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Peer-Group Affiliation and Adolescent Self-Esteem: An Integration of Ego-Identity and Symbolic-Interaction Theories

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To evaluate expectations derived from ego-identity theory and symbolic-interaction theories about the association between self-concept and peer-group affiliations in adolescence, we examined the self-esteem of (a) 221 7th through 12th graders associated by peers with one of five major school crowds and (b) 106 students relatively unknown by classmates and not associated with any school crowd. Among crowd members, self-esteem was directly related to the position of one's crowd in the peer-group status hierarchy (based on both peer-rated and self-perceived crowd affiliation). Outsiders' self-esteem differed in relation to the accuracy of their reflected appraisal of and the salience they attached to crowd affiliation. Crowd members as a whole exhibited higher self-esteem than outsiders as a whole. Differences, however, were mediated by crowd status, salience of crowd affiliation, and the accuracy of reflected appraisals. An adequate interpretation of the findings required an integration of Festinger's (1954, 1957) social comparisons and cognitive-dissonance theories, Cooley's (1902) notions of reflected appraisal, and Newman and Newman's (1976) extrapolations from ego-identity theory.

According to many researchers and theorists, one of the hallmarks of adolescent peer relations is the set of large, relatively amorphous groups or "crowds" that appear at the beginning of the teenage years (J. S. Coleman, 1961; Dunphy, 1963; Newman & Newman, 1976). Crowds are often perceived as playing a pivotal role in an adolescent's maintenance of self-esteem or development of a sense of identity (J. C. Coleman, 1980; Erikson, 1968). Yet, few researchers have attempted to quantify the nature or degree of association between a teenager's crowd affiliation and self-esteem. Furthermore, two leading approaches to self-concept formation—ego-identity theory (Erikson, 1968) and symbolic-interaction theory (Gergen, 1971)—produce different expectations about the connections between peer-group membership and self-concept during adolescence. Our study examined how well the postulates derived from these two theoretical frameworks explained patterns of self-esteem observed among members of various adolescent peer groups as well as among students who were not part of any school crowd.

Much of the impetus for examining how peer-group affiliation relates to adolescents' self-esteem can be traced to J. S. Coleman's (1961) classic study of high school peer relations. In each school in his sample, Coleman identified a leading crowd comprised of students highly regarded or highly envied by their schoolmates. Most students seemed to be aware of the attributes necessary to become part of this group and many aspired to membership in the leading crowd. To measure self-esteem, Coleman asked students whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "if I could trade I would be someone different from myself." Despite its simplicity, this item did differentiate leading crowd members from other students. Curiously, however, the elites held a much larger advantage in self-esteem over students who wished to be part of the leading crowd than over students with no such aspirations.

Subsequent studies, mostly ethnographic in orientation, have objected to J. S. Coleman's (1961) overemphasis on the leading crowd (Buff, 1970; Cusick, 1973; Gottlieb, 1975; Larkin, 1979; Varenne, 1982). Through participant observation, each investigator was able to identify between three and five crowds in the school he studied. Associated with each crowd was a set of stereotypic characteristics that distinguished its members from students in other crowds. Essentially, each crowd represented a label placed on a certain group of students, even if they spent little or no time interacting with one another. All the ethnographers except Buff (1970) noted that groups were arranged in an informal status hierarchy, headed by a crowd whose stereotypic attributes were strikingly similar to the elites on which Coleman focused. The most commonly observed manifestations of status—peer popularity, control over extracurricular activities and school leadership positions, positive regard from school adults—have been associated by other researchers with high self-esteem (Wylie, 1979). Thus, it is not surprising that the ethnographers reported more self-esteem among members of high-status groups than within crowds further down the status hierarchy.

With one exception (Varenne, 1982), the ethnographers

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found that students were constantly reminded of their group affiliation through peer interactions. Seating arrangements in the lunchroom, access to various extracurricular activities, and invitations to weekend activities all served to reinforce group boundaries, to define who belonged to the crowd and who did not. Thus, those who were not part of any crowd were effectively excluded from many of the facets of high school life that can bolster self-concept. Indeed, Cusick (1973) found these outsiders to be especially deficient in self-esteem. Larkin (1979), on the other hand, maintained that many who did not appear to be part of the peer-group system seemed to function effectively without a strong group affiliation.

Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, especially as it has been elaborated by Newman and Newman (1976), provides one theoretical context in which to interpret these findings. In formulating a sense of identity, the Newmans postulated, teenagers use the peer groups as a way station between relinquishing their childish dependence on parents for self-definition and achieving an autonomous sense of self rooted in their society at large. They described the central crisis of early adolescence (ages 13–17) as "group identity versus alienation." During this period, the importance attached to group affiliation is uniformly high, and being accepted by a crowd is essential to maintaining a positive self-concept. Yet, one must find acceptance in an "acceptable" group: one that meets the teenager's social needs and provides an adequate sense of group belonging.

