

Early Adolescents' Perceptions of Peer Pressure

B. Bradford Brown, Mary Jane Lohr, and

Eben L. McClenahan
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract

To examine the nature of peer pressures perceived by early adolescents, 373 students in grades 7 - 12 were asked to indicate, on a 12-item index, the degree and direction of peer pressures they perceived from friends and acquaintances, and to describe their personal attitudes and behavior in areas corresponding to index items. Analyses revealed that peers were seen as encouraging misconduct less than other types of behavior. Females reported stronger peer pressure than males toward conformity (to peer norms) and social involvement, but the genders did not differ in perceptions of misconduct or pro-adult pressures. Associations between perceived pressures and personal attitudes or behavior were significant but modest, and sometimes were mediated by gender or grade level. Findings are discussed in light of previous research on conformity and Newman and Newman's postulates concerning early adolescent identity development.

Developmental studies often point to early adolescence as the age period when young people are most receptive to peer pressure. Previous research has focused on children's and teenagers' responses to contrived or hypothetical peer pressures. Surprisingly few studies have examined the types or degree of peer pressures that

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adolescents commonly perceive in their daily lives. The intent of the present study was to assess age and gender differences in junior and senior high school students' perceptions of peer pressures in four areas: peer social involvement, conformity to peer norms, "misconduct" (drug or alcohol use and sexual activity), and "pro-adult" behavior (school achievement and relations with parents). The study also examined the degree of association between perceived peer pressure and corresponding personal attitudes and behavior.

In elaborating Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, Newman and Newman (1976) suggested that peer pressure is one of the organizing principles of early adolescent social interaction and personal development. They postulated that the major psychosocial "crisis" of early adolescence, "group identity vs. alienation," led teenagers to develop a sense of solidarity with peers (group identification) in order to avoid a sense of alienation in the face of waning parental identification. Such solidarity is manifested by conformity to group norms, which requires the individual to be especially attentive to peer pressures exerted by his or her reference group. "In most cases, the adolescent's personal values are altered and shaped by peer group pressure in order to increase the similarity between himself and the other group members" (Newman & Newman, 1976, p. 270).

Newman and Newman's postulates have been supported by studies of conformity in contrived situations. Several researchers have used an Asch (1951) procedure to examine how frequently young people of various ages alter their judgments of ambiguous stimuli to correspond with judgments they have been led to believe were made by peers. With some notable exceptions (Collins & Thomas, 1972; Hoving, Hamm & Galvin, 1969), most investigators have found that conformity is significantly higher among early adolescents than younger individuals, and either declines modestly or remains high in the later teenage years (Costanzo & Shaw, 1966; Iscoe, Williams & Harvey, 1963; Landsbaum & Willis, 1971). This has prompted many researchers to assume that similarity among adolescents is evidence of peer pressure and conformity (e.g., Ide, Parkerson, Haertel, & Walberg, 1981) and that teenagers are strongly motivated to behave similarly to their friends in virtually all areas of activity (e.g., Collins, 1974).

Studies using hypothetical situations to examine peer conformity, however, reveal a more complex picture. For example, Berndt (1979) asked various age groups of children and adolescents how willing they would be to accede to peer pressure in three types of commonly experienced activities. All age groups in his sample were less willing to follow peers in antisocial situations than in pro-social or neutral behaviors. These differences were less pronounced in early adolescence than in other age groups. In all three areas, however, early adolescents were more willing to follow peers than were younger or older age groups. Males were more willing than females to accede to antisocial peer pressures; gender differences were not significant in the other areas. In contrast to the implicit, unspoken pressure characteristic of the "Asch" studies, Berndt examined relatively explicit peer pressure because, in his hypothetical situations, the individuals exerting pressure were portrayed as actively encouraging the respondent to join them.

