006, p. 84). Identity is thus understood to be an overarching construct that is both personal and collective, some going so far as to say “the self is fundamentally relational” (Andersen, Chen, & Miranda, 2002, p. 159), a statement of reasonable merit. This collective identity “reflects internalizations of the norms and characteristics of important reference groups and consists of cognitions about the self that are consistent with that group identification” (Brewer & Gardner, 2006, p. 84). This group self, or relational self, is especially relevant in Eastern-influenced cultures, as research on Asian-Americans has shown that their characterization of the self is contingent on the relational context of the situation (English & Chen, 2007).

Recent research on Filipino high school students has revealed much about Filipino youth values. Natividad's (2004) survey research on high school students at a public school in Metro Manila showed that these high school students have the greatest preference for the values of benevolence, self-direction, and universalism, and least preference for power and hedonism. Compared to Korean-Americans and Korean immigrants in New York, the local sample showed higher levels of self-esteem. These same also evinced a balanced independent-interdependent self-construal, straddling both traditionally Western and Eastern construals of self. There is also a pervasive optimism among these youths, believing “that their goals in the realms of education, work, marriage, and future residence are reachable” (Natividad, 2004, p. 135).

The specific direction taken by identity development appears to be driven by the salient group norms and values. Adolescents join a particular peer group and learn how to be a functioning member of that group. The norms and values that the group deems important become more apparent as interactions and shared experiences within the peer group accumulate over time (Verkooijen, De Vries & Nielsen, 2007; Newman & Newman, 2001), strengthening group similarity. Young adolescents become more sensitive in terms of how they behave because they take into consideration how they will be evaluated by other group members, as implied by social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000). The peer group thus becomes intensely facilitative in the development of identity on the personal and on the relational level.

In sum, the norms and values inherent to a peer group are critical in their contribution to an individual's identity across social context. In this day and age, the sheer range of opportunities available to the individual can complicate and delay consummate identity development (Abregana, Udarbe & Valbuena, 2003), which further underscores the need to characterize identity development in youth. The present research sought to determine which specific norms and values typically exert their influence on the Filipino adolescent in the peer group, or barkada, and the implications of these norms and values on peer group dynamics and adolescent developmental trajectories.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive design that employed focus group discussions (FGD) as method for data gathering. Respondents were adolescents who studied in local high schools that came from both

urban and rural backgrounds. A total of four FGD sessions were conducted: two had participants from urban institutions while the other two had participants from rural institutions.

Participants

An overall total of 36 adolescents comprising 18 males and 18 females participated in the study. The ages of all respondents ranged from 13 to 17 years, with a mean of 15.17. For the urban institutions, the FGD sessions were made up of 19 respondents (i.e., 10 in the first session and 9 on the second), with a total of 10 males and 9 females in both sessions. For the rural institutions, there were 17 respondents (i.e., 9 of which belonged in the first session and 8 on the second), with a total of 8 males and 9 females in both sessions.

Instruments

The main objective of the focus group discussion was to confer with the participants about issues that adolescents face regarding the nature of their barkada, as well as the recognized norms and values that come with the membership. The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate the discussion.

The guide consisted of five open-ended questions that specifically reflected the following subject matter:

- ⊙ the overall nature of the peer group, which included how it is defined, as well as what activities its members participate in
- ⊙ the norms that allow continued membership within the peer group
- ⊙ the values learned from being a member of the peer group

Procedure

Prior to data gathering, the researchers sought approval from the school administrators, after which appointments were made regarding the schedule of the focus group discussions. Selected students from different classes were provided by the school administrators to participate in the study.

In each FGD session, the facilitators introduced themselves and explained the nature and objectives of the study. Informed consent forms were provided to obtain the respondents' agreement in participating in the study. The respondents were reassured of their anonymity and that the utility of their inputs would be used for research purposes only. Once the various topics to be discussed were made clear, the respondents were encouraged to participate and share their thoughts. A digital voice recorder was used in every session, which lasted for approximately one hour.

To ensure that the insights of the respondents were captured completely, the facilitators relayed the data provided back to the respondents immediately after each session. They were encouraged to give additional inputs or make clarifications to further validate the data. As the sessions ended, respondents were provided with refreshments and were thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis

The data were subjected to thematic content analysis. Once transcriptions have been made, data segments that pertained to the respondents' experiences with their peer group, the norms followed and

values learned were extracted and compared with other strands. Themes were generated based on the abstraction of similarities and differences of the responses and conceptual labels were formulated for each theme.

