

Peergroups and Evolution of the Self-System in Adolescence

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This study aims to explore the importance of peer groups, how belonging to different types of groups affects the actual perception of oneself, the peer group and other groups, and the perception of difficulty in coping with developmental tasks. 600 adolescents from Bologna, Italy filled out a questionnaire, consisting of three parts. The results show that peer groups are important in adolescence lives. Overall, 90% of the subjects were members of a peer group; most often they belonged to informal or quasi-informal groups.

A smaller percentage belonged to formal groups, like to sport or religious groups. The scopes to meet the groups were most often for amusement and also for talking about one's personal problems.

Surprisingly, the differences of descriptions of oneself and the own group, oneself and the self-defined outgroup, oneself and drug abusers, did not differ considerably among informal and formal groups. Also informal and formal groups described the ingroups equally favorably and outgroups equally unfavorably. Moreover the results show that informal and formal groups did not differ in the perception of difficulty in coping with developmental tasks.

These results indicate that the type of groups is not a crucial variable in explaining differences in evolution of the self-system in adolescents.

Introduction

Adolescence is defined as the life period in which the individual continually experiences an upset in previously attained states of equilibrium and must look for new ones. Several authors have taken up observations already present in developmental psychology and have suggested describing adolescence as a period when the individual has to cope with various developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1952).

- developmental tasks concerning physical changes (to know how to accept one self even after rapid and important changes in appearance);
- tasks regarding relationships with one's peers both of the same sex and of different sex (that is, to accept one's own sexual drives and to live with them according to old or new values; to know how to institute and take care of friendships);
- tasks regarding group participation (becoming a member of the peer group...);
- tasks regarding independence and autonomy (relations with family, with other adults, etc.);
- tasks regarding relationships with social institutions (i.e. school and work);
- tasks regarding the choice (of conversation, of innovation) of values and the self concept
- tasks regarding future time perspectives.

Developmental tasks can differ from culture to culture and, in the framework of a single culture, from group to group: can have different priorities in each culture and in each group; each of them can crop up either simultaneously, with others or by themselves.

Juvenile uneasiness can be viewed in relation to the need the adolescents feel to face up to developmental tasks: the uneasiness will be all the greater the more tasks there are to confront simultaneously in non supporting and non gratifying structural and relational conditions (Coleman, 1980).

Silbereisen (1984) has already argued, for example, that taking drugs («to try them») can be considered the sketch for a strategy to confront developmental tasks with.

Previous studies have shown that coping with developmental tasks is part of the important stages in the modification of the adolescent's self system (Palmonari, Carugati, Ricci Biti & Sarchielli, 1984). What is more, authors like Muzafer and Carolyn W. Sherif (1953, 1964, 1965, 1984), in examining various factors in real life situations in which adolescents actually plan their futures, have been able to show how some «universal» phenomena of the adolescent period (i.e. the speed of physical development and the modification of responsibility) influence the individual's self. These modifications of self in turn influence attitudes and social behaviours thereby triggering of further processes of change involving the person and his/her social relationships.

Sherif considers peer groups as the most important social laboratory for adolescent change. Relationships established in infancy are in fact challenged by the «new facts» which characterize adolescence; this motivates the individual to actively seek out specific relationships with others and, through these, to find a way-out of the uncertainties he/she has fallen prey to. In other words, the adolescent faces up to his/her developmental tasks, above all, in the peer group. Organization by age, typical of school and many other forms of community life in today's society, is in this respect critical. The adolescent no longer writes in his/her private diary about his/her loneliness if he/she sees that other peers are passing through the same experience. Instead he/she tends to augment and consolidate his/her relationships with them in order to confront his/her own difficulties. The move towards peers clearly indicates a shift in the balance of the self-system: from reference mainly to adults (i.e., parents) to one geared more towards peers, at least in those activities and life experiences that are no longer dominated by adults.