If conformity inclinations and peer pressure arise from the same developmental impetus, as Newman and Newman (1976) suggest, the differences Berndt (1979) noted in conformity inclinations also should be apparent in the pressures teenagers commonly encounter from peers. To examine adolescents' perceptions of peer pressure, Brown (1982) asked college students to recall the degree and direction of peer pressure they encountered in high school in numerous areas and to recount their own attitudes or behavior in corresponding areas (e.g., pressure to get good grades vs. self-reported GPA). His measure, like Berndt's, focused on relatively explicit peer pressures. It included items concerning misconduct (drug/alcohol use, sexual intercourse) and conformity (wearing clothes or hairstyles like everyone else), on which experimental studies of conformity have focused, as well as items concerning peer social involvement (going to parties, participating in school activities) and "pro-adult" behaviors (getting good grades, getting along well with parents). Brown (1982) found significant variations in both the strength of various peer pressures and the degree of association between peer pressure and self-reported behavior. He also found significant gender differences in some peer pressures. Differences were similar to but not entirely consistent with Berndt's (1979) results. Although these findings are intriguing, their generalizability is limited by the study's retrospective approach and narrow sample (comprised only of students who went on to college).

In sum, there is evidence to support Newman and Newman's (1976) postulates that early adolescents are especially receptive to peer pressure and are aware of such pressure in numerous facets of their lives. Yet, peer influences appear to vary by situation as well as by age and gender. This encourages closer scrutiny of early adolescent peer pressures and conformity within an ecologically valid context (beyond contrived and hypothetical situations). The present study, designed as an extension of Brown's (1982) investigation, examined early adolescents' perceptions of explicit peer pressures in four areas: peer socializing, conformity, misconduct, and pro-adult behavior. The study focused on three questions: First, how strong are the peer pressures that early adolescents perceive in various facets of their lives? Second, to what extent do perceptions of peer pressure vary by grade level and gender? Third, are perceived pressures significantly associated with corresponding personal attitudes and behavior?

METHOD

Sample

The 373 respondents were drawn from the junior (grades 7-9) and senior (grades 10-12) high schools of one Midwestern city. The city's 13,000, largely working- and middle-class residents comprised a stable and homogeneous (virtually all White) population. Relatively even numbers of males and females were drawn from each grade (*n* of males in grades 7-12: 33, 31, 27, 34, 35; *n* of females: 32, 32, 32, 36, 32).

Measures

The study was based on responses to three instruments. The first measured the amount of pressure respondents perceived from peers to engage in various behaviors. The second assessed respondents' personal attitudes about these behaviors, namely, how important it was to them to engage in the behaviors. The third asked respondents to report the frequency with which respondents engaged in many behaviors covered in the peer pressure measure. The content and derivation of each measure are described below.

Perceived Peer Pressure. A 12-item *Peer Pressure Index* (PPX) asked respondents to rate the degree and direction of peer pressure ("pressure people put on other people their own age to do something or not do something else") they encountered from their friends and acquaintances. The measure included Brown's (1982) nine peer pressure items, which were derived from open-ended pilot interviews with a group of teenagers. Additionally, based on previous research concerning early adolescent peer interactions (Coleman, 1961; Larkin, 1979) and consultations with administrators in the participating schools, two items were added (pressure to "belong to a crowd" and to "talk or act like everyone else"), one of Brown's items (pressure to "use drugs or alcohol") was split into two separate items, and one item was worded differently for junior versus senior high students (pressure to "have sexual intercourse" was reworded to "make out—sex" for the younger group).¹ Order of presentation of items was fixed because pilot testing revealed that changing the order did not alter the item response distributions. The exact wording and order of presentation of items is provided in the appendix.

Each PPX item was rated on a 5-point scale, from "strong" (scored +2), "some" (+1) or "no" pressure (0) to "some" (-1) or "strong" (-2) pressure to do the opposite. Items were expected to cluster in four "pressure areas": conformity, social involvement, misconduct, and pro-adult behavior. Factor analyses of PPX item scores assessed the empirical validity of the expected clusters. The analyses were constrained to a four-factor solution and run separately for grades 7-9 and 10-12. They confirmed expectations for all items among junior high students and all but two items among senior high respondents. In the older group's analysis, "pressure to drink" loaded primarily on the social involvement (rather than misconduct) factor, and pressure to "be involved in school activities" was not strongly associated with any factor. Initial (expected) and final assignments of items to areas are listed in the appendix.

