

## Analytical Study of Peer Conformity among Adolescents and Its Relation with Their Social Interaction Anxiety

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**ABSTRACT :** The period of adolescence is marked by many physical, mental and social changes .One such social change is mental drift from family or parents to the peers. Suddenly the issues like peer acceptance and fear of rejection from them start bothering them. Their behavior and attitudes starts modifying in order to confirm to their peers. This peer conformity leads to many desirable and undesirable effects. One of such undesirable effect is development of social interaction anxiety among the adolescents due to which they start avoiding social interactions and gatherings. The present study aimed to analyze the relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents. A sample of 105 adolescent girls and boys were taken from the adolescents studying in the schools of Jalandhar city, Punjab. The data was collected using the self-prepared peer-conformity scale and social interaction anxiety scale by the investigators. Pearson's coefficient of correlation technique and t-test were employed to analyze the raw data. The results showed that there is a direct correlation between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents. Both adolescent girls and boys show similar levels of peer conformity and social interaction anxiety.

**KEY WORDS:** Peer conformity, social interaction anxiety, adolescents

### I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. During this stage many physical, emotional, mental, and social changes take place. One side adolescents try to adapt to the physical changes in their bodies, on the other hand, they are dealing with emotional and psychological turmoils. It is also the period of social reorientation. They start spending more time with their peers then parents or family. They try to form groups and maintain friendships. Adolescent is a time of social reorientation when children start spending more time with their peers rather than parents. Their desire to form and maintain friendships and integrate with their group becomes crucial (Chiu, 2021). Slowly the desire of peer acceptance and fear of rejection from peers drive them towards peer conformity and they start modifying their behaviour and attitudes to conform to the peer group they belong to.

### II. PEER CONFORMITY

Conformity refers to the modification in the opinion and behavior of an individual in accordance with majority. Sometimes it can be in the form of simple choices such as choosing one's dressing style or other times in the form of behavior modification according to the majority (Zhang, et al.). Peer conformity, a phenomenon deeply ingrained in human social dynamics, refers to the tendency of individuals to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to align with those of a peer group. This pervasive influence often arises from the desire to fit in, gain acceptance, or avoid rejection within social circles. Whether consciously or subconsciously, individuals frequently find themselves conforming to the norms and expectations set by their peers, sometimes sacrificing their own convictions in the process. Peer conformity operates on various levels, from subtle shifts in opinions during casual conversations to profound changes in behavior in response to group pressure. Studying processes underlying peer conformity leads to highlight factors such as group size, cohesion, and social identity. While conformity can foster cohesion and cooperation within groups, it can also lead to conformity bias, where individuals prioritize conformity over critical thinking and independent judgment. Additionally, the impact of peer conformity extends beyond interpersonal interactions to influence broader societal norms, cultural practices, and even institutional policies. Exploring the complexities of peer conformity can offer valuable insights into complexities of human interaction and societal dynamics. Studying peer conformity among teenagers is of paramount importance due to its profound implications for adolescent development, social dynamics, and well-being. Gallardo et al. (2016) found that peer acceptance can predict a range of outcomes including higher levels of academic achievement, better self-esteem and lower loneliness.

Adolescence is a critical period characterized by heightened susceptibility to peer influence as individuals navigate the complexities of identity formation and social integration.

**Understanding how teenagers conform to peer norms sheds light on various aspects of their lives:**

**Identity Formation:** Peer groups play a pivotal role in shaping teenagers' sense of identity, influencing their beliefs, values, and behaviors. Study of peer conformity among adolescents can give insights into how adolescents negotiate their identities within social contexts and the factors that influence their decisions to conform or resist conformity.

**Risk Behaviors:** Peer conformity is often associated with engagement in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and reckless driving. Investigating peer conformity among teenagers helps identify risk factors and protective factors that influence susceptibility to negative peer influence, informing targeted intervention strategies to mitigate harmful behaviors.

**Mental Health:** Conformity pressures within peer groups can contribute to stress, anxiety, and social exclusion among teenagers. Understanding the impact of peer conformity on mental health outcomes provides valuable insights for designing interventions that promote resilience, coping strategies, and supportive peer networks.

**Academic Performance:** Peer conformity can influence academic achievement through its effects on motivation, study habits, and academic aspirations. By examining how peer norms shape academic behaviors and attitudes, educators can develop strategies to foster a positive peer culture that supports academic success and positive learning outcomes.

