

University of Groningen

At your own risk

Pattiselanno, Kim Lianne

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pattiselanno, K. L. (2016). *At your own risk: The importance of group dynamics and peer processes in adolescent peer groups for adolescents' involvement in risk behaviors*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

CHAPTER 6

General Discussion and Conclusion

The relevance of peers for the social-emotional wellbeing of adolescents has been widely acknowledged and scholars agree that being accepted, especially by others in the peer group, is of fundamental importance to finding social support, a sense of belonging, and feeling connected (e.g., Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009; Rubin et al., 2006). Although being part of a peer group offer many benefits, peer groups also form a setting where adolescents can influence each other in less positive ways: risk behavior among peers is shown to be one of the most important factors for an adolescent's own risk behavior (e.g., Dishion et al., 1995; Henry et al., 2001; Kerr et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2000; Svensson et al., 2012; Weerman, 2011). Although scholars have become skillful in disentangling the influences from other processes, far less is known about how and under which conditions adolescents are influenced by their peers in their risky behaviors. This dissertation, therefore, aimed to examine when adolescents are more likely to adopt risk behaviors and how they accomplish this. This concluding chapter summarizes the main findings, reflects on the findings and discusses the implications of this dissertation and directions for future research.

Summary of Main Findings

Features of Peer Groups

Adolescents mostly look to each other in peer groups to see how to behave, but their motivation to engage in behaviors is very important to whether or not they actually behave in one way or another. For adolescents, the goal of trying to fit in or becoming accepted by peers is most important (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berndt, 1979; Coleman, 1961; Rubin et al., 2006) and often reached via three pathways, namely by gaining status, affection, and behavioral confirmation (Lindenberg, 1996; 2001; Ormel et al., 1999; Ormel, 2002). It is through these needs that differences in the susceptibility to the risk behaviors of peers might exist.

The needs for status and affection can be satisfied by behaving in a way that is attractive to others, for example by attaining high social status or becoming popular (Buhrmester, 1990; Cillessen & Rose, 2005; Jarvinen & Nicholls, 1996; Ojanen et al., 2005). In peer groups some adolescents are likely to have a higher social status than others, leading to possible differences in hierarchies in those groups. Ethnographic studies such as by Adler and Adler (1998) and Eder (1985) have given insight into this. Take the statement of a girl who describes the hierarchy in her group: "We had three levels, kind of. There was Denise in the center, and then me and Christy kind of just close to the center, and then there was another level beyond us, way beyond us." (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 78), and compare this

with the following statement about a group with no such hierarchy: “They were not identified by a single core person, [...], and no leader dominated the delineations of the borders.” (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 86). The differences in social status in peer groups might inform us of why some adolescents are more susceptible to peer influence than others, because they might elicit different behavioral responses from its members.

Chapter two argued that competition for status in egalitarian peer groups would be stronger, because adolescents would be more aware of others who could challenge their position and compete with them for status (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1985). To maintain their social status, adolescents would be more inclined to display aggression to emphasize a powerful and dominant position among peers (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Dijkstra et al., 2009). In hierarchical peer groups there would be less competition, and the hierarchy would stabilize relationships and decrease group hostility (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1979). In contrast, prosocial behavior would be less likely in egalitarian peer groups due to the costly risk of the prosocial act not being reciprocated (Clark & Mils, 1993) and because it might expose one’s weaknesses (Ryan et al., 2001; Shim et al., 2013).

The results of chapter two showed, partially in line with expectations, that adolescents residing in peer groups that were more egalitarian, particularly in same-gender egalitarian peer groups, tended to be more aggressive (as expected) and more prosocial (contrary to our expectations). We argued that behavioral directedness of aggression and prosocial behavior might explain the findings, because both behaviors can be functional for several reasons, such as gaining resources for one’s group or maintaining balanced relationships in the peer group. Chapter two also found gender-related nuances to the main findings, specifically with regard to same-gender versus mixed-gender peer groups. Different processes seemed to be at play in mixed-gender peer groups compared to same-gender peer groups. To conclude, our study importantly showed that our measure, for better identifying different hierarchical structures in peer groups, could detect the subtle effects in the analyses, whereas the most common measure of hierarchy (i.e., the standard deviation) could not.