With these revisions the cluster of items in each area was tested for internal consistency. The junior and senior high school samples were run separately because of differences in the items included in their misconduct and social involvement scales. Among junior high students, scale alphas (Cronbach, 1951) were .74 for conformity, .55 for social involvement, .83 for misconduct, and .53 for pro-adult behavior. Corre-

sponding alphas for the older sample were .74 for conformity, .61 for social involvement and misconduct, and .40 for pro-adult items. Although the small number of items per scale must be considered in interpreting these figures, the pro-adult and social involvement scales appeared to have a relatively high degree of measurement error. Thus, findings concerning these scales must be interpreted with caution. To compensate for the unequal number of items per scale, scale scores were based on the mean of scale item responses. Higher mean scores indicated more "positive" peer pressure (pressure to do the activity); scores near zero indicated more ambivalent pressure (more of a balance of pressure toward and against the activity).

Because the PPX measured *perceptions* of peer pressure, it is difficult to assess the instrument's validity. An individual's perceptions may legitimately differ from more objective measures of peer pressures. Other studies (Clasen & Brown, 1985), however, have shown that peer group differences in perceived peer pressures correspond to independently assessed differences in peer group norms. The stability of pressure area scores was examined by readministering the PPX to a pilot sample of 63 adolescents after a six-week interval. Test-retest correlations on scale scores ranged from .46 for social involvement to .62 for pro-adult behavior.

Personal Attitudes (Importance Index). Respondents also rated, on a 4-point Likert scale (from "not important" to "very important"), how important to their life at present various activities were. This *Importance Index* included items corresponding to each item on the PPX pro-adult and social involvement scales. For example, to compare to the PPX item measuring peer pressure to be active socially, respondents were asked how important it was to their life at present to "have a good social life (go out, go to parties, etc.)." The Importance Index items allowed assessment of the degree of association between perceived peer pressure and personal attitudes about various behaviors.²

Self-Reported Behavior. A separate set of questions assessed the associations between PPX item responses and self-reported behavior. Several questions related to social involvement pressures. Concerning pressure to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, respondents indicated whether or not they had an opposite-sex relationship and, if so, how important this relationship was to them (on a 5-point Likert scale from "only a little" to "extremely important"). In relation to pressure to be active socially, respondents listed the things they did on a "typical Friday or Saturday night." Each activity mentioned was coded as a "crowd" (e.g., go to parties, school functions, the local teenage hangout), "small group" (e.g., go to a movie, visit a friend), or "solitary" (e.g., do homework, watch TV, work on a hobby) activity, with a "miscellaneous" category for such things as "work." Inter-rater agreement on assignment to these categories was .89, based on Flanders' (1967) modification of Scotts (1955) pi, which corrects for chance association. The number of activities in each category divided by

²School policy disallowed questions about self-reported misconduct. Our efforts to derive valid self-report questions concerning conformity to peer norms also appeared unsuccessful. Consequently, analyses were confined to Importance Index and self-reported behavioral items corresponding to PPX social involvement and pro-adult scale items.

the total number of weekend pursuits mentioned (excluding miscellaneous and uncodeable responses) constituted the crowd, small-group and solitary socializing scores, respectively. Because the socializing variable scores were not independent, data analyses only employed the variable with closest correspondence to the PPX item, the crowd socializing score.

A catalog of the student's extra-curricular activities provided information that could be compared to perceived pressure to be involved in school activities. Each activity was categorized by type—athletic, club, leadership, or performing (with three raters displaying 96% agreement on category assignments)—so that respondents received scores for the sheer number (total number of activities mentioned) as well as the diversity (number of categories of activities mentioned) of their extra-curricular pursuits. Students also indicated the number of hours per week, on average, they devoted to these activities, all told.

In the pro-adult area, relevant to peer pressure to get good grades, respondents reported their GPA for the past year. Concerning pressure to get along well with parents, respondents indicated (on a 5-point Likert scale from "not at all" to "extremely") how likely they were to ask their parents' advice on important matters.

Procedure and Analyses

Students in three or four classrooms per grade were given a self-report questionnaire containing the measures described above. Classrooms were selected randomly in the junior high school. To enhance representativeness in the senior high sample, the classrooms for each grade were selected randomly from an academic subject area taken by most students in that grade. To encourage honest responses, the questionnaire was administered by a member of the research staff and confidentiality was stressed. Usable questionnaires were returned by 98% of the students. Data were collected in January to allow the youngest class time to become familiar with the school's informal social milieu.