Newman and Newman (1976) have not tested these ideas empirically. Their postulates, however, predict that crowd members will manifest higher self-esteem than will nonmembers, but the difference will be significant only between nonmembers and adolescents satisfied with the group of which they are a part. This theory accounts for the preoccupation with the leading crowd among students that J. S. Coleman (1961) observed, as well as the relatively low self-esteem of peer-group outsiders that Cusick (1973) encountered. But it fails to explain the association ethnographers found between self-esteem and the status of one's crowd, or the adequate self-concept Larkin (1979) noted among a substantial proportion of students who had no clear crowd affiliation.

Symbolic-interaction theories also provide a framework within which to assess the association between adolescents' crowd affiliation and self-esteem. Drawing from the pioneering work of James (1890) and Mead (1934), symbolic interactionists have proposed several theories of how self-concept is formed, modified, and maintained largely through interaction with others. Early approaches emphasized Cooley's (1902) concept of reflected appraisals, the notion that one's sense of self is derived largely from one's perceptions of how other people regard oneself. Several experimental studies have shown that individuals do adjust their self-concept after being exposed to an appraisal from another person (Gergen, 1971). Few, however, have examined whether subjects accurately perceived the other person's opinion (Wylie, 1979). Thus, it is unclear how much the changes in self-concept observed in these experiments depended upon reflected rather than actual appraisals.

In his theory of social comparisons, Festinger (1954) suggested that an overt appraisal is not actually necessary for one's self-concept to be influenced by another person. This is because individuals often compare their own attributes or attitudes with those they perceive in a significant other in order to evaluate the adequacy of their ideas or characteristics. The impact of such comparisons may depend on the salience attached to the significant other. Rosenberg (1979) found that the association between self-concept and reflected appraisals or social comparisons was stronger if the significant other was highly valued by the subject. However, the appraisal or comparison may itself alter the salience of the significant other. In his theory of cognitive dissonance, Festinger (1957) argued that if the significant other's attributes appear much more favorable or sharply different from one's own, the individual may devalue the salience of this person in order to avoid the loss of self-esteem or self-assurance the comparison would otherwise engender.

Because most symbolic interaction studies have been conducted under controlled experimental conditions, the principles of these three approaches—reflected-appraisal theory, social-comparison theory, and cognitive-dissonance theory—have not been well tested in more ecologically valid contexts. Nevertheless, they all suggest certain expectations about how crowd affiliation will be related to self-esteem. Because each type of crowd is associated with a set of stereotypic attributes, the group to which peers assign a teenager may be viewed as a global or summary appraisal of the adolescent as a person. A crowd's position in the status hierarchy essentially represents the degree of esteem that peers accord the crowd's members. Through social comparisons, crowd members will incorporate this appraisal into their self-concept. Thus, one would expect, as Cusick (1973) found, that self-esteem will decline as one moves from members of high-status crowds to those assigned to low-status groups. In view of Cooley's (1902) concept of reflected appraisal, however, self-esteem ought to be more strongly associated with self-perceived than peer-rated crowd affiliation.

Even among those who accurately perceive the appraisal of peers, the effects of crowd membership on self-evaluation may be mediated by the importance a teenager attaches to belonging to a crowd. Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that members of low-status groups will deflate the importance of crowd membership to cushion the effects of an essentially negative reflected appraisal, whereas more elite group members may enhance their more flattering appraisal by rating crowd membership as very important. In this case, the salience of a group would vary directly with crowd status. Rosenberg (1979), however, would contend that crowd salience is more instrumental as a mediating variable, implying that the association between crowd status and self-esteem will be significant only among adolescents who regard crowd membership as a relatively important aspect of life. Unfortunately, neither J. S. Coleman's (1961) study nor ethnographers' reports offer sufficient detail to evaluate these hypotheses.

Symbolic-interaction principles also may be applied to students who are not part of a crowd. Because adolescents routinely harbor rather tenuous self-concepts (Rosenberg, 1979), the absence of the summary appraisal or social comparisons that group membership offers may in itself endanger the self-esteem of those who remain outside the peer-group system. Yet reflected-appraisal theory suggests that, within this group, those who sense they are regarded as crowd members will not harbor as low self-esteem as those who recognize they are outsiders.

Rosenberg (1979), on the other hand, would argue that the impact of recognizing oneself as an outsider will depend on the salience one attaches to being part of a group. In other words, like crowd members, outsiders are not necessarily a homogeneous group. Ethnographers, therefore, may have disagreed about outsiders' self-esteem because unwittingly they observed different subgroups of these students.