Results

The present study investigated the dynamics of the Filipino adolescent peer group as reflected in their perception of the specific norms and values obtained from being members of the barkada. Focus group discussions were conducted that addressed what it took for peer groups members to remain within the barkada, as well as what they learned by being members of their respective peer groups. Data revealed salient expected behaviors and insights about the relevance of belonging in a barkada as experienced by adolescent peer group members.

THE FILIPINO ADOLESCENT BARKADA

To further understand how the Filipino adolescent perceive membership in a peer group, insights regarding the nature of a barkada were elicited that included how the barkada is defined and what group activities members engage in. For this sample, the barkada is thought of as a context that can provide *a source of self-knowledge and improvement as well as help and support.*

In terms self-knowledge and improvement, membership in a barkada provides avenues for learning, in such a way that the members themselves arrange opportunities through discourses and advising. As expressed by statements such as “*Tinuturuan po ako ng tamang landas para ma-attain ko*

po ang main goal ko” and “Natuklasan po namin yung mga bagay po na karaniwan po sa amin. Ang gagawin nila kung masama man i-improve nila at kung mabuti ito pwedeng gayahin nila,” belonging in a barkada allows a member to discover and enhance one's capabilities and broaden one's perspectives to facilitate optimum development.

With regards to aid, adolescent peer group members find their barkada to be individuals that they could seek assistance from, may it be for instrumental needs or emotional support. Peer group members are also considered as those that do not discriminate based on the time, number and gravity of aid sought. Peer group members provide the help and address their co-members' needs. This provision ultimately reflects the dependability experienced by group members from each other, as expressed by one participant who said, “*..nagiging dingding, nangiging haligi ko, nagiging sandalan kung saka-sakaling may problemang nararamdaman...*”.

Finally, the Filipino adolescent barkada was described as a group that is composed of individuals who share similarities in attitudes, beliefs, and personal preferences. These similarities are often found out and/or reinforced further when members “hang out” with each other, whether during or after school. A “tambayan,” described as a place where the group members often stay and hang out, such as malls, is usually associated with the Filipino barkada.

THE NORMS OF A BARKADA

When posed with the query about what it takes to remain or not be removed from the barkada, the salient norms that were recognized as relevant included *revealing of true self; consistency of behavior; help and protection* and “*pakikisama*”.

Revelation of true self pertains to how a peer member is expected to “be his true self”, as expressed in terms such as “*magpakatotoo ka (sa sarili)*,” and displays transparency in word and deed that reflects one's genuine characteristics among the members of the barkada. Relative to this, the peer member is also expected not to display behaviors that are contradictory to what the member has previously demonstrated with his peers. This was expressed by the responses, “(*makakapagpatanggal sa akin ay kung) sakaling maging plastic ako...*,” where being “plastic” denotes dishonesty and not being transparent about one's true self, which could lead to exclusion from the peer group.

Consistency of Behavior describes how a member of a barkada is expected to maintain his or her ways of interacting with the other members. Such consistency is expected to be observed since the time he or she became a part of the group. The phrase “*stay as you are*” has been emphasized in the discussion. This depicts that members of a barkada can be ensured of inclusion in the group when they abide by this norm. Conversely, respondents who expressed that “*pagbabago*” or a negative change in behavior of a member that the peer group has gotten used to could lead to exclusion from the barkada, as depicted in statements like “*yung makakapag paalis sa akin siguro yung magbabago ka ng ugali na hindi nila matanggap.*”.

Help and protection among the peer group is another norm that members of the barkada are expected to abide. Peer members should be able to provide aid (e.g., “*kaya kapag may problema ang isa, tulungan po para one for all, all for one*”). At the same time, they should also be able to look out for each other (e.g., “*hindi po kami magpapabaya sa isang kasama at di iaadya sa masama*”). The practice of “*damayan*” is also highlighted in this norm, as expressed by one member, “*Sa isang tao kailangan niya rin ng kaibigan, kailangan niya rin ng kadamay...*,” where peer members should be able to provide companionship and share the other's affliction.