This study aims to point out the importance of peer groups for definition of self. The groups considered here are the ingroup (that is the group of one's peers) and two different outgroups, one made up of peers considered socially accepted, the other of peers who carry with them a social stigma (drug abusers). It also aims to explore how belonging to different types of groups affects the actual perception of difficulty in the developmental tasks to be faced up to.

More specifically:

- we wanted to find out whether among the adolescents of the city of Bologna, Italy, being a member of a peergroup is a widespread phenomenon as in the cases described by Sherif;

- we then wanted to investigate whether the adolescents, whenever they belonged to different groups, were clearly aware of the differences that existed between the various groups, and whether the adolescents, irrespective of the group they belonged to, considered it important for themselves to be part of a group;

- the subsequent aim was to find out whether belonging to different groups affects the proximity-distance relationship between the representations of self, one's own group, and groups different to one's own.

Our interest in the socio-psychological importance of the different types of peer groups originates in a previous survey conducted in this field which allowed to verifying (cf. Amerio, Palmonari & Pombeni, 1986) that adolescent groups are widespread in the urban environment and involve practically all subjects of that age. They can be distinguished as follows:

- (a) *formal groups*: these groups are constituted on the basis of clear goals to be attained, aims that may be religious, political, sportive or humanitarian. Actual engagement to attain the goals is guaranteed by participation in the group of one more adult leaders.
- (b) *natural or informal groups*: these groups are constituted exclusively on the basis of reciprocal interest of the adolescent members, quite independent of any adult leadership. In some cases the peers meet in various places outside their homes, such as street-corners, parks, etc., or in coffee houses. In other cases the peers meet in «more structured» places, such as close to the school, in public or private institutions (e.g. sport, clubs, church).

For the purpose of this study we used as basic reference points the notions of intergroup relations and social identity put forward by Tajfel (1978, 1981, 1982) as well as Doise's (1978) categorical differentiations. Our chief aim was to investigate whether, first, the adolescents who participate in formal groups appreciate their own group, and tend to consider as less important the other groups (outgroups); second, whoever belongs to an informal group although favorably evaluating the ingroup, tends to perceive the ingroup less positive than subjects belonging to formal groups.

These expectations are based on the fact that the members of formal groups share symbolic universes that are more elaborated and clearly defined than those of members of informal groups. This sharing functions as a strong means of cohesion.

Informal groups, on the other hand, may hold opinions that are more heterogeneous than those of formal groups. That is because whoever belongs to an informal group has less criteria for affirming the distinctiveness of his own group in relation to the others.

Finally, we wanted to examine, on the basis of these reflections, how the group of drug abusing adolescents is defined. It would be reasonable to expect that such a group would be considered by adolescents belonging to formal groups as being very distant from themselves and their own group, and by those belonging to natural groups as being slightly less distant from themselves and their group.

As a last point, we investigated how adolescents consider developmental tasks. We expected the adolescents belonging to formal groups to attribute different importance and difficulty to various developmental tasks than the peers in informal groups. Likewise we predicted that the expectations of the members of formal groups about the eventual consequences of failing to accomplish the various developmental tasks would similarly be different from those of the informal groups.

Method

Subjects

The survey covered 600 adolescents from Bologna, Italy. Fifty nine percent were males, 41% were females, from 16 to 18 years. The sample group was heterogeneous regarding social class, level of education of parents, and the scholastic condition of the interviewees. Almost all participants were members of either an informal group of adolescents (a group was defined

informal if it met in the streets of the city or in coffee-houses), a quasi-informal group (that are groups meeting either in the homes of its members or near the school, etc.), a sports group (that are groups meeting for sport competitions), or a religious group (groups meeting in the parish or in the respective seats of the religious community). Since almost no adolescents were members of politically engaged group formations. The subjects were asked to indicate a single group; those belonging to more than one group were asked to indicate «the group which they would not for any reason have left at that moment». Only 10% of the sample group declared that they did not belong to any group at all. 90% of the respondents indicated belonging to one of the four mentioned types of group, meeting with their peers fairly regularly.