**Socialization Processes:** Peer conformity plays a crucial role in the socialization processes during adolescence, influencing social skills, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. Studying peer conformity helps elucidate the mechanisms through which adolescents learn social norms, negotiate conflicts, and develop empathy and perspective-taking skills.

**Social Interaction Anxiety :** Social interaction anxiety is characterized by an intense fear of social situations and interactions. Individuals with social interaction anxiety experience worry about being judged and embarrassed or rejected by others. This fear maybe pervasive and persistent impacting their ability to engage in everyday social activities such as conversations meetings or attending events. It can interfere with personal relationships, academic or professional performance and overall quality of life if left untreated. Social interaction anxiety among teenagers can be particularly challenging due to the developmental stage they are in, where peer acceptance and belonging are very important to them. The fear of being judged and ridiculed by their peers can be overwhelming, leading to a constant state of apprehension in social situations. This anxiety may arise from different factors including past negative social experiences, low self esteem or lack of social skills. As a result teenagers may become isolated and start avoiding social gatherings or interactions. This isolation can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression creating a cycle of avoidance and distress Teachman & Allen (2007) studied interactions of adolescents with their peers provide them with essential context for psychological development and act as socializing agents. Teens constantly judge their own behaviour relative to the norms of their peers and any deviation from peer norms may lead to negative evaluations of one's own social success. Researcher like Tillfors, Persson, Willén & Burk (2012), Zhang et al. (2016), Pickering, Hadwin, & Kovshoff (2020), Laursen (2022) and Bica (2023) conducted various researches related to peer conformity and social interaction anxiety . So investigators considered it important to study peer conformity among adolescents and establish its relationship with social interaction anxiety.

### **III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Santor et al. (2000) developed measures of peer pressure, peer conformity and popularity using a sample of 148 adolescent boys and girls .They found the measures to be inter correlated and peer conformity to be a strong predictor of risk behaviour among adolescents. Tillfors, Persson, Willén & Burk (2012) studied the bi-directional link between social anxiety and multiple aspects of peer relations, ie., peer acceptance, peer victimization and relationship quality among 1528 adolescents. The study was longitudinal where the sample was assessed twice after a gap of one year. The results showed that lower levels of peer acceptance lead to greater social anxiety. Also peers play an important role for mental health of adolescents and social anxiety interfere with healthy peer relations. Zhang et al. (2016) studied the effects of social anxiety and stress type on strong conformity in adolescence (age 10 to 16 years). A sample of 152 adolescents was taken .They were assigned one of the two conditions: An interaction and a judgment condition. The study utilized completion of a

Modified Asch task. In the interaction condition highly social anxious adolescence HSA were less likely to confirm while completing the task as compared to LSA adolescence. In the judgment condition HSA were more likely to confirm than LSA. The results found that by changing the stress type HSA behave differently. They avoid potential social situations with less or weaker conformity but when it comes to negative evaluation from others they show stronger conformity.

Gommans et al. (2017) investigated the relation between popularity, likeability and peer conformity in an experimental study on adolescents. It was found that adolescents were more likely to confirm to high status peers than to low status peers and popularity was a stronger predictor of peer conformity than likeability. Pickering, Hadwin, & Kovshoff (2020) in a systematic review explored the peer related risk factors in development of social anxiety among adolescents. It studied the risk factors like (i.e., peer acceptance, peer attachment, friendship quality, peer support, and victimization). The findings showed that low peer acceptance increase social anxiety for both boys and girls. Whereas limited closed friendships negative friendship experiences and victimization are peer related risk factors specific to girls. The study highlights the need of development of intervention methods to support the girls to improve relationships with their peers.

Laursen (2022) studied the developmental changes that affect peer conformity. According to the study susceptibility means easily influenced or harmed by something. So a child susceptible to peer influence is easily swayed by his or her peers. But in peer relations, susceptibility also means the likelihood that a child will be swayed. So more susceptible means, greater probability that a child will be influenced and to be susceptible to peer influence is to conform to behaviour of peers. Peer influence is a process that involves at least two participants influencer and influence (target), whereas susceptibility involves only the target and it increases the likelihood of conformity. Bica (2023) studied the conformity given behaviour of socially anxious individuals. It focused on how a socially anxious person behaves towards an unrelated fair person. The study used a modified multi shot Prisoner's dilemma (a socio economic game). Participants were presented with peer behaviour (fair or unfair) towards an unrelated fair person. Then they were presented with two alternative responses: reciprocate fairness or confirm to unfairness according to peer group. The results shows that conformity to peers rather than reciprocity drive decision making and cooperation in highly social anxious individuals.

