

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY AS PREDICTORS OF PRESSURE TOWARDS PEER ACCEPTANCE AMONG TEENAGERS

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined predictive effects of social desirability and social identity on pressure towards peer acceptance among teenagers, using 191 teenagers in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, comprising 89 males and 102 females with mean age 9.80yrs, sampled through simple random technique. Peer Acceptance Scale by Skogbrott, Breivik and Wold (2013); Social Identity Scale by Cheek and Briggs (2013) and Social Desirability Scale by Marlone and Crowne (1960) were used for data collection, while predictive design and multiple regression analysis were used as design and statistics. The result confirmed that social identity significantly predicted positively peer acceptance at $B = .21^*$, $p < .05$ and social desirability significantly predicted positively peer acceptance at $B = .15^*$, $p < .05$ ($n = 191$). It is recommended for stakeholders to monitor pupils' social dispositions and peer behaviour in school in order to provide counseling services to pupils for healthy growth and social adaptation.*

KEYWORDS: **Social Desirability, Social Identity, Peer Acceptance, Teenagers**

INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure or influence can be positive. A child might be influenced to become more assertive, try new activities, or to get more involved with school, but it can be negative too. Some children might choose to try things they normally wouldn't be interested in, such as smoking or taking part in antisocial behaviour. These social struggles occasioned by peer pressure involve efforts by the child to be accepted among his or her peers or friends (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010).

Peer acceptance of a child is more of the child's popularity among his or her peers; it is also the extent to which the child is recognized, valued, and accepted by his or her mates which includes friends at school and home, mates in the family and church circles and in the wider society (Vannatta, 2009). Oni (2010) opined that peer acceptance refers to socially adjusted child in social interaction among his or her peers. Beatrice, Okpala and Oghale (2016) defined peer acceptance as the coping capacity of the child within the social influence of his or her peers through which the child is identified as unique individual without pressures from his or her mates.

The importance of peer acceptance of a child especially in the social development of the

child cannot be overemphasized. Without social development, the child cannot be fully developed physically, mentally, emotionally and otherwise (Oyeyemi, Ishaku, Deforche, Oyeyemi, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Dyck, 2014). A growing child needs peer-to-peer acceptance in order to assert him/herself, compete with his or her mates and develop positive concepts about the self and the society. No doubt these will help the child actualize appropriate adjustment to life pressures later in life and especially during the adolescent age in college.

Social identity mainly refers to ways by which a distinct group is unique and distinct from other groups. Identity also means marks, quality and uniqueness or differences between two things, persons or groups. By social identity marks and quality of a social group is inferred and the differences between one group and another is also inferred. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are in relation to their group membership(s). Tajfel (1979) proposed that the groups (e.g. social class, family, football team etc.) which people belong to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. It is also cognitive and motivational basis of intergroup differentiation.

Therefore, social identity is the perception of a person's belongingness in relation

to the members of the group and its associated values. The way the child is identified in the society may necessarily influence how he or she may be accepted within the child's group and other external groups. Social desirability is also a perceptual behaviour of people's likeness, approval ratings and acceptance. Social desirability is a basic motivation whereby we are driven by what others think about us, their approval and likeness.

Statement of the Problem

Children's conduct and performance in school may be affected if the children socially do not adjust well to the pressure of their group. This can lay the foundation for low self-esteem later in life as the child grows. No doubt, this can affect the child through life. Usually, children's poor grades in school may be associated with not paying attention in class, poor retention memory, distractibility and general laissez-fair attitude of children towards learning. However, there is insight that growing children may be affected by a host of other factors which may be associated with socialization process such as the influences of peer pressure, peer acceptance and group interactions. The later has gained the attention of the current study.

The social interaction may be understudied in child development as regards its relationship with other social variables. Yet, its effects on the wellbeing of children have been very devastating due to both parents and guardians' negligence. There is an understanding that the greatest challenge which a child might face in life is influence of peer pressure which may be shaped by group acceptance as the child may want to impress and get approved by the members of the group. Consequently, finding factors which predict group acceptance may naturally help parents and guardians to reduce their child's vulnerability to peer pressure so that the child can function optimally among his or her peers and in the society at large. It is in consideration of the problems, setbacks and challenges which may be caused by peer pressure to the child that this study is deemed necessary.

Research Questions

Based on the above, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the current study:

1. Will social desirability predict peer acceptance among school children?
2. Will social identity predict peer acceptance among school children?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study includes:

1. To determine if social desirability will predict peer acceptance among school children.
2. To determine if social identity will predict peer acceptance among school children.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. They are:

1. Social desirability will not significantly predict peer acceptance among teenagers.
2. Social identity will not significantly predict peer acceptance among teenagers.