In sum, ego-identity and symbolic-interaction theories yield a variety of expectations about the relation between crowd affiliation and self-esteem. Occasionally, the expectations from different theories are contradictory. More important, however, collectively the theories suggest a more complex and conditional set of associations between crowd membership and self-esteem than is apparent from the perspective of any single theory. Newman and Newman (1976) argued that all 13- to 17-year-olds will regard group membership as highly salient and that self-esteem will be higher among group members—at least those satisfied with the crowd to which they belong—than among nonmembers. Social-comparison theory suggests that although members as a whole may have higher self-esteem than nonmembers, there also will be differences among members according to the position of their crowd in the peer-group status hierarchy. Reflected-appraisal theorists would expect the differences in self-esteem among crowd members to be greater when based on self-perceived than on peer-rated status, and the deficits in self-esteem among outsiders to be higher among those who recognize themselves as outsiders than among those who perceive themselves as crowd members. Rosenberg (1979) would expect the salience attached to group membership to be a mediating variable such that differences in self-esteem among crowd members would increase as the salience of crowd affiliation increased. Cognitive-dissonance theorists, however, might expect adjustments in salience in response to reflected appraisals, so that salience would parallel group status.

An ecologically valid evaluation of these varying expectations would require background information from a representative sample of students about the types of crowds they perceived in their school and the degree of status accorded to each group. Additionally, one would need to identify members of various crowds as well as students not associated with any group and measure their self-esteem, self-perceived group membership, the salience they accorded to belonging to a crowd, and satisfaction with their current affiliation. Although conducted in an appropriate ecological context, neither J. S. Coleman's (1961) nor any of the ethnographers' studies provides adequate measures of all these variables. Thus, our study was designed to assess adolescents' self-esteem in light of the differing expectations of these theoretical frameworks.

Method

Sample

Data were drawn from students in the junior (grades 7–9) and senior (10–12) high school of a racially homogeneous (98% white), residentially stable, and largely working- to middle-class Midwestern community. Both schools had approximately 1,000 students. Of the 403 students asked to participate in the study, 327 (81%) successfully completed the questionnaire. Most of the remainder were absent or unavailable on the day of testing. The sample was relatively evenly divided by grade and gender (for boys in grades 7–12, n = 26, 28, 32, 28, 32, and 24, respectively; for girls: n = 16, 24, 32, 26, 28, and 31, respectively).

Within the sample were two major subsamples. The first (n = 221) was comprised of students consistently associated by peers with one of the school's five major crowds: populars (n = 25), athletes (61), druggies/toughs (52), nobodies (32), or normals (51). The n subsamples in each crowd varied in accordance with differences in the size of crowds within the school. Differences in the distribution of students among these crowds were retained to enhance the study's ecological validity. The other subsample included 106 students classified as outsiders, that is, relatively unknown by classmates and not consistently associated with any crowd. The derivation of each subsample is explained in the next section.

Identifying Crowd Members and Outsiders

To derive the study's sample, we conducted a crowd-identification study in each school. Students in three randomly selected classrooms per grade (310 raters all told) were asked to name, in their own words, the major crowds they perceived in their school. They then described the stereotypic traits of each group on six preselected dimensions (derived from a semistructured pilot questionnaire), rank ordered the crowds in terms of status, and listed five classmates whom they considered to be members of each group. Each crowd named by the raters was categorized into one of eight major crowd types. The types were derived from content analyses of responses to a semistructured pilot study questionnaire given to 133 adolescents. Interrater agreement on crowd assignments was .87, using Flanders's (1967) modification of Scott's (1955) pi, which corrects for chance association. Log-linear analyses were then conducted for each pair of crowds on all six descriptive dimensions to determine how well differentiated the pair's stereotypic images were. Further details of the identification study's methods and findings are reported elsewhere (Brown & Lohr, 1983).

To focus on clearly recognized, well-established peer groups within the school, we eliminated two crowd types from the present analyses. One (the brains) was dropped because it was mentioned by less than half the identification-study raters, the other (special-interest groups) because raters failed to concur on its stereotypic image for at least half the descriptive dimensions. Of the remaining groups, two were combined (druggies and toughs) because, unlike all other pairings of crowd types, their stereotypic images were not differentiated from each other on at least two dimensions. This left five distinct crowds to be included in the study. Listed from highest to lowest in peer status, they were *jocks* (athletically oriented), *populars* (well-known students who lead social activities), *normals* (middle-of-the-road students who constitute the masses), *druggies/toughs* (known for illicit drug use and/or delinquent activities), and nobodies (low in social skills and/or intellectual abilities). The crowd-member sample was comprised of all students associated with one particular crowd by at least two thirds of the raters who mentioned them.