In data analyses respondents were grouped by grade rather than age because grade level provided a more even distribution than age (making certain statistical comparisons more robust) and because most previous studies of peer conformity have grouped students by grade.³

RESULTS

The degree and direction of peer pressures reported by early adolescents in the present sample were strikingly similar to the retrospective accounts of college students on Brown's (1982) study. Because Brown asked respondents to recall high school peer pressures, his results were compared to the high school portion (grades 10 - 12)

³Thornburg and Jones (1982) have shown that, for many variables, age-based analyses reveal developmental trends more clearly than grade-based analyses. In our study, however, respondents' associates (who were the source of the peer pressures respondents reported) were confined to "grade-mates", more so than age-mates. Also, there was no increase in age variance with advancing grade (as it sometimes the case). In each of the two oldest grades, for example, respondents differed in age by no more than one year.

TABLE 1

Comparisons of PPX Item Mean Scores in Brown's (1982) Study vs. Present Sample

Item	Males		Females	
	Present Sample ^a	Brown's Study	Present Sample ^a	Brown's Study
Conformity				
Dress, groom like others	0.67 ^b (.70)	0.48 (.62)	1.74 (.77)	1.83 (.73)
Social Involvement				
Have a boyfriend or girlfriend	0.46 (.67)	0.26 (.60)	1.93 (.67)	1.93 (.70)
Be active socially	0.99 (.66)	0.85 (.68)	1.27 (.66)	1.14 (.67)
Be active in school	0.64 (.74)	0.72 (.83)	-0.60 (.74)	0.89 (.77)
Misconduct				
Drink alcohol	0.89 (.80)	0.80 (.74)	0.66 (.81)	0.79 (.74)
Smoke cigarettes	-0.09 (.77)	-0.14 (.72)	0.41 (.73)	0.17 (.74)
Make out/Have sex	0.34 (.65)	0.43 (.62)	-0.92 (.71)	0.25 (.74)
Pro-adult				
Study, get good grades	0.84 (.80)	0.75 (.76)	0.69 (.74)	0.78 (.73)
Get along with parents	0.28 (.64)	0.14 (.67)	1.28 (.72)	0.18 (.65)

Note. PPX items not included in Brown's (1982) study are omitted from table.

^aRespondents in grades 10-12.

^bItem mean; figure below (in parentheses) is standard deviation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

of the present sample. T-tests were conducted on each item common to both studies, separately by gender. Results are reported in Table 1. Only two of the 18 comparisons yielded significant differences: Females in the present study reported significantly less positive peer pressure than females in Brown's (1982) study to be active in school and to smoke cigarettes. Because Brown's respondents were from an older cohort than the students we surveyed and came from a variety of high schools, these comparisons suggested that adolescents' perceptions of peer pressure are not highly specific to a given school or to a particular moment in history.

Perceptions of Peer Pressures

To assess whether or not respondents perceived comparable degrees of peer pressure in the four pressure areas (conformity, social involvement, misconduct, pro-adult behavior) a 6 (grade) \times 2 (gender) \times 4 (pressure area) ANOVA was conducted, treating the pressure area scores as a repeated measure. Table 2 reports the

TABLE 2
Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Pressure Area Scale

Scale	Total Sample		Males		Females	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Peer conformity	0.77	0.67	0.62	0.58	0.91	0.72
Social involvement	0.75	0.57	0.67	0.55	0.82	0.58
Misconduct	0.18	0.68	0.14	0.63	0.21	0.72
Pro-adult behavior	0.62	0.63	0.62	0.64	0.62	0.63
(N)	(373)		(177)		(196)	

mean score in each area. There was a significant main effect for pressure area, $F(3, 1074) = 82.85, p < .001$. Post-hoc Scheffé comparisons, based on the ANOVA (MSE = .341, $df = 1,074$) and specifying an alpha level of .025, indicated that perceived misconduct pressures were significantly less positive than peer pressures concerning conformity, $t = 19.51$, social involvement, $t = 18.85$, or pro-adult behavior, $t = 14.55$. The fact that the mean score for misconduct was near zero indicated that students felt nearly as much pressure from friends *not* to engage in misconduct as *to* do so. The comparisons also indicated that pro-adult peer pressures were significantly less positive than pressures concerning conformity, $t = 4.96$, or social involvement, $t = 4.30$.