#### **IV. OBJECTIVES**

Following objectives were designed to study the relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents studying in various schools of Jalandhar city.

1. To study the peer-conformity among adolescents.
2. To study the relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents.
3. To study the difference in peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys.
4. To study the difference in social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys.

#### **Hypotheses**

Following hypotheses were designed to test the objectives of the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents.
2. There is no significant difference in peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys.
3. There is no significant difference in social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys.

**Delimitation :** The study was delimited to adolescents studying in various schools of Jalandhar city.

**Sample :** The adolescents studying in the schools of Jalandhar city constitute the population of the study. A sample of 105 adolescent girls and boys were taken from the said population.

**Tools :** The tools used to collect the data regarding the present study were:

- Self-prepared Peer-Conformity Scale and
- Self-prepared Social Interaction Anxiety Scale

**Procedure and data collection :** The research was conducted to study the relationship between peer conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents. A descriptive survey method was used to study the problem at hand. 105 adolescent girl and boy students were taken for the study and data related to peer conformity and social interaction anxiety were collected using Google forms. The scales constructed by the investigators were

used to collect the data. The data were subjected to statistical analysis. The results and conclusions were drawn out from there.

**Statistical tools used :** The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean, standard deviation, standard error of mean were calculated. To study the correlation between the variables, coefficient of correlation was calculated using Pearson’s correlation technique. Difference in means was calculated using t-test.

**Analysis of the data :** To infer meaning, the raw data was subjected to statistical analysis. The objectives of the study were tested using hypotheses framed for the objectives.

Objective 1: To study the Peer- conformity among adolescents.

**Table 1: Percentage agreement regarding Peer- conformity of adolescents**

S.No.	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I skip my classes sometimes because my friends want me to do so.	9.5	25.7	39	18.1	7.6
2.	Sometimes I go to parties to appease my friends.	7.6	20	29.5	33.3	9.5
3.	Sometimes I engage in risky behaviour to keep up with my peers.	5.7	14.3	29.5	32.4	18.1
4.	Whenever I buying new things, I seek approval from my friends.	9.5	22.9	33.3	20	14.3
5.	I urge my parents to buy expensive things to maintain my status among my friends.	1.9	3.8	14.3	36.2	43.8
6.	I follow my friends' wishes even when it means not doing something I want to do.	1.9	21	39	21	17.1
7.	I sometimes break rules, because my friends also do so.	6.7	30.5	27.6	21.9	13.3
8.	If my friends are drinking, it would be hard for me to say no.	5.7	16.2	13.3	32.4	32.4
9.	I do things to make myself popular among my friends.	1.9	6.7	25.7	41	24.8
10.	At times I have changed the way I dress up in order to be more popular among my friends.	21.9	10.5	17.1	43.8	6.7

Table 1 shows the behavior of the adolescents related to peer conformity.

Looking at the item, ‘I skip my classes sometimes because my friends want me to do so,’ around 35% (9.5 + 25.7) agree to this whereas 25.7% (18.1 + 7.6) disagree with the statement, rest of them showed neutral/ undecided behavior. Further, for going to parties 27.6% (7.6 +20) agree that to appease their friends they go to parties whereas around 43% (33.3+ 9.5) disagree to it. More than 50% (32.4 + 18.1) of the adolescents disagree for engaging themselves in a risky behaviour to keep up with their peers whereas 29.5% showed neutral behavior to the statement. Around one third of the adolescents seek their friends’ approval before buying anything and another one third were neutral towards this statement. Majority (80%) disagrees with the statement, ‘I urge my parents to buy expensive things to maintain my status among my friends’. 38% of the adolescents disagree to following their friends' wishes even when it means not doing something they want to do, whereas 39% were neutral or undecided regarding this. Almost equal number, that is, more than

One third adolescents both agree and disagree to the statement, 'I sometimes break rules, because my friends also do so'. 2/3<sup>rd</sup> (32.4 +32.4) % adolescents disagree to the statement that if their friends are drinking, it would be hard for them to say no. Again 2/3<sup>rd</sup> (41+24.8) % adolescents disagree for doing things to make themselves popular among their friends. Around 50% disagree that at times they changed the way they dress up in order to be more popular among their friends whereas around one third adolescents agree to it. More than 50% adolescents feel shy around people they do not know, 28.6% are neutral towards this statement. Rest of them disagrees with this statement.