To identify outsiders, we turned to the crowd-member sample. Because of the nature of crowds, one would expect students to know, at least superficially, most if not all other classmates associated with their own group. Therefore, students not known by members of any of the school's major crowds were, effectively, outsiders to the peer-group system. On the basis of this rationale, a checklist containing a randomly selected half of the respondent's classmates was added to each crowd member's questionnaire. Respondents were asked to check the name of each person they could recognize and call by name. All but 7 crowd members had enough time to complete the checklist. Responses from 5 others were deleted because they checked more than one of the 10 bogus names added to each form of the list, thereby indicating they were exaggerating the number of classmates known. From the remaining check-

lists we identified the students least likely to be recognized by crowd members, namely, the 15% of students in each grade who received the fewest checks on the classmate checklist. Of this group, 34 were eliminated because they were known by all members of one crowd. The remainder constituted the outsider sample.

Measures

The questionnaire given to all respondents (group members and outsiders) contained items to measure self-esteem, reflected appraisal of group affiliation (from which a self-perceived crowd-status score was derived for crowd members), the salience attached to group membership, and satisfaction with one's current position in the peer-group system. Rosenberg's (1965) scale was used to measure self-esteem. This 10-item, Likert-scaled measure has been used extensively with adolescent samples. As in previous studies, it manifested impressive internal consistency; Cronbach's alpha was .82. A respondent's score, representing the mean response to the 10 items, could range from 1.00 (low) to 4.00 (high self-esteem).

To evaluate their reflected appraisal of group affiliation, crowd members were presented with a list of the crowds most often named by the identification-study raters and asked to indicate the group to which they felt most of their classmates would say they belonged. Of the 221 crowd members, 207 assigned themselves to one of the five major crowds on which our analyses focused. In order to test symbolic-interaction theory's expectations, crowd affiliation was transformed into a crowd-status score. Each crowd was assigned a number from 1 (low) to 5 (high), according to its position in the status hierarchy. Based on their group affiliation, crowd members were given a peer-rated and self-perceived (reflected appraisal) crowd-status score. For example, a druggie who felt that most classmates considered her a popular would receive a peer-rated crowd-status score of 2 and a self-perceived score of 4.

Outsiders were asked to indicate which of six alternatives best described their relation to the peer-group system as a whole. Those who classified themselves as having many friends but no strong affiliation with a crowd, as being attached only to a small group of friends, or as being a loner were viewed as having a reflected appraisal that coincided with peer judgments. Those describing themselves as a leader, definite member, or marginal member of a crowd were viewed as misperceiving peer appraisals.

To measure the salience of crowd affiliation, students were asked to rate, on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 4 = *very*) how important they personally considered belonging to a crowd. Satisfaction was measured by asking students how they would change their group affiliation, if they could, and how strongly they desired these changes. Some expressed little or no interest in changing or mentioned alterations that essentially enhanced their current status; these were classified as "satisfied." Among those expressing a somewhat or very strong desire to change, crowd members who wished to shift affiliations to a different group and outsiders desiring acceptance by a crowd were judged "dissatisfied." The specific responses classified into satisfied and dissatisfied categories for members and outsiders are presented in the Appendix.

Procedure

In each school, a self-report questionnaire, containing the measures outlined previously as well as several other instruments, was group administered in an unused classroom by one of the research staff to the crowd-member sample during one of their free periods or study halls. At the end of this questionnaire, students filled out the classmate checklist from which the outsider sample was derived. To obviate time pressures and avoid fatigue effects, two forms of the checklist were prepared for each grade level so that respondents had to evaluate only half their classmates. Each checklist contained every second name from a class roster, along with 10 bogus names added to identify respondents who appeared to be marking names of classmates indiscriminantly.

One week later the same questionnaire and classmate checklists were administered (under the same conditions) to the outsider sample along with several crowd members who had been unavailable the previous week and a random assortment of other students (n = 81). The latter group was included so that outsiders would remain unaware of the basis on which they were selected for the study. Confidentiality was stressed to both portions of the sample to enhance honesty in responses to questionnaire items.

Results

Because members of the various crowds were unevenly distributed by grade and gender, it was possible that any differences in self-esteem or salience observed among various segments of the sample were partially attributable to grade or gender effects. Thus, before entertaining the main analyses, we conducted a 6 (grade) × 2 (gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on self-esteem scores for the entire sample.[1] Both main effects were significant, with boys reporting higher self-esteem than girls (M = 3.16 vs. 2.99), $F(1, 311) = 9.28$, $p < .01$, and scores varying among grade levels in a nonlinear fashion, $F(5, 311) = 2.74$, $p < .05$. An ANOVA on the salience attributed to crowd membership also revealed significant main effects, with boys scoring lower than girls (M = 2.78 vs. 3.04), $F(1, 302) = 8.76$, $p < .01$, and fluctuating differences among grade levels, $F(5, 302) = 3.44$, $p < .01$. In neither analysis was the Grade × Gender interaction significant. Because of these differences, subsequent analyses involving self-esteem or salience were adjusted for grade and gender effects before examination of the effects of other variables.