Figure 1 traces grade differences in pressure area scores. Although the main effect for grade (in the ANOVA) was not significant, there was a significant Grade \times Pressure Area interaction, $F(15,1074) = 2.90, p < .001$. It appeared as if differences in pressure area scores narrowed from grades 7-9, then broadened again through 12th grade. Based on this pattern we performed post-hoc Scheffé contrasts (again based on the ANOVA) on two comparison groups: 8th- and 9th-graders versus all other grades. The difference between perceptions of misconduct versus social involvement pressures was significantly smaller among 8th- and 9th-graders than students in other grades, $t = 4.72$. Similar comparisons of misconduct pressures to conformity pressures, $t = 2.85$, and to pro-adult pressures, $t = 1.32$, were in the same direction but not statistically significant.

There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(1,358) = 11.24, p < .001$, with females reporting more positive peer pressure, in general, than males did. The Gender \times Pressure Area interaction also was significant, $F(3, 1074) = 4.26, p < .01$.

To examine grade and gender differences *within* pressure areas a 6 (grade) \times 2 (gender) ANOVA was conducted on each pressure area score. There were significant grade differences in perceptions of misconduct pressures, $F(5,358) = 2.69, p < .05$, and social involvement pressures, $F(5,358) = 5.54, p < .001$ (see Figure 1). A subsequent one-way trend analysis (with scores adjusted for the effects of gender) indicated that grade differences in perceived social involvement pressures traced a U-shaped quadratic trend, $F(1,366) = 8.77, p < .01$.⁴ Compared to males, females

⁴Some may suspect that grade differences were due to variations between junior and senior high school samples in the specific items constituting the social involvement and misconduct pressure area scores. However, analyses of area scores based only on items common to both sets of respondents produced the same pattern of grade differences.

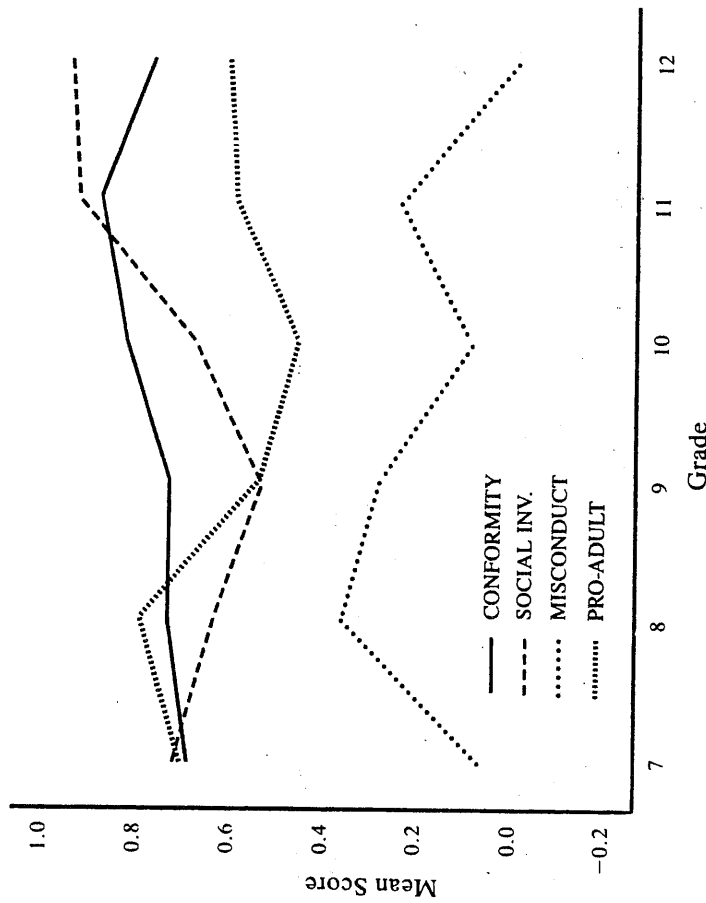


Figure 1. Grade differences in mean scores for each perceived peer pressure area scale. Higher scores indicate more positive peer pressure (pressure toward the domain).

perceived significantly more positive peer pressures toward conformity, $F(1,358) = 18.75, p < .001$, and social involvement, $F(1,358) = 6.42, p < .05$ (see Table 2). Gender differences in the other two areas were not significant.