Relevance of the Study

1. The relevance of the current study has therefore found meaning in holistic upbringing of the child by taking cognizance of what happens in the child's social circle such as the child's association among peers, influences and self-esteem.
2. This study has uniquely offered parents/guardians, psychologists, therapists, school counselors, school management system, religious organizations and the wider society an opportunity to understudy dispositional factors which may endanger the child to negative influences e.g. peer rejection, peer pressure and low self-esteem. These can better be understood using the relationship among the child's social identity, social desirability and peer acceptance.
3. Children will also be the beneficiary of the study as findings will help their parents understand their children's social challenges.

Operational Definition of Key Study Variables

Peer Acceptance: Peer acceptance refers to the level of peer popularity and acceptance of a child within a group of his age either school mates and otherwise.

Social Desirability: Social desirability is also a perceptual behaviour of people's likeness,

approval ratings and acceptance. It is a basic motivation whereby we are driven by what others think about us.

Social Identity: Social identity mainly refers to ways by which a distinct group is unique and distinct from other groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attribution Theory Social Desirability (Heider, 1958): Heider (1958) believed that people are naive psychologists trying to make sense of the social world. People tend to see cause and effects relationships, even where there is none! Attribution theory is concerned with how and why ordinary people explain events as they do. "*Attribution theory* deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991). Heider didn't so much develop a theory himself as emphasize certain themes that others took up. How do we attach meaning to other's behavior, or our own? This is called attribution theory. For example, is someone angry because they are bad-tempered or because something bad happened? There were two main ideas that he put forward that became influential.

Internal Attribution: The process of assigning the cause of behaviour to some internal characteristic, rather than to outside forces. When we explain the behavior of others, we look for enduring internal attributions, such as personality traits. For example, we attribute the behavior of a person to their personality, motives or beliefs.

External Attribution: The process of assigning the cause of behaviour to some situation or event outside a person's control rather than to some internal characteristic. When we try to explain our own behavior, we tend to make external attributions, such as situational or environment features.

Social Identity Theory by Tajfel (1979): Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel & Turner (1979). The theory was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup acceptance and discrimination. Tajfel (1971) attempted to identify the *minimal* conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favor of the in-group to which they belonged and against another out-group.

In the Social identity theory, a person has not one, "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on basis of his personal, family or national "level of self" (Turner et al, 1987). Apart from the "level of self", an individual has multiple "social identities". Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). In other words, it is an individual-based perception of what defines the "us" associated with any *internalized group membership*. This can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity which refers to self-knowledge that derives from the individual's unique attributes.

Empirical Review

Social Desirability and Peer Pressure

There is support for Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theory in the works of Masland and Lease (2013). Their study investigated whether academic achievement motivation and social desirability explain variation in children's conformity to positive academic behaviors (n = 455 children in grades three through five). Structural equation modeling suggested that academic value and peer group academic norms were positively related to academic conformity.

Children who enjoyed academic pursuits and who belonged to academically-inclined peer groups were more likely to conform to novel academic behaviors than children who did not. Additionally, academic value moderated the relationship between peer group norms and conformity, implying that, for students who do not value academics, belonging to a peer group with high academic norms will lead to more conformity to academic behaviors than belonging to a peer group with low academic norms. In contrast, analyses suggested that some aspects of achievement motivation and social identity are unrelated to academic conformity.

Braza, Azurmendi, Muñoz, Carreras, Braza, García, and Sánchez-Martín (2009) examined the effects of social intelligence, empathy, verbal ability and appearance-reality distinction on the level of peer acceptance, as well as the moderating role of gender. Participants

were 98 five-year-old children (43 boys and 55 girls; mean age 5 years 3 months for boys and girls). Their results showed a significant and positive effect of verbal ability on social acceptance was found for boys; appearance-reality distinction was found to have a positive effect on social acceptance in the case of girls; and although empathy had a significant positive effect on social acceptance for both boys and girls, and this effect was more pronounced among boys.

In another study, proponents of the social desirability concept were also boosted by Banerjee, Rieffe, Terwogt, Gerlein and Voutsina (2006) their two studies compared popular and rejected children's reasoning regarding social interactions involving negative emotions. In their first study, with 23 rejected and 23 popular 10- to 11-year-olds who were involved hypothetical social scenarios where a classmate 'victim' was likely to experience a negative emotion. Popular and rejected children both recognized negative emotions and were equally likely to suggest helping behaviour to aid the victim. There were gender effects on the type of helping behaviour suggested.