Analyses of Crowd Members

Newman and Newman (1976) implied there would be no significant differences in self-esteem among members of various crowds. Social-comparison theory, on the other hand, postulates a direct association between peer-rated crowd status and self-esteem. Reflected-appraisal theory suggests that self-esteem would be more strongly associated with self-perceived than with peer-rated crowd status. Whereas cognitive-dissonance theory implies that salience would parallel the crowd-related differences in self-esteem, Rosenberg (1979) suggested salience would mediate the relation between status and self-esteem.

To examine these expectations, we performed a series of regressions. First, self-esteem and salience were each regressed on grade, gender, peer-rated status, and interaction terms. Grade and gender were entered first; the remaining variables were allowed to enter hierarchically. For self-esteem, status was the only term to enter significantly, $F(1, 204) = 27.59$, $p < .001$. It accounted for 11% of the variance in the dependent variable. For salience, only the Status × Gender interaction was signifi-

[1] Some have argued that fluctuations in self-esteem are more closely tied to age than to grade level (Thornburg & Jones, 1982). We elected to control for grade level, however, because our sense is that peer-group assignments are influenced more heavily by grade than age. When analyses were repeated substituting age for grade level, the same patterns of associations emerged as are reported here.

Table 1
Mean Self-Esteem and Salience Scores for Members of Various Crowds

Crowd	Self-esteem			Salience		
	M^a	*SD*	*n*	M^a	*SD*	*n*
Peer-rated crowd affiliation						
Jocks	3.31	.38	61	3.00	.84	59
Populars	3.27	.38	25	3.28	.88	24
Normals	3.05	.43	48	3.05	.66	51
Druggies/toughs	3.05	.46	52	2.79	.75	52
Nobodies	2.90	.44	30	2.68	.96	27
Overall	3.13	.44	216	2.95	.81	213
Self-perceived crowd affiliation						
Jocks	3.33	.34	56	3.11	.91	55
Populars	3.33	.37	29	3.10	.70	31
Normals	3.03	.45	71	2.90	.73	71
Druggies/toughs	2.99	.44	45	2.95	.67	46
Nobodies	2.49	.06	2	3.42	.18	2
Overall	3.14	.44	203	3.00	.76	205

[a] Scores are adjusted for grade and gender effects.

cant, $F(1, 209) = 10.49$, $p < .001$, accounting for 5% of the variance. Subsequent linear-trend analyses revealed that self-esteem declined as one moved down the crowd-status hierarchy, $F(1, 211) = 24.03$, $p < .001$; the trend for salience also was significant, $F(1, 208) = 7.03$, $p < .01$, in spite of the relatively low score among jocks. Mean self-esteem and salience scores for each crowd are reported in Table 1.

To determine whether similar or more powerful differences were apparent based on reflected appraisals, the regressions were repeated, substituting self-perceived for peer-rated status. As in the earlier analysis of self-esteem, only the main effect, self-perceived crowd status, entered significantly, $F(1, 197) = 25.87$, $p < .001$. It accounted for 11% of the variance in self-esteem. Self-perceived status was not significantly associated with salience, either as a main effect or in interaction with grade or gender. Linear-trend analyses revealed that as self-perceived status declined, so did self-esteem, $F(1, 202) = 11.36$, $p < .001$; no such pattern was found with regard to salience (see Table 1).

To determine if salience served as a mediating variable, self-esteem was regressed on grade and gender, followed by hierarchical entry of peer-rated status, salience, and the Salience × Status interaction. Status was the only variable to provide a significant addition to the regression equation (past the effects of grade and gender), $F(1, 204) = 27.59$, $p < .001$. Substituting self-perceived for peer-rated crowd status, the status term again was the only variable to enter significantly, $F(1, 197) = 25.87$, $p < .001$.

In sum, self-esteem was significantly associated with crowd status, based on both peer-rated and self-perceived group affiliation. Salience also varied directly with crowd status when membership was based on peer assignments, although the differences were not as strong or consistent as they were for self-esteem. Salience did not significantly mediate the relation between crowd status and self-concept.

Analyses of Outsiders

Although Newman and Newman (1976) predicted that self-esteem would be uniformly low among outsiders, symbolic-interaction theorists suggested it would be especially low among those who valued crowd affiliation but recognized they were not part of a group. To evaluate these expectations, we regressed self-esteem scores on grade and gender, then allowed salience, appraisal (whether or not outsiders saw themselves as part of a crowd), and the Salience × Appraisal interaction to enter hierarchically. Both salience, $F(1, 90) = 4.49$, $p < .05$, and the Salience × Appraisal interaction, $F(1, 89) = 4.08$, $p < .05$, entered significantly, accounting respectively for 5% and 4% of the variance in self-esteem. To assess the interaction, we regressed self-esteem on grade, gender, and salience separately for those who felt they were part of the crowd ($n = 42$) and those who saw themselves as outsiders ($n = 54$). Salience was significantly associated with self-esteem only for the latter group, $F(1, 50) = 3.04$, $p < .05$; it accounted for 9% of the variance in the dependent variable.