Strength of association between perceived pressure and personal attitudes of self-reported behavior. Perceived pressure to engage in misconduct (drug/alcohol use and sexual behavior) was less positive than pressures in other areas. Perceived pressures toward getting good grades and getting along well with parents (pro-adult activities) also were lower than pressures toward conforming to peer norms or socializing with peers. There were significant grade differences in the strength of perceived misconduct and social involvement pressures, so that differences in mean scores among the four pressure areas appeared to narrow between 7th and 9th grade, then broaden again through 12th grade. Females reported more positive peer pressures than males did, especially regarding peer conformity and social involvement.

Perceived peer pressures corresponded significantly but modestly with personal attitudes about the importance of peer socializing and pro-adult behaviors. Perceived pressures accounted for between 3 and 10% of the variance in importance index items. Associations between perceived pressure and self-reported social involvement were significant but of even lower magnitude. Perceived pressures did not display significant ties with pro-adult behavior. Associations between perceived pressure and self-

Perceived Pressures vs. Personal Attitudes

Associations between each PPX social involvement and pro-adult scale item and its corresponding item on the Importance Index were examined in a series of regressions. Age, gender and the Age x Gender interaction were entered first, followed by the PPX item. Interactions between perceived pressure and both grade and gender were examined by adding each set of interaction terms to a regression containing all other main and interaction effects. Results of the regressions are summarized in Table 3. There were significant main effects for all three social involvement variables, indicating that the stronger the pressure respondents perceived from friends toward having a boy/girlfriend, being active socially, and being in school activities (respectively), the more importance they attached to these activities. Main effects also were significant for both pro-adult behavior variables, and there was a significant Pressure x Gender interaction in the analysis of academic achievement. The association between perceived peer pressure and the importance attached to getting good grades was stronger for males ($r = .30$) than females ($r = .07$). The only other significant interaction effect involved social activity (going to parties, etc.). For students in grades 8 and 9 (who reported less positive peer pressure than other respondents to be active socially), correlations between this PPX item and the importance of an active social life were significantly lower ($r = .06$ and $.07$) than among students in any other grade ($r = .27$ to $.46$).

Perceived Pressure vs. Self-Reported Behavior

Regressions also were used to assess associations between perceived peer pressure and self-reported social involvement and pro-adult behavior (see Table 4). Among those who had a boy/girlfriend, perceived pressure was significantly associated—directly and in interaction with grade and gender—with how much respondents valued this relationship. The more pressure 7th- and 8th-graders perceived from peers to have a boy/girlfriend, the more they valued their opposite-sex relationship ($r = .48$, $.47$, respectively); corresponding correlations for students in grades 9–12 were much lower ($r = .05$ to $.22$). Perceived peer pressure to be active socially was significantly associated with the percentage of a respondent's "typical" weekend activities that involved a large crowd of peers. Perceived pressure to be active in school was significantly associated with the total number and diversity of activities in which the respondent participated as well as the number of hours per week devoted to these activities.

With regard to pro-adult behaviors, perceived peer pressure to get good grades was not significantly associated with a respondent's grade point average. The association between perceived pressure to get along well with parents and the frequency of confiding in parents also was not significant, although the frequency of confiding was significantly associated with the importance attached to getting along well with parents (conditional chi-square gamma = $.53$, controlling for grade and gender effects).

Summary of Findings

In sum, there were significant differences in the degree and direction of peer pressures our respondents perceived in various areas of their life, as well as in the

TABLE 3
Associations Between Perceived Peer Pressure and Self-Rated Importance of Corresponding Activity

Importance Index item	Summary Effects ^a		Perceived Pressure		Pressure x Grade		Pressure x Gender	
	R ²	F	F	R ²	F	R ²	F	
Have a boyfriend or girlfriend	.13	2.86***	27.89***	.02	1.87	.00	0.31	
Be active socially	.11	2.38***	15.18***	.03	2.21*	.00	0.20	
Active in school	.11	2.33*	37.11***	.01	0.39	.00	0.44	
Get good grades	.11	2.30**	12.64***	.02	1.74	.01	4.31*	
Get along well with parents	.07	1.35	8.30**	.01	0.94	.00	0.12	

^aResults of regressing Importance Index item on corresponding PPX item, grade, gender, and all interaction terms. Under F value (in parentheses) are degrees of freedom. Based on entering specified effect after all other effects at same level have been entered. Under F value (in parentheses) are degrees of freedom. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

TABLE 4
Associations Between Perceived Peer Pressure and Corresponding Self-Reported Behavior