Material

A semistructured questionnaire, consisting of three parts, was distributed to each participant. The questionnaire examined, (a) first, the structural aspects of the different experiences; i.e., the adolescents were asked whether they participated in a group, its meeting place, the characteristics of its members; the activities and aims of the group, their relations with adults who interact with the group.

(b) The adolescents were then asked to indicate similarities and differences, respectively, between themselves and other adolescents. More precisely, the adolescents judged members of their own group (ingroup), members of a group they perceived as completely different from their own group (outgroup 1), and finally, adolescents who use heroin (outgroup 2: drug abusers). The subjects used a list of 21 descriptive adjectives provided by the researcher to describe themselves, the ingroup, and the two outgroups. This list was drawn up in a pre-test phase through interviews with adolescents having the same characteristics as the sample (see Appendix A).

(c) The last part of the questionnaire dealt with the developmental tasks. The interviewees were asked to evaluate the importance of 12 (see Appendix B) developmental tasks. These tasks were also drawn up from pre-test interviews and were used here to assess the degree of difficulty the adolescents experienced in coping with them. The subjects also had to evaluate the degree of difficulty they thought the other ingroup members faced when confronting these developmental tasks.

At the end, a set of questions was employed to assess demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Procedure

The adolescents were met by one of four research assistants at various high schools. If willing to participate in the study, the research goals were debriefed. Completion of the questionnaire was done while the teachers were out the classrooms. It took approximately 50 minutes. No financial recompense was offered for participation.

Results

Overview

As already outlined, the respondents were members either of formal groups, organized as associations or clubs that can be completely different one from the other (e.g., sports groups or clubs on the one hand, religious and political groups on the other hand) but which do nonetheless have clearly defined objectives and set themselves educational and socialization goals; or informal groups (the so called «compagnies») that from in a completely natural way, functioning outside any preordained directives (informal and quasi informal groups). We assimilated these «informal» groups to the «natural» groups studied in M. and C. W. Sheriff's

work (1953, 1964, 1965, 1984). More than half (53%) of the juvenile adolescents participating in this study were members of informal groups; 26% belonged to quasi-informal groups; 11% defined themselves members of a sports group, and 10% participated as active members in a religious group.

Informal groups, quasi-informal groups, and sports groups were prevalently composed by males (the respective percentages of males were 62%, 59%, and 67%) rather than females (38%, 41%, and 33%). Religious groups were predominantly female (37% males versus 63% females). The age of adolescents in informal groups was higher (17.2 years) than the age of those participating in quasi-informal groups (16.7 years), sports groups (16.4 years), and religious groups (16.5 years).

In the following analysis similarities and differences, respectively, between these four groups are stressed. First, various activities and aims of the groups are assessed. Second, the type of groups considered to be most different from the subject's own group was studied. Third, strategies of categorial differentiation, i.e., importance attributed to the subjects' own group, identification with the group, and descriptive evaluations of the groups, were scrutinized. Finally, attention was focused upon the importance of various developmental tasks and the adolescents' difficulties in coping with them.

Activities performed by the groups

Respondents indicated on scales ranging from 1 (=never) to 5 (=very frequently) how often they were engaged with their peers in entertainment activities, talking over their own as well as social problems, walking and driving around, and organized activities, and how important these activities were to them (1=unimportant to 5=highly important). Two analyses of variance with the type of group (informal, quasi-informal, sport group, religious group) as between subjects factor and type of activity (entertainment, talking about private or social problems, walking around, organized activities) and within subjects factor, and importance and time of those activities as dependent variables, were conducted, leading to significant interaction effects. For the importance ratings, the interaction effect «group type by activity» amounted to $F(12,1656)=4.09$; $p<.001$; the respective F -value for the time spent in the five activities was $F(12,1660)=12.25$; $p<.001$. Also the main effect of activity reached significance (importance: $F(4,1656)=26.345$; $p<.001$; time: $F(4,1660)=72.44$; $p<.001$). The second main effect, group type, was found insignificant. The results are depicted in Figure 1.