These results suggested that outsiders could be classified into three groups, on the basis of the interaction of appraisal and salience: *distorters,* who saw themselves as part of a crowd; *independents,* who acknowledged being an outsider but attached little or no importance to being part of a crowd; and the *envious,* who recognized they were not part of a group but rated crowd affiliation as somewhat or very important. As symbolic interactionists predicted, self-esteem was lower among the envious than other portions of the outsider sample (see Table 2).

Members Versus Outsiders

From social-comparison theory, we inferred that outsiders would exhibit lower self-esteem than crowd members, although differences would diminish as one moved down the status hierarchy. Reflected-appraisal theory suggested that such differences would be mediated by self-perceptions of one's position in the peer-group system, whereas Rosenberg's (1979) findings implied they would be mediated by the salience attached to crowd affiliation. Newman and Newman (1976) also predicted lower self-esteem among outsiders, although they suggested that nonmembers may be outscored only by members satisfied with their current group affiliation. It seemed sensible to base our evaluation of symbolic-interactionist postulates on the groupings of members and outsiders that encompassed variables significantly associated with self-esteem in separate analyses of the subsamples. Thus, the five subgroups of crowd members based

Table 2
Mean Self-Esteem Scores for Subgroups of Outsiders

Subgroups	M^a	*SD*	*n*
Envious	2.87	.66	30
Independents	3.16	.44	23
Distorters	3.04	.47	44
Overall	3.02	.53	97

[a] Scores are adjusted for grade and gender effects.

Table 3
Planned Comparisons of Self-Esteem Scores Between Each Crowd and Each Subgroup of Outsiders

	Envious		Independents		Distorters	
Crowd	*t*	*df*	*t*	*df*	*t*	*df*
Jocks	−3.41**	39	−1.42	35	−3.16**	80
Populars	−3.10**	47	−1.22	43	−2.61*	60
Normals	−1.28	44	1.10	42	−0.04	86
Druggies/toughs	−1.28	46	1.06	44	−0.06	91
Nobodies	−0.01	52	2.36*	48	1.54	64

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

on peer-rated status were compared to the three subgroups of outsiders based on the interaction of appraisal and salience. Results of planned comparisons, in which self-esteem was adjusted for grade and gender effects, are reported in Table 3. Both the envious and the distorters recorded significantly lower self-esteem than did jocks and populars. Self-esteem among independents, on the other hand, was not appreciably lower than in any other crowd and significantly surpassed the nobodies.

To evaluate the postulates of ego-identity theory, both members and nonmembers were divided into those who appeared satisfied and those who voiced dissatisfactions with their current position within the peer-group system. Despite Newman and Newman's (1976) implications that dissatisfaction would be very high among outsiders because they were not part of a group, less than half of these students (43%) expressed modest or strong interest in becoming part of a crowd. A smaller proportion of crowd members (20%) was dissatisfied with their current group affiliation, although the difference between members and nonmembers was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, n = 290) = 1.39$.

Table 4 presents mean self-esteem scores for satisfied and dissatisfied portions of the crowd member and outsider subsamples. To test the significance of satisfaction on the differentiation of the two subsamples, three planned comparisons were conducted using separate variance *t* tests. As we expected, on the basis of Newman and Newman's (1976) postulates, outsiders' self-esteem was significantly lower than that of members satisfied with their current crowd affiliation $t(125) = 2.07$, $p < .05$. It also was marginally lower than for crowd members as a whole, $t(117) = 1.94$, $p < .06$, but (despite the apparent differences in Table 4) not significantly lower than for dissatisfied crowd members, $t(84) = 1.42$. In post hoc analyses based on a modified form of Student's *t* test (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975) with the alpha set at .05, we found that dissatisfied and satisfied outsiders also differed significantly in self-esteem.

Discussion

The analyses revealed differences in self-esteem both within and between groups of crowd members and groups of outsiders. Differences among crowd members were consistent with Festinger's (1954, 1957) theories of social comparisons and cognitive dissonance: Higher peer-rated crowd status was associated with both higher self-esteem and greater salience attributed to crowd affiliation. Self-esteem also was directly associated with self-perceived crowd status, as predicted on the basis of reflected-appraisal theory (Cooley, 1902), but contrary to expectation this connection was not stronger than for peer-rated status. Salience did not mediate the relation between crowd members' self-esteem and crowd affiliation.