PPX item	Self-reported behavior		Perceived Pressure		Partial Effects ^b	
	R ²	F	R ²	F	R ²	F
Have a boy/girlfriend	.17	2.90***	.05	16.17***	.04	2.48*
Importance to R of his/her boy/girlfriend		(18.255)		(1.261)		(5.255)
Be active socially	.08	1.64*	.01	4.65*	.01	1.07
Weekend time in large-group activity		(18.350)		(1.356)		(5.350)
Be active in school	.14	3.08***	.07	27.43***	.02	1.33
Number of extra-curricular activities		(18.344)		(1.350)		(5.344)
Diversity of extra-curricular activities	.12	2.53***	.06	22.01***	.02	1.22
Hours/week in extra-curricular activities		(18.354)		(1.360)		(5.354)
Get good grades	.12	2.49***	.04	15.08***	.02	1.85
Grade point average		(18.343)		(1.349)		(5.343)
Get along with parents	.08	1.68*	.01	2.32	.00	0.07
Confide in parents		(18.348)		(1.354)		(5.348)
	.04	0.77	.01	2.93	.02	1.30
		(18.346)		(1.352)		(5.346)

^aResults of regressing self-reported behavior on corresponding PPX item, grade, gender, and all interactions. Under F value (in parentheses) are degrees of freedom.
^bBased on entering specified effect after all other effects at same level have been entered. Under F value (in parentheses) are degrees of freedom.
 *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

reported attitudes or behavior occasionally were mediated by grade or gender, but there was no consistent pattern to these mediating (interaction) effects.

DISCUSSION

Peer pressure in early adolescence often is portrayed as a repressive, monolithic, unidirectional force that threatens individual autonomy and undermines acceptable behavior. Newman and Newman (1976), however, cast peer pressure in quite different terms, based on their developmental model of identity formation in early adolescence. They argue that efforts to achieve a sense of group identity make teenagers especially sensitive to peer pressures because such pressures transmit and enforce group norms. Because norms differ from group to group there should be substantial individual differences in early adolescents' perceptions of peer pressure. Yet, within this age group, pressures to spend time with friends and conform to group norms should be relatively high in order to enhance group identity.

Results of the present study favor Newman and Newman's (1976) perspective. Respondents confirmed our expectation that there are multiple areas of peer pressure in early adolescence. Areas also varied in the strength of perceived pressures, in the extent and direction of grade differences in such pressures, and the degree of correspondence between peer pressures and personal attitudes or behavior.

As the Newmans' postulates would predict, pressures toward peer social involvement and conformity to peer norms were particularly prominent. This corroborated earlier research that has addressed adolescent peer pressures. Based on teenagers' responses to hypothetical dilemmas involving parent-peer cross-pressures, Brittain (1963) found that early adolescents were most willing to conform to peer expectations on items concerning dress, dating, and choice of school courses. He interpreted this as evidence that teenagers wish to avoid being separated from or notably different than friends. The desire to conform to the norms of the "leading crowd" also was a major theme in Coleman's (1961) study of Midwestern high schools. Yet, whereas Coleman portrayed adolescents (or at least the "leading crowd") as critical of academic achievement and close parental ties, students in our sample sensed moderately positive peer pressure to get good grades and get along well with parents. Perhaps by forcing students to select a single response or rank-order items Coleman underrated the importance that adolescents attach to pro-adult behaviors. It also is possible that peer pressures have changed in the 25 years since Coleman's study. In any case, our respondents concurred with Coleman's findings that peer pressure is more positive in non-academic areas.

Similar to Berndt's (1979) findings about peer conformity inclinations, perceptions of peer pressures were more ambivalent with regard to misconduct than other areas of behavior. A substantial proportion of respondents reported that peers generally discouraged drug use and sexual activity. Pressure to drink alcohol, however, departed from the pattern of other misconduct items. Rising steadily with age, it moved from being one of the least positive sources of peer pressure among 7th-graders to the most

positive item among 12th-grade males. The prominence of peer pressure to drink alcohol encourages the conclusion the peer pressure fosters antisocial behavior in early adolescence. It is important, therefore, to emphasize how much more ambivalent than other items were peer pressures to smoke, use drugs, or have sex.