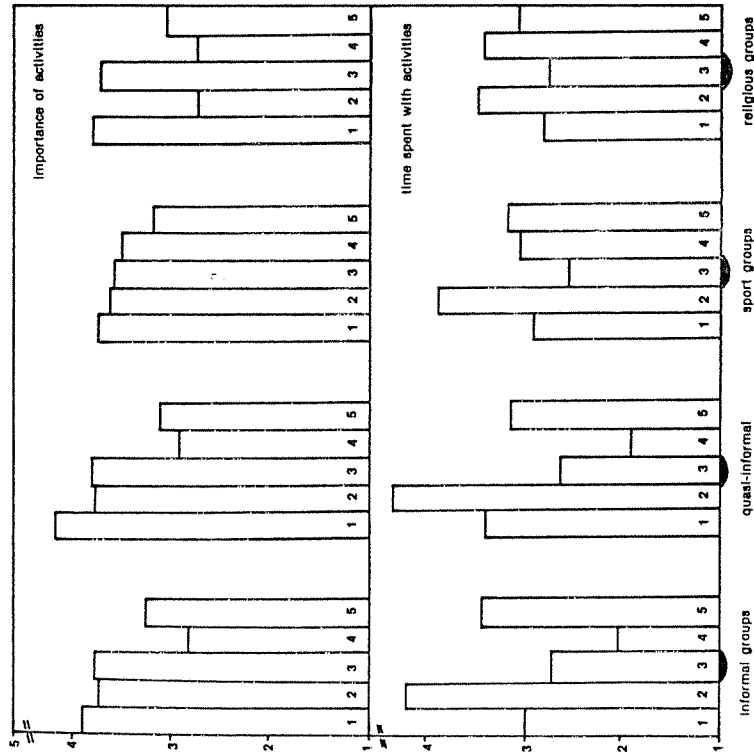
While it is true that the bulk of time, in everyone's opinion, is given over to enjoyment (amusement, leisure, fun) and moving around within one's area, all groups agreed that talking about one's problems is the most important activity. The interaction effects between time spent in and importance of activities by group type, shown in Figure 1, are mainly due to the different evaluations concerning «preordained program realization» within the formal and informal groups, and to the different amounts of time spent in amusement activities by these groups.

The results (also) mirror the goals of the different groups: while informal and quasi-informal groups reported being together (42% and 39%) and enjoyment (37% and 35%) as being the aim of their meetings, religious groups met for reasons like sharing experiences (44%) and «growing up aims» (27%). Sports groups got together for reasons of enjoyment (54%). The group as a means for «not being alone» was mentioned by 12% if the members of informal groups, 9% of the members of quasi-informal groups, 6% and 2% of the members of sports and religious groups.

Definition of the group most different from subject's own group

After describing their own group, the interviewees were asked to indicate the type of group chosen as outgroup. As shown in Table 1, all groups attempt to differentiate themselves from the political groups. There are, moreover, some interesting differences between the four

Figure 1. Importance et temps consacrés aux différentes activités par type de groupe



Note. 1-talking about private topics; 2-entertainment; 3-talking about social topics; 4-organized activities; 5-walking around
Figure 1. Importance of and time spent with various activities by type of group (importance and time on a scale from 1 = little, to 5 = a lot)

Table 1
Groups considered as outgroups by informal, quasi-informal, sport, and religious groups (frequencies)

groups	outgroups					total
	informal	quasi-inf.	sport	religious	political	
informal	47	6	8	85	75	221
quasi-informal	14	1	0	22	29	66
sport	33	3	3	11	18	68
religious	26	1	3	5	15	50
total	120	11	14	123	137	405

Note. Not all those interviewed indicated an outgroup

Tableau 1

Groupes considérés comme «outgroups» par les sujets des groupes informels, groupes quasi-informels, groupes-sport et groupes-religieux

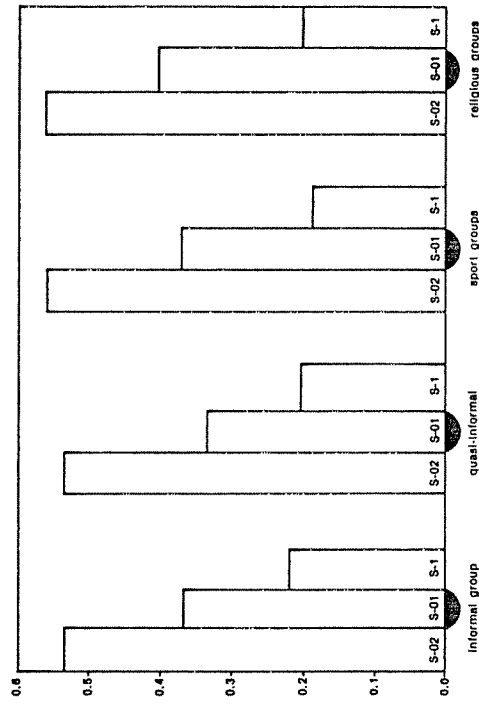
groups: the informal groups indicated the religious groups and sports groups as their outgroups; the sports groups and religious groups indicated the informal groups as their outgroups.

Strategies of categorical differentiation

On an «importance of the group» — scale ranging from 1 (=unimportant) to 5 (=highly important) the subjects marked how important the peer group was to them. These ratings were analyzed by 4 (type of the group) by 2 (sex of respondent) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(3,391)=3.12, p<.026$), significant main effect for the type of group ($F(3,391)=3.23, p<.022$); but no main gender effect. Generally, religious group were perceived as being more important by its members than all other types of groups were by their members. Moreover, females in sports groups judged their groups as being more important than did males in sports groups. Though less in number than the boys, the girls in the sports groups evidently attach a particular importance to belonging to the group. In all other groups, male and female rating were not statistically different.

The next strategy of categorical differentiation we examined, was the degree of identification with the group one belongs to. As an index of identification we began with Turner's (1982) notion, discussed in his paper on the cognitive-redefinition of the social group: «Social groups can be defined as two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or perceive themselves to be members of the same social category. This definition stresses that members of a social group seem often to share no more than a collective perception of their own social unity and yet seems to be sufficient for them to act as a group. The theory of the «social group which represents can be described as the social identification model» (Turner, 1982, p. 15). This model is contrasted with the more

Figure 2. Distances entre descriptions de soi et du groupe propre, de soi et de l'hors-groupe 1, de soi et de l'hors-groupe 2 (consommateurs de drogue)



Note. S-02 ... euclidian distance between judgements of oneself and outgroup 2 (drug abusers); S-01 ... euclidian distance between judgements of oneself and outgroup 1; S-1 ... euclidian distance between judgements of oneself and ingroup.

Figure 2. Euclidian distances between descriptions of oneself and ingroup, oneself and outgroup 1, and oneself and outgroup 2 (drug abusers)

traditional «social cohesion model» according to which: «... a group has been conceptualized as a small collection of individuals in face-to-face relation of interaction attraction and influence who may not stand in differentiated, structural positions with respect to each other» (Turner, 1982, p. 15).

The index of group identification was worked out by calculating the euclidian distances between the description of self, ingroup, outgroup 1, and outgroup 2 (drug abusers) on the 21 adjectives. These distances (self-ingroup, self-outgroup 1, self-outgroup 2) were included as dependent variables in an analysis of variance with the group comparisons as within subjects factor and the type of groups and sex of respondents as independent between subjects factors. The main effect of group comparisons ($F(2,740) = 785.07, p < .001$) and the interaction between type of group and group comparison ($F(6,740) = 2.47, p < .022$) were significant.

As Figure 2 shows, the interaction effect is mainly due to a significant difference between quasi-informal groups' and religious groups' perception of distance between oneself and the outgroup members. As expected all subjects judged themselves closer to their group than to the outgroups, and outgroups 1 closer to themselves than drug abusers. Interestingly, members of informal groups, who are frequently perceived as groups at risk of becoming deviant, perceived themselves equally distant from outgroups 1 and 2 and equally close to the ingroup as formal groups did.

The next step of analysis concerned judgements of one self, the ingroup and outgroups on the 21 adjective scales. First, a principal component analysis with varimax rotation was applied to reduce the complexity of the adjective list. The scree-test revealed four factors, explaining 44.1% of variance. On the first factor, labelled «dissatisfaction», adjectives «dissatisfied», «sad», «deluded», «lonely», «marginal», «blue», and «anticonformist» were loading highly. This factor expresses, in other words, feelings of personal uneasiness. The second factor, «openness towards the social world», included items «extroverted», «open towards others», «optimistic», «trustful», «active», and «sportive» — underlining, thus, the positive nature of one's attitudes towards others. The next factor, «disengagement», was defined by the adjectives «disengaged», «violent», «lacking values», and «lacking ideals», indicating, thus, uneasiness felt by the individuals not towards themselves but rather the outside world. On the last factor, «commitment», including items indicating attitudes of social and personal engagement, the following adjectives were loading high: «responsible», «decisive», and «autonomous».

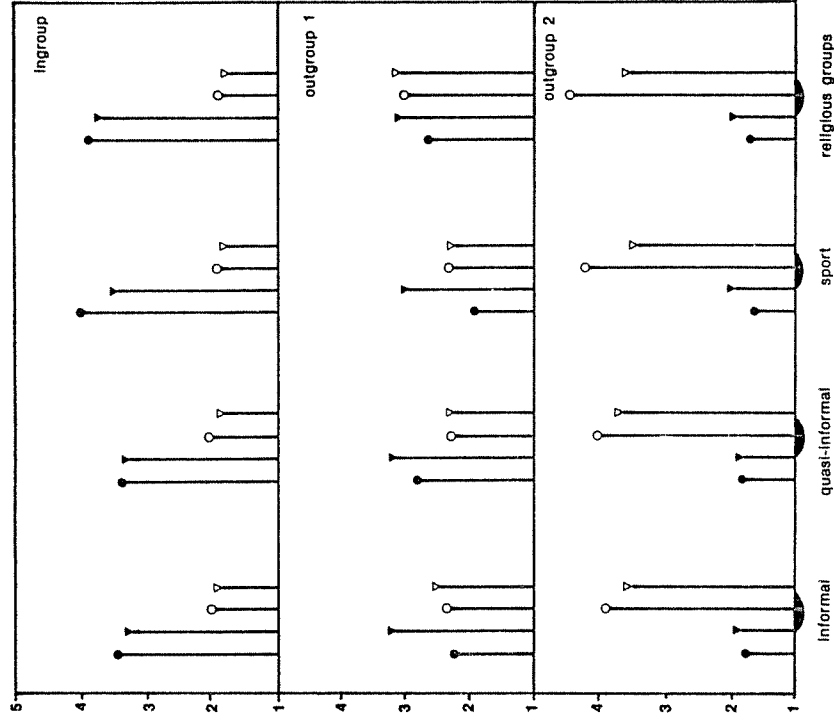
In the following, several analyses of variance were carried out, including the four factors and the group type as independent factors (mixed between — within design) factor. Judgements of oneself, the ingroup, and both outgroups were included as dependent variables. Figure 3 depicts the results. Since judgements of oneself and the ingroup members were highly similar, only the results of ingroups and the outgroups are presented.

Difficulty and importance of developmental tasks

It was assumed that representation of the developmental tasks would also be different for the various groups considered. Let us therefore consider how belonging to a group may influence representation of the developmental tasks that one has to face up to on his way to becoming an adult. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation grouped the 12 tasks that interviewees were to evaluate for importance and difficulty into three clusters (overall, the factors explain 57% of variance). The first factor involved tasks about personal development (such as biological maturing, acquisition of autonomy, and self-awareness), the second involved relational tasks (interpersonal, couple, and group relationships), and the third factor involved socio-institutional tasks, that are tasks concerning the relationship between self and institutions (school, work, etc.).

From an analysis of variance with the importance and difficulty scores as dependent variable and the task type and groups as independent variables, neither the interaction effect nor the main effect of groups emerged as statistically significant. The main effect of task

Figure 3. Description du groupe propre, de l'hors-groupe 1 et de l'hors-groupe 2 (consommateurs de drogue) par les groupes informels, quasi-informels, les groupes-sport et les groupes religieux



Notes: ●... openness toward the social world; ▲... commitment; ○... disengagement; ▽... dissatisfaction.

Figure 3. Description of the own group, the outgroup 1, and outgroup 2 (drug abusers) by informal, quasi-informal, sport, and religious groups (self and hetero-description on a scale from 1 = unsuitable in a description, to 5 = very suitable in a description)

type was highly significant ($F(2,800) = 83.80; p < .001$), indicating that adolescents of all four groups considered socio-institutional tasks more important than personal and relational ones.

Comparing the importance and difficulty of the tasks the subjects said they experienced personally and those they believed the members of their own group experienced, we found that all correlations between the three tasks are equally high for the four groups (ranging from .53 to .78; for all $r < .001$). This means that all the interviewees, irrespective of their type of group, believe that their own difficulties are the same as those of peers in their group.

Perceived consequences of failing in developmental tasks

At the end, each subject was asked to indicate the consequences of failing in developmental tasks. More precisely, they were asked to estimate whether failure with coping with personal, relational, or socio-institutional tasks leads to negative internal (personal problems, drug abuse) consequences or to negative external (deviant behavior) consequences. The data in the questionnaire were transformed in order to have a positive value if the consequences were involved to internal damage, and to have a negative score if the consequences involved to external consequences. These scores were again included in an ANOVA with the type of groups and the task type as independent variables. Except for a main effect of task type ($F(2,762)=46.56; p<.001$) no main and no interaction effect reached significance.

Members of all four groups were convinced that failing in personal ($M=.41$) or relational ($M=.38$) tasks leads to negative internal consequences, whereas the unsuccessful coping with socio-institutional tasks is not associated with external consequences ($M=-.04$).

Discussion of results

The data collected show unequivocally that belonging to a peer group is one of the more widespread phenomena characterizing adolescent experience. The research concerns only 600 adolescents from Bologna, but the resultant data is so clear that we consider that it may be generalised to cover the adolescent population as a whole.

On top of this, the vast proportion of adolescents who feel themselves to be members of a peers group consider the fact of belonging to a group as being an important and significant factor in their actual experience. This opinion is slightly more accentuated in the religious and in certain sports groups than in all the other groups.

These data, which only Sherif's work has pointed to in any decisive and explicit way, underline the necessity of reformulating the theories of adolescent development. They also pose the problem of clarifying the mechanisms of the complex game of influences exerted on the adolescent by the family, school and peer group as well as by the social and cultural context (social class, city or small town environment, dominant social values, level of schooling, etc.). In other words, the adolescent should always be studied within the context of a certain culture, not as an entity defined simply in terms of age and sex but as a member — female or male — of a given family, of a given scholastic class and, above all, of a given peer group.

Our survey has also shown how among adolescents belonging to peer groups there are clear ideas about the characteristics of one's group and the existence of groups different to one's own. This is in line with one of the propositions of Tajfel's intergroup theory which does state that awareness of belonging to a social group (or category) is for everybody always related to awareness of the existence of other groups or categories which he/she uses for comparison. The way in which the subjects studied define the ingroup is more positive terms than the outgroups and see the ingroup as being closer to their selves than the outgroup also agrees with the same theory. This fact is most clearly seen in the opinions expressed on outgroup 2 (drug users) considered by everybody (members of formal and informal groups) as being very distant from their selves and their ingroup.

The results of our survey contrast with the widespread social stereotype which places informal groups in an intermediate position between the positive side of the juvenile condition as represented by formal groups and the negative side as represented by deviant or drug using groups, thus constituting in themselves an expression of adolescent unease.

Rather, the ingroup mechanism comes into play: self and ingroup are perceived as being very close, outgroup 1 is seen as relatively distant from the self and ingroup, outgroup 2 is perceived as fairly distant from oneself and the own peer group; moreover, the image of self, ingroup and outgroups is not differentiated by the social actors' belonging to different types of groups.

It should, however, be outlined that there is a high variability in the description of self and ingroup by the subjects of different groups. The variability of judgements is significantly higher in informal groups (variance of individual's judgements of self and ingroup ratings = .10 in informal groups, and .008 in quasi-informal groups) than in formal groups (variance = .006 in sports, and .006 in religious groups). This result indicates more heterogeneous positions in informal groups, as regards the social objects the subjects are defining.

While in formal groups all peers perceive themselves more or less equally close in the ingroup (similarity of judgements on adjectives), in informal groups some adolescents see themselves similar as their group whereas others perceive high dissimilarity. This might be an interesting result to be considered in future research. At the moment we cannot offer a clear explanation of this difference between the groups.

The difficulty of some members of informal groups to come closer to their groups, or in other words, to «identify» themselves with the groups, may be due to the fact of social stigmatization of some informal groups. As far as opinions on developmental tasks is concerned, there is a similar trend. All types of groups view the socio-institutional tasks as more important and difficult; there is no important difference in opinions expressed by the various types of groups.

All the results therefore seem to indicate at first glance a large degree of homogeneity in the opinions of all the different types of groups considered.

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Appendix A

list of descriptive adjectives

— trusting	— independent
— open	— lonely
— disillusioned	— active
— sporty	— violent
— unsatisfied	— responsible
— carefree	— marginalised
— thoughtless	— decisive
	— sad
	— altruistic
	— without any ideals
	— optimistic
	— rebellious
	— without any values
	— extrovert

Appendix B

list of developmental tasks

- To overcome restlessness
- To accept one's body after the changes linked to development
- To acquire autonomy as regards the choices to be fulfilled
- To develop self-awareness
- To find reference values
- To cope successfully with different situations of everyday life
- To build up stable relationships with a group of friends
- To establish positive relationships with the other sex
- To successfully complete one's schooling
- To prepare oneself for integration into a work ambient
- To achieve economic independence
- To prepare oneself for the responsibility of having one's own family

Groupes des pairs et evolution du système de Soi à l'adolescence

Le but de cette étude est d'explorer l'importance du groupe des pairs à l'adolescence et d'examiner comment l'appartenance à différents types de groupes affecte la perception actuelle de soi, de son propre groupe et des autres groupes, ainsi que la perception de la difficulté à accomplir les tâches de développement. 600 adolescents de Bologne (Italie) ont rempli un questionnaire divisé en trois parties.

Les résultats confirment l'importance des groupes de pairs dans la vie des adolescents. 90% des adolescents étaient membres d'un groupe de pairs, ils appartenaient le plus souvent à des groupes informels ou quasi-informels. Un plus petit pourcentage d'adolescents appartenait à des groupes formels, par exemple des groupes sportifs ou religieux. Le plus souvent la rencontre en groupe avait pour but l'amusement et la discussion de problèmes personnels. Les groupes formels dédiaient aussi une bonne partie de leur temps à des activités organisées.

De manière surprenante, les différences entre soi-même et son propre groupe, entre soi-même et le groupe défini comme hors-groupe, entre soi-même et des consommateurs de drogue étaient pratiquement du même ordre dans les groupes informels et dans les groupes formels. Les groupes informels ont, dans la même mesure, décrit favorablement leur propre groupe et défavorablement l'hors-groupe. En outre, les résultats montrent que les groupes formels et informels ne différaient pas dans leur perception de la difficulté à accomplir les tâches de développement.

Ces résultats indiquent que le type de groupe d'appartenance ne constitue pas une variable déterminante dans l'explication des différences dans l'évolution de la conception de soi à l'adolescence.

Key words: Adolescence, Development tasks, Intergroup relations, Peer group, Self system.

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Current theme of research;

Social representations, Social identity, Peer groups and self evolution in adolescence.

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Current theme of research;

Social identity, Occupational psychology.