For outsiders, self-esteem differed among groups defined by the interaction of salience and reflected appraisal: Those who realized they were outsiders but attached little importance to group membership (independents) harbored higher self-esteem than those perceiving themselves as group members (distorters) or, especially, those who felt it was important to be part of a crowd but recognized they were not (envious). These differences were most consonant with principles articulated by Cooley (1902) and Rosenberg (1979).

Differences between members and outsiders depended upon groupings within each subsample. Distorters and envious outsiders registered significantly lower self-esteem than did members of the two highest status crowds. Independents' self-esteem, on the other hand, was not significantly lower than that of any of the crowds and actually surpassed that of the lowest status group. These patterns were contrary to the consistency that ego-identity theory suggested would be found within the two subsamples. Consonant with Newman and Newman's (1976) postulates, however, outsiders as a whole did display lower self-esteem than crowd members who were satisfied with the group to which they belonged.

Because peers are routinely regarded as an extremely influential component of an adolescent's interpersonal world, many consider membership in a peer group to be essential in maintaining a strong self-concept during the teenage years. Erikson (1968) incorporated these assumptions into his theory of adolescent identity development, which Newman and Newman (1976) elaborated and transformed into a set of testable postulates. In our study, as we expected on the basis of Newman and Newman's (1976) ideas, self-esteem was lower among outsiders than among students satisfied with the group with which they were affiliated. Far more impressive, however, were the variations in self-esteem within the member and nonmember subsamples. These differences were not readily explained by Newman and Newman's (1976) extrapolations from ego-identity theory. Perhaps this is because ego-identity theory regards adolescent crowds primarily as support groups that provide the re-

Table 4
Comparison of Self-Esteem Scores Among Satisfied and Dissatisfied Crowd Members and Outsiders

Group	*M*[a]	*SD*	*n*
Crowd members			
Satisfied	3.14	.45	156
Dissatisfied	3.13	.42	38
Outsiders			
Satisfied	3.16	.44	53
Dissatisfied	2.84	.61	40

[a] Scores are adjusted for grade and gender effects.

sources necessary to develop a strong and stable self-concept. Teenagers are expected to select a group compatible with their own values and interests or to move from group to group trying out various self-concepts as a means of developing a sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). Yet, empirical and ethnographic studies focusing more directly on adolescent peer groups (J. S. Coleman, 1961; Cusick, 1973; Larkin, 1979) have found crowd affiliation to be much less volitional than ego-identity theory suggests. Ethnographers perceived that a student's crowd affiliation reflected the degree of social status accorded by schoolmates, based on peer assessments of the student's predominant characteristics.

This view is more consonant with symbolic-interactionist perspectives of self-concept development, which encourage us to regard adolescent crowds not as groups of students engaged in mutually supportive interactions but as manifestations of the global appraisals of others in which adolescents seem to engage readily. Rosenberg (1979) suggested that interest in peer evaluations of self are heightened in adolescence as one begins to turn from parents to peers as a primary source of reflected appraisals and social comparisons. The postulates of symbolic-interaction theories, that peer judgments can be mediated by the accuracy of one's perceptions of others' appraisals (Cooley, 1902) or the importance one attaches to agemates' opinions (Rosenberg, 1979), help account for the differences in self-esteem that were observed among subgroups of outsiders.

In view of these results, however, it is puzzling that neither salience nor reflected appraisals tempered the association between self-esteem and peer-rated group affiliation among crowd members. Perhaps our findings underscore the power of peer-group labeling in adolescence. Ethnographers emphasized that crowds are a prominent feature of adolescent social interaction and that crowd members are constantly reminded in daily activities of their position within the peer-group system. Therefore, it is difficult for members to misperceive or ignore their status among peers. Although members of low-status crowds may attempt to salvage a positive self-concept by deflating the salience of group membership, our findings imply that such efforts at warding off low self-esteem were not very effective. Outsiders, on the other hand, are more uncertain entities. Without a clear crowd label it is undoubtedly difficult for agemates to know how to respond to them. This may be why ethnographic studies portrayed peer interactions among outsiders as less regimented than those between members of various crowds (Buff, 1970; Cusick, 1973; Larkin, 1979). In the face of less consistent or predictable responses from peers, it would be easier for outsiders than for crowd members to misperceive peer appraisals—that is, to see themselves as part of a group—or to deflate the importance of schoolmates' assessments altogether. Such factors might explain why the reflected-appraisal process and the salience attached to crowd membership mediated the association between peer-group position and self-esteem for outsiders more than for crowd members.