Grade differences in perceived pressures were inconsistent across areas and failed to display the inverted u-shaped age trend noted in several developmental studies of peer conformity. Similar to Berndt (1979), however, we found that differences in scores among pressure areas narrowed from grades 7-9, then broadened again through 12th grade. Because of the study's cross-sectional design we cannot determine whether this was a developmental difference or a cohort effect. It is possible, however, that as the need for group identification intensifies early adolescents tend to perceive peer pressures more as a unitary force. Then, with the weakening of group identity in the later teenage years, adolescents recover the capacity to discriminate among areas of peer pressure. In any case, our findings underscore the need for longitudinal studies to ascertain how perception of peer pressure change over the course of early adolescence.

The relative absence of gender differences supported Eagly's (1978) contention that gender differences in peer conformity have dissipated in recent years. As in Brown's (1982) earlier study of perceived pressures, however, females sensed stronger peer pressure than males in areas involving social activities and interpersonal relationships. Such subtle gender differences, which appear to reinforce traditional gender-role stereotypes, deserve continued attention in subsequent studies. Although Berndt (1979) found females less willing than males to accede to antisocial peer pressures, we found no gender differences in perceptions of misconduct pressures. This may have been because the PPX misconduct items inquired about different behaviors than were encompassed in Berndt's hypothetical situations.

It was not surprising to find peer pressures more strongly associated with attitudes than self-reported behavior because attitudes are not as constrained by forces beyond an individual's control. By itself, for example, pressure from peers would be unlikely to make an adolescent with limited intellectual abilities get good grades, but it could easily alter his or her attitudes about academic achievement. More intriguing was the perceived pressures also were associated with behaviors subject to individual control—valuation of an existing heterosexual attachment or choice of extracurricular activities—more significantly than behaviors dependent upon other individuals or innate capacities: Maintaining close ties to parents, getting good grades, etc. If, as these findings suggest, teenagers tend to accede to peer pressures except when inhibited by external forces or personal limitations, then many early adolescents may suffer considerable anxiety or frustration when thwarted from following the dictums of peers. Future research should evaluate the consequences of not conforming to peer pressures as well as the degree of conformity characteristic of early adolescents.

The present study probably underestimated the strength of association between peer pressure and personal attitudes or behavior because the PPX only inquired about explicit pressures from friends and acquaintances. It omitted potentially influential

subtle and indirect forms of peer pressure. Nevertheless, the modest associations observed concur with Newman and Newman's (1976) contention that no peer group demands total conformity, but only an optimal level that strengthens the group's effectiveness in satisfying members' needs. Similarly, Sebald (1981) found that although "conformity" is the most prominent prerequisite of popularity listed by teenagers, "being yourself, being an individual" is also a frequently noted requirement. Apparently, peer pressures serve primarily as a boundary-maintaining device. They encourage adolescents to keep behaviors within certain limits deemed acceptable by peers without demanding blind allegiance to a narrowly defined lifestyle.

Generally, then, peer pressures do not appear to constitute a monolithic force constricting or misdirecting individual development in adolescence. Our respondents perceived peer pressures in meeker and more complex terms. They appear to be a persistent feature of early adolescence, but their impact seems to hinge on such factors as grade level, gender, and the facet of life under consideration. By approaching peer pressures in terms of these qualifying variables future research can clarify their impact on individual growth and development in early adolescence.

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Appendix

Wording and Order of PPX Items

How strong is the pressure from your friends and acquaintances to:

1. Be active socially (go to parties, social events, etc.)?
2. Smoke cigarettes?
3. Study hard, get good grades?
4. Wear the same types of clothes or hairstyles that most other people are wearing?
5. Drink alcohol (beer, wine, etc.)?
6. Have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend (opposite sex)?
7. Belong to one of the crowds at school?
8. Use drugs?
9. Be active in school organizations?
10. Get along well with parents?
11. Have sex (sexual intercourse)? / "Make out" (sex)?
12. Talk or act like everyone else?

Assignment of Items to Peer Pressure Areas

	Final		
	Initial (Expected)	Junior High	Senior High
Conformity	4, 7, 12	4, 7, 12	4, 7, 12
Social involvement	1, 6, 9	1, 6, 9	1, 5, 6
Misconduct	2, 5, 8, 11	2, 5, 8, 11	2, 8, 11
Pro-adult behavior	3, 10	3, 10	3, 10

Reprint requests should be addressed to:

B. Bradford Brown
 Department of Educational Psychology
 1025 W. Johnson Street
 Madison, WI 53706