**Objective 2:** To study the relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents.

The relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis using Pearson's coefficient of correlation technique.

**Table 2: Coefficient of correlation between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents**

Variable	N	M	SD	R	Level of significance
Peer-conformity	105	26.41	6.836	.300	.01
Social interaction anxiety	105	29.46	7.133		

Table 2 shows that for 105 sample students, the mean and standard deviation values are 26.41 & 29.46 and 6.836 & 7.133 respectively. The coefficient of correlation value is .300. The value is significant at .01 levels of significance. Hence the hypothesis, 'there is no significant relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents', may not be accepted. The alternative hypothesis, 'there is a significant direct relationship between peer-conformity and social interaction anxiety among adolescents,' can be retained. This means that increased peer conformity leads to increased social interaction anxiety.

**Objective 3:** To study the difference in peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys.

The significant difference between mean values of peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis by calculating the t-ratio value.

**Table 3: Difference in mean values and t-ratio for peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys**

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	SEm	df	t-value	Level of significance
Peer-Conformity	Girls	63	25.48	6.355	.801	103	-1.730	NS
	Boys	42	27.81	7.356	1.135			

Table 3 shows that the mean values of peer-conformity between adolescent girls (63) and boys (42) are 25.48 & 27.81 respectively and the standard deviation values are 6.355 & 7.356 respectively. The t- value for 103 degrees of freedom is -1.730 which is not significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis, 'There is no significant difference in peer-conformity between adolescent girls and boys, may be accepted. This means that both girls and boys showed similar levels of peer-conformity.

**Objective 4:** To study the difference in social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys.

The significant difference between mean values of social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys can be studied by testing the concerned hypothesis by calculating the t-ratio value.

**Table 4: Difference in mean values and t-ratio for social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys**

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	SEm	df	t-value	Level of significance
Social Interaction Anxiety	Girls	63	29.87	6.957	.876	103	1.460	NS
	Boys	42	27.81	7.303	1.127			

Table 4 shows that the mean values of social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls (63) and boys (42), are 29.87 & 27.81 respectively and the standard deviation values are 6.957 & 7.303 respectively. The t- value for 103 degrees of freedom is 1.460 which is not significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis, 'There is no significant difference in social interaction anxiety between adolescent girls and boys, may be accepted. This means that both girls and boys showed similar levels of social interaction anxiety.

## V. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Adolescence is a phase of life where one gradually starts drifting from the parents and seeks validation from the peers. There is a strong desire to fit in the peer groups even if it means to do things which one actually does not want to do. This tendency increases during its early adolescence 14-15 years and then starts decreasing as they mature. They have to navigate through the complexities of social dynamics and strive to establish their identities. So they become very sensitive towards peer feedback and develop greater tendencies to conform to the group they belong to in order to gain social approval and avoid rejection. As they grow towards later stage of adolescence they tend to develop stronger sense of self awareness and autonomy. So they become more selective in the social interactions and less reliant on peer validation. The results of the study show the flickering nature of the adolescence. The sample showed greater conformity in simple tasks like -skipping classes or seeking approval from their friends when they buy new things. But in extreme situations the trend is more towards non conformity, for example, engaging in risky behaviour to keep up with their peers or forcing their parents to buy expensive things to maintain their status among their friends. Mostly disagreed that they find it difficult to say no to their friends for drinking.

Among the sample the neutral or undecided response in few statements is quite high, like, skipping classes due to friends, following wishes of friends even when they think otherwise or going to parties to appease their friends. This may be due to the fact that during adolescent age once behaviour is not completely driven by the peers. Other factors like presence of supported relationships with parents or other role models can provide adolescents with alternative sources of guidance and validation. So there may be uncertainty in their responses regarding statements that can generate conflicting responses from the point of view of their peers and parents or role models. The results also reveal that the trend remain similar in case of both girls and boys related to peer conformity and social interaction anxiety.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The present study analyzed peer conformity in adolescents and showed that there exist a positive correlation between peer conformity and social interaction anxiety. Also peer conformity affect both boys and girls and lead to social interaction anxiety in them. More such studies with different variables are required to understand the effects of peer conformity in adolescents.

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