It seems, then, that an adequate interpretation of our findings requires an integration of principles from ego-identity and symbolic-interaction theories. Adolescent crowds are not merely fertile grounds for bolstering self-esteem through identity testing or building supportive social relationships, as Newman and Newman (1976) suggested. Crowd labels also provide one with feedback on one's comparative status among peers, which in itself may enhance or depreciate self-esteem. For crowd members, the labels may be too powerful to escape by such symbolic-interactionist mechanisms as misperceiving peer appraisals or depreciating their salience. Yet these mechanisms may guard against loss of self-esteem among those who occupy the less regimented world of an outsider, someone whom peers have not clearly pigeonholed in the adolescent peer-group system.

In discussing our findings in light of ego-identity and symbolic-interaction theories, we seem compelled to presume a causal direction between self-esteem and peer status. The theoretical frameworks that we examined assumed that self-esteem was heavily influenced by one's position within the peer-group system. Yet recent empirical research relating self-esteem to perceived peer relations has found stronger evidence for the opposite causal ordering (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Kahle, Kulka, and Klingel, 1980). More specifically, Bohrnstedt and Felson (1983) demonstrated that for verifiable attributes such as athletic or academic achievement, self-perceptions were more likely to affect self-esteem than vice versa, but among less verifiable attributes such as popularity the opposite was true. The cross-sectional nature of our data disallows definitive statements about causality. We suspect, however, that Glidewell, Kantor, Smith, and Stringer's (1964) review of research on self-concept and peer status was accurate in portraying causality as largely a circular process. An adolescent's crowd affiliation represents a more global and lasting appraisal than do the variables on which most researchers have focused. Peers base such an appraisal on their observations of an individual's attributes and actions over an extended period of time. Their evaluations (and the resulting crowd assignments) are therefore likely to be influenced by the individual's existing self-concept. Yet the accolades or ridicule that stem from a crowd assignment are likely to further enhance or undermine self-esteem. From this perspective, causality appears difficult to specify within a natural ecological context. A more central concern from our point of view is to chart the nature and extent of the interrelation of self-concept and peer-group affiliation during adolescence.

Among our respondents, then, peer-group membership was not necessarily a sign of or pathway to strong self-esteem, nor did those who were not part of a group appear uniformly deficient in self-esteem. Our findings supported the more impressionistic data of ethnographers that self-esteem among group members was significantly related to the status of their crowd. The findings also seemed to clarify discrepancies in ethnographers' evaluations of outsiders by showing that self-esteem among these students was tied to how accurately they perceived their position in the peer system and how much they valued group membership. Despite Newman and Newman's (1976) concern about teenagers who do not become attached to a group, the outsiders in our sample who showed little inclination to join a crowd had relatively favorable levels of self-esteem, especially in comparison to students whose crowd affiliation was a constant reminder of the limited status they enjoyed among peers. The variables we examined accounted for approximately 11% of the variance in self-esteem, suggesting that peer-group membership is not the preeminent reflection of or influence on adolescents' self-esteem. Nevertheless, it is a significant factor whose association with adolescent self-concept is best un-

derstood through an integration of principles from ego-identity and symbolic-interaction theories.

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Appendix

Types of Changes in Peer-Group Affiliation Desired by Respondents

The classification system outlined below was applied to respondents who listed a change and indicated they wanted "somewhat" or "very much" to see the change really occur. Each respondent was categorized as satisfied (with his or her current position within the peer-group system), dissatisfied, or unclassifiable, according to the type of change listed. Newman and Newman (1976) argued that group identification depended on being part of a group that offered support and acceptance. Thus, changes revealing a desire for more support (e.g., friendship) or acceptance were considered to reflect dissatisfaction with current crowd affiliation. Changes reflecting a desire for continued support or acceptance (e.g., deeper friendships within the crowd) were seen as reflecting satisfaction. Some classifications depended on whether one was currently a crowd member or an outsider.

Table A1
Classification of Student Responses by Group

Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Crowd members	
None, nothing, no change	Be a member of a different crowd
Be a leader of my crowd	Accepted by a different crowd
Be more of a leader	Become a member of several crowds
Be more of a member	Have friends from other crowds
Closer friendships within the crowd	Have more friends
Be accepted by the opposite sex	Be accepted or liked by more people
	Be more popular
Unclassifiable	Be accepted for who I am
Wish there were no crowds	Be more of a loner
Wish crowds got along with each other better	Not be part of a crowd
Inappropriate response (e.g., be smarter, lose weight, be more attractive)	Be less involved in the crowd
Outsiders	
Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Be accepted for who I am	Be a leader of a crowd
Be a loner	Be accepted by a crowd
Be more of a loner	Be more accepted by a crowd
Have friendships grow closer	Be part of a different crowd
	Belong to several crowds
Uncategorizable	Be accepted by more people
Have friends in many crowds	Be more popular
Inappropriate response (e.g., be smarter, lose weight, be more attractive)	Have more friends

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