Another salient norm among adolescent peer groups is the notion of “pakikisama”, where members of the barkada are expected to express the desire to participate in the experiences and share in the collective decisions of the entire barkada. This can be applied in situations such as attendance in a group function (e.g., “*Makiki-join sa mga happenings*”), and decision-making based on the consensus of the group (e.g., “*pinapapili kung majority wins*”). When a peer group member refuses to engage in “pakikisama,” this may lead to potential conflict and exclusion (i.e., “paglayo”) as well as a peer being upset with another (i.e., “pagtatampo”).

VALUES LEARNED FROM THE BARKADA

Among the many lessons that the adolescents found meaningful in their membership in the peer group, *valuing one's self and one's relationships* with others were found to be the most salient. Furthermore, being able to *display trust*, as well as *having resolve*, were also included as additional values that adolescents recognized to be of benefit from being with their barkada.

For the respondents, valuing relationships with peers describes an appreciation for the relational bonds formed through interactions, as sampled in the phrase, “*natutuhan kong pahalagahan ang tunay na pagkakaibigan at pagsasamahan*”. For these adolescents, belonging in a peer group allowed them to realize the importance of being together. They also recognized the capability of peers to dispel loneliness. Furthermore, displaying selflessness by putting the needs of peers ahead of the adolescent's (e.g., “*pagbibigay o pagpaparaya sa mga barkada*”) was another way in which a peer member values the barkada.

Aside from valuing others, the adolescent peer member also learns to value himself/herself. By means of becoming a member of a barkada, the

adolescent learns to take time to “take care,” “prioritize,” and “give importance” to one's self. Moreover, engaging with the peer group allowed the adolescent to acknowledge his or her own self-worth (e.g., *“nararamdaman mo na may halaga ka pala”*) as well as discover an avenue for developing skills that would enhance his/her potentials (e.g., *“natutunan ko pong lalong mapaunlad yung self confidence ko”*) and facilitate further self-improvement (i.e., *“kailangan mo ng instrumento para malaman mo na nagkamali ka...at kaibigan iyon”*).

Expressing trust in oneself and for others is another value that adolescents learn from their peer group. As a result of the adolescent's membership and interaction with the barkada, believing in and relying on other people becomes something that has apparently been learned (i.e., *“Siguro sa barkadahan ko po natutuhan ko pong magtiwala sa ibang tao”*), as is learning to believe in oneself (i.e., *“Natutunan ko po na maging malakas ang tiwala sa sarili.”*)

Finally, with the help of the barkada, the adolescent peer group member learns to achieve resoluteness when it comes to everyday challenges. The respondents achieve what they referred to as “katatagan” when it comes to dealing with problems. They learn to remain strong during adversities (e.g., *“Dapat hindi ako nasuko sa mga problema ko”*) and view these adversities in a less negative light (e.g., *“kayang harapin ang mga problema o pagsubok sa buhay namin at wag indahin yung anumang problema.”*).

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to describe the specific norms that members of the adolescent peer group abide by to maintain membership within the barkada, as well as the values imbibed by the adolescent brought about by

membership in the peer group. The findings of this research do not claim that the norms and values presented here can be generalized across all adolescent peer groups, nor do they differentiate between environmental contexts (i.e, urban versus rural) or other demographic characteristics. However, the data uncovered in this study have been able to illustrate certain parallelisms between internalized norms and the acquired values, and how this may be related to the adolescent's pursuit of positive development.

Findings from four focus group discussions showed that it is imperative for the adolescent peer member to display transparency and consistency of character, be a pillar of support, as well as to ensure smooth relations with his peers. The context of the peer group allows the adolescent to internalize valuable learning such as giving importance to established relationships with others, and recognizing the value of one's self. The value of trust and resolve also proved to be valuable traits that the adolescent peer member gained from peer membership.

The findings of the research concur with the existing literature regarding peer relationships among adolescents. The similarity among members of the Filipino barkada is parallel to the similarity-hypothesis (Hartup, 1996), where the presence of similarity within a group of individuals brings about attraction that may facilitate the onset of friendships. As a possible foundation of friendships, the similarity characteristic among peer groups becomes relevant, as it may facilitate peer group influence. Peer group influence pertains to the inclination of peer group members to strengthen and further reinforce attributes and behaviors they have shared through time, as implied by the social categorization theory (Verkooijen, de Vries, & Nielsen, 2007). In the current study, therefore, norms that involved a showing of genuine character from the adolescent peer as well as displaying such character consistently were recognized as salient and relevant. Perhaps, these norms were deemed important by the peer

group because it was the basis of why the barkada was formed in the first place, where the members got together because they have something in common that is included in their genuine characteristics. Hence, not being true to oneself or changing into someone else is not tolerated because it shakes the very foundation of the formation of the peer group, as well as the subsequent friendships that developed.