Social Identity and Peer Acceptance: Empirical evidence supporting the influence of social identity on peer acceptance exists in the study by Rutland, Cameron, Jugert, Nigbur, Brown, Watters and Le Touze (2012). Their study examined whether peer relationships amongst ethnic minority status children reflect the social groups to which children belong and the degree to which they identify with these groups. The authors conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the influence of group identities (i.e., ethnic and national) on children's perceived peer acceptance and preference for same-ethnic friendships.

Measures of ethnic and English identification, perceived peer acceptance, and friendship choice were administered to 207 south-Asian English children, aged between 5 and 11, at two time points 6 months apart. In line with predictions, longitudinal analysis showed that bicultural identification (i.e., higher ethnic and English identity) was related to higher perceived peer acceptance and less preference for same-ethnic friendships. The results suggest that

older children who adopted a bicultural identity were able to strategically 'flag' their multiple group identities, within their multicultural peer groups, to obtain acceptance amongst the maximum number of peers and show less preference for same-ethnic friendships.

METHOD

Participants: The participants used in the study were students of Universal Basic Education (public primary schools) in Awka. The participants were 191 participants comprising 89 males and 102 females whose age ranged from 7 to 10 years. The mean of age of the participants were 9.80yrs with a standard deviation 2.25yrs. The participants were selected through simple random sampling technique.

Instruments: To gather data for the study, three questionnaires which measure the variables of the study were used; they include: Peer acceptance scale, social identity scale and social desirability scale.

Peer Acceptance Scale: This is a 7-item questionnaire is developed and validated by Skogbrott, Breivik and Wold (2013) which measures the extent of person who is at an equal level with some group. For every peer, there is a group; hence the popular name peer group acceptance. The authors reported validity measures from .83 for the American sample. The scale has also two sub scales namely; emotional exhaustion and dehumanization. The questionnaire is a self-report type on a 5-point Likert format. It is designed to help clinicians/counseling psychologists to determine the level of stress and exhaustion suffered by a worker. The responses to the items are rated in the following format: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – disagree moderately, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree.

Validity/Reliability – Omoluabi (1997) reported a validity measure of .86 for the Nigeria sample. For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted a pilot to measure the reliability of the instrument. In the pilot study an alpha co-efficient was sought and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .70 was obtained for the scale.

Social Identity Scale: This is a 7-item questionnaire developed and validated by Cheek and Briggs (2013) which measures ways by

which a distinct group is unique and distinct from other groups. The authors reported validity measures ranging from 0.76 to 0.83 for the American sample. The questionnaire is a self-report type on a 5-point Likert format rated in the following format: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – disagree moderately, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree.

Validity/Reliability - For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to enhance the reliability of the instrument. In the pilot study an alpha co-efficient was sought and a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.74 was obtained for the scale.

Social Desirability Scale: This is a 13-item questionnaire (13-short highlighted form) developed and validated by Marlone and Crowne (1960) measures perceptual behaviour of people’s likeness, approval ratings and acceptance. It is also a basic motivation whereby we are driven by what others think about us. The authors reported internal consistence of .89 for the American sample. The questionnaire is a self-report type on a 5-point Likert format rated in the following format: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – disagree moderately, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree.

Validity/Reliability - For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to enhance the reliability of the instrument. In the pilot study an alpha co-efficient was sought and a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.72 was obtained for the scale.

Procedure: The inception of the study began with search for instruments which are to be used in the study having obtained a guide from the supervisor. Copies of the instruments found were reprinted and distributed for the pilot study. For the pilot study the researcher used 53 pupils from primary schools in Anambra University as participants. After distributing the instruments (for the pilot study) the researcher carried out an alpha reliability analysis. Favourable reliability measures obtained encouraged the researcher to proceed to the main study. In the main, the researcher distributed 203 booklets of questionnaire from which 189 was collected back at a return rate of 97% from which only 191 (95.1%) that were correctly filled were used for analysis.

During the administration of the questionnaires, the respondents were assured that their responses are for academic purposes only and were encouraged to respond promptly to all the items. It took the participants on the average 31 minutes to respond to all of the items in the questionnaire booklet. Only correctly filled set of the questionnaires were selected for data analysis as all questionnaires were labeled for easy identification and coding.