Chapter three continued to examine how an adolescents’ position in the hierarchy would affect his or her behavior, by testing whether those who were lower in status were more or less likely than those of higher statuses to be influenced by peers’ behavior, in order to increase their social status. We argued that adolescents can display risk behaviors to make themselves more attractive and

become higher in status (Dijkstra et al., 2007; Dijkstra et al., 2009). Especially by imitating the behavior of high status peers they might bask in the reflected glory of those higher in status, and thus we expected adolescents with a relatively low social status to be more likely to be influenced by peers' behavior than adolescents with a relatively high social status. Although chapter two indicated that the hierarchical structure of a peer group can affect how members of those peer groups behave, the findings of the study in chapter three would appear to suggest that peer influence is not moderated by differences in status of individual members in those groups. An adolescent's individual position in the peer group did not make them more or less likely to be influenced in risk behavior in our study.

Chapter three also examined whether adolescents were more or less likely to be influenced in their risky behavior depending on the cohesiveness of their peer group. We argued that the need for behavioral confirmation can be met by imitating the observed behavior of peers and by learning, in their interactions with others, which behaviors are accepted or rejected by peers (i.e., by showing "correct" behaviors) (Bandura & McClelland, 1977; Cialdini et al., 1991; Keizer et al., 2008). This would be of crucial importance for becoming accepted by those peers and finding a place where they fit in (Coleman, 1961; Horne, 2001). Especially when what is desirable becomes salient in the peer group, we expected that adolescents would be most likely to be influenced by the behavior of their peers. This would be the case in cohesive peer groups, because well-interconnected adolescents in a peer group would strengthen the transmission of norms, rules, and behavioral conformity (Horne, 2001). The findings of chapter three, however, showed that adolescents in cohesive peer groups were no more or less likely to be influenced by their peers than adolescents in loose-knit peer groups.

Although the initial effects of group dynamics on adolescent risk behavior seemed promising, all things considered, it seems that adolescents' susceptibility to peer influence was not related to individual social status or to the cohesiveness of the relations in the peer group. The dynamics in peer groups and the features of (individuals in) peer groups do not appear to cause differences in adolescents' conforming to the behavior of peers. This might be the result of other underlying mechanisms, such as individual goals or norm conformity, but it is also possible that peer influence in risk behaviors is more general than we think. Researchers raise the question whether peer influence could be moderated by individual or contextual characteristics (see Veenstra et al., 2013), but the relative scarcity of those types of

studies only strengthens our belief in the persistent nature of peer influence processes across different contexts.

Mechanisms of Peer Influence

In the other two empirical chapters of this dissertation, we wanted to take a closer look at the theorized mechanisms for peer influence, and also partly peer selection. Most studies examining peer influence in risk behaviors in adolescence create their outcome measures from several items on a scale, particularly when it comes to delinquency (e.g., Burk et al., 2008; De Cuyper et al., 2009; Haynie et al., 2014; Knecht et al., 2010; Weerman, 2011). They mostly use a collapsed measure of self-reports which expect that adolescents associate with others who display behaviors, or adolescents will mimic behaviors that fall in line with one or more of the items on the scale. As a result, peer influence in risk behaviors is measured and identified as peer influence in any form of risk behavior. However, most of the studies mentioned assume that the crucial process for peer influence in risk behaviors is the direct mimicking of observed behavior. If this is indeed the case, then using a collapsed measure in analyses of peer influence would not necessarily be an intuitive step to take. We, therefore, wanted to investigate if adolescents are indeed inclined to adjust their behavior to the observed behavior of peers, by firstly examining whether adolescents directly imitated each other's specific behavior (on the item level) or whether they mimicked more general deviant behaviors, and secondly, by examining whether adolescents directly imitated each other's behavior or more indirectly via the perception they form of their peers' behaviors.

Chapter four used a relatively novel method of examining peer influence, with delinquency as a two-mode network versus a collapsed scale measure. In peer influence with delinquency as a two-mode network, influence (and selection) are only seen as such when the exact same types of behavior are involved. This way, when adolescents connected with peers who engaged in, for example, weapon carrying, started engaging in weapon carrying, this would be considered influence, but if they started engaging in theft, this would not be considered as influence.

The findings showed that adolescents are not (only) influenced in general in their delinquent behavior, but (also) on a specific-behavior level. Adolescents were likely to mimic the same behavior as the behavior their peers were engaged in, thus confirming that peer influence does occur through the process of behavioral modeling as argued in other literature. Peer selection on the other hand did not appear to play on the behavior-specific level. Adolescents tended to associate with others who were similar in their engagement in any type of deviant behavior. The

study in chapter four also has implications for other types of behavior. For example, health-related behavior, such as sports or other physical activities, can consist of (time spent in) several behavioral acts. Although peer selection and influence have shown to be relevant processes with regard to these behaviors (e.g., De la Haye et al., 2011; Gesell et al., 2012; Shoham et al., 2012; Simpkins et al., 2013), analyses usually combine different behavioral acts in a latent construct, whereas examining, for example, influence in specific health behaviors