Evidence has also shown that similarity breeds trust within group dynamics (Williams, 2001). Furthermore, the social identity theory has shown that the ingroup folk are considered more trustworthy than the outgroup folk (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, there is an expectation of trustworthiness that is placed on all peer group members, consistently, in word and deed, such that the adolescent in the peer group is able to trust the other members of the peer group and eventually reap the benefits of this shared trust. In terms of this trust-expectancy framework, pakikisama, consistency of behavior, and help and protection as norms require that the peer group members be trustworthy. Only a trustworthy peer group member can be expected to reliably provide help, to be consistent in word and deed, and to cooperate with other peer group members in the form of pakikisama. Revelation of the true self, or self-disclosure, is likely due to being able to trust the other members of the peer group. Thus, the trust-expectancy dynamic in the adolescent peer group may underscore how delicate the adolescent is. Rather than a peer group dynamic that is independent, the adolescent peer group is primarily interdependent buttressed by a primary understructure of mutual reliance and expected trust.

As members of the peer group eventually develop bonds that further evolve into friendship, they experience the benefits that friendship brings about. Apart from belongingness, it was found that one is guaranteed to satisfy the need for safety and security as a result of peer group membership (Newman & Newman, 2001). Similarly, Hartshorne (1994)

included social support, which can further be classified as emotional, instrumental and informational support as a benefit of friendship. However, findings showed that providing help and protection become more salient as a norm. Perhaps it is because of this expected helping behavior that adolescent peers are able to experience such a benefit. Aid and social support become a part of the barkada's nature and at the same time a benefit precisely because a norm is maintained with the individuals who make up the peer group.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that the underlying objectives of the norms assert what the individual must do for himself (i.e., one should be reveal *one's* true self, or be consistent with *one's* behavior) and what the individual must do for the others (i.e, help and protect *them*, or display “pakikisama” with *them*). The same can be said with the beneficiaries of the values acquired from peer group membership. It mirrors that of the norms such that the adolescent peer member learned valuable things from the barkada that reflect the influence of how they must deal *with others* as well as how they must deal *with themselves*.

Perhaps this mirroring is brought about by the type of norms that the barkada finds important to uphold, which the adolescent learns lessons from as the result of adherence to such norms. For instance, the display of “pakikisama” may reinforce the value of giving importance to established friendships within the barkada. Another would be being expected to reveal and be consistent in showing one's character, which gives one an opportunity to air potential issues and concerns and make initial progress towards the resolution of their problems (Rotenberg, 1995).

Given this parallelism, the idea of group identity that incorporates the *I* and the *We* concept can contribute to identity development (Giordano,

Cernkovich, Groat, Pugh & Swinford, 1998). The norms and values reflect the *I* that can be considered as the agent who seeks membership and does what is expected of him to maintain membership, while the *We* reflects how the individual experiences shared history with the group, including the internalization of group norms and values that eventually strengthen group ties and acquire group identity. This further concurs with the idea behind the duality of identity formation, such as that of Phoenix (2001) regarding individuation and social relatedness; likewise it supports the idea of Brewer and Gardner (2006) that having internalized norms that imply expectations for the self and others may contribute in identity development in such a way that the extended self-concept is tapped and that both overarch the personal and socially collective contexts of the adolescent. In this sense, putting others ahead of one's self does not necessarily disrupt identity development, but rather it is through cooperation that self-affirmation is appropriately achieved (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001).

In sum, the outcome of this study depicts how the barkada, at its core, can be seen as a support system for the developing adolescent. Internalization of specific norms and values reflect the aspect of identity development that encompasses autonomy and relatedness, such that its role clearly shows how the adolescent is able to achieve a balanced sense of self-concept. The notion of relatedness is further reinforced by cultural influences such as the Filipino's collective self (Natividad, 2004) and the preference for maintaining smooth interpersonal relations (Marilao, 1997), thus making reciprocity in displaying trust or support a mutual experience for the members of the barkada. By means of articulating what keeps members of the barkada intact, as well as acknowledging the merits of membership, the adolescent is able to experience significant developmental undertakings and consequently achieve a positive portrait of personal growth and development.

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NOTES ON THE PAPER

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