Design and Statistics: The design adopted for this study was cross sectional while multiple regression analysis was adopted as the appropriate statistical tool for data analysis. Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 16.00) was also used to analyze all the data obtained from the field of study

RESULT

Table 1: Regression Coefficients for Predictive Effects of Social Identity and Social Desirability on Peer Acceptance. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	B			
1	(Constant)	5.656	.727			7.782	.000
	TOTALSI	.060	.020	.217		3.086	.002
	SDTOTAL	.160	.074	.153		2.179	.031
2	(Constant)	5.655	1.345			4.205	.000
	Social Identity	.058	.019	.209		2.989	.003
	Social Desirability	.166	.074	.158		2.230	.027
	GENDER	.446	.224	.139		1.995	.047
	AGE	-.041	.061	-.048		-.676	.500

a. Dependent Variable: PEER ACCEPTANCE

** significant @ P ≤ .01 or * significant @ P ≤ .05 for N = 191: Source: Questionnaire Primary Data

The results of the study using multiple regression analysis enter method gives three model scores. One is model summary which was assessed using Adjusted R square and the actual value of the adjusted R² is .07 (in table 1) which increased to .1 when gender was included. Thus, the model can be said to have contributed 10% of understanding of peer acceptance.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, which stated that desirability will not significantly predict peer acceptance among teenagers was confirmed. The current finding is in line with the study carried out by Braza, Azurmendi, Muñoz, Carreras, Braza, García, and Sánchez-Martín (2009) which examined the effects of social intelligence, empathy, verbal ability and appearance-reality distinction on the level of peer acceptance, as well as the moderating role of gender.

The result showed a main effect of social intelligence on peer acceptance, as well as several other effects that were moderated by gender like a significant and positive effect of verbal ability on social acceptance was found for boys; appearance-reality distinction was found to have a positive effect on social acceptance in the case of girls; and although empathy had a significant positive effect on social acceptance for both boys and girls, this effect was more pronounced among boys. Their result also suggests that abilities promoting peer acceptance are different for boys and girls. Their finding can be related to the current study on social desirability which is also built on social intelligence.

The second hypothesis which stated that social identity will not significantly predict peer acceptance among teenagers was confirmed. The current finding is in line with the study carried by Rutland, Cameron, Jugert, Nigbur, Brown, Watters and Le Touze (2012). Their study examined whether peer relationships amongst ethnic minority status children reflect the social groups to which children belong and the degree to which they identify with these groups. The authors conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the influence of group identities (ethnic and national) on children's perceived peer acceptance and preference for same-ethnic friendships. In line with predictions, longitudinal analysis showed that bicultural identification

(higher ethnic and English identity) was related to higher perceived peer acceptance and less preference older children with more advanced social-cognitive abilities.

The results suggest that for same-ethnic friendships. Importantly, as hypothesized, this finding was limited to the older children who adopted a bicultural identity were able to strategically 'flag' their multiple group identities, within their multicultural peer groups, to obtain acceptance amongst the maximum number of peers and children show less preference for same-ethnic friendships.

This quest for *positive distinctiveness* means that people's sense of who they are is defined in terms of 'we' rather than 'I'. The theory explains socialization process and development needs of the child in belonging to a group. The theory is also concurrent with the influences of the social circles of the child in establishing social acceptance, recognition and integration. In the light of the above, both the theoretical assumption and empirical evidence found in previous studies are in line with the current conceptual framework of the study and hence the current study findings are deemed consistent with behavioural expectation in African child developmental climate and thus, may be used as a generalization fact across the wider circles of the study area mainly the South East of Nigeria.

Implications of the Study

1. How a child is perceived and the image the child forms among his or her peers are important factor which determine the interaction process of that child with the social circle.
2. There is reality that if the wrong perception and identity is made of any child, it may likely affect the social factors around the child which may ultimately facilitate several maladjustment behaviour from the child in an effort to cancel out the effect.
3. There is risk of not monitoring the social interaction of a child so as to ascertain how the identity of the child is perceived by his or her peers which may likely determine desirability, acceptance and pressure.

4. There is also a significant implication for the child's self-esteem which may also present attending problems such as shyness and stage flight among peers with adverse developmental effects.
5. There is an array of fear that if the child is not accepted and properly integrated among his or her peers proper developmental growth and adjustment may be elusive.

Limitations of the Study

There is need to take cognizance of other multi-faceted factors which face the growing child which may also weld their influences on teenagers.

Conclusion

This study examined social desirability and social identity as predictors of pressure towards peer acceptance among teenagers. The importance of proper developmental process of the child in the social strata overshadowed both the conceptual and theoretical mindset of the study. The result can be accepted as the behavioural pattern within the social circles of growing children and leaves a number of pertinent issues among stakeholders in the upbringing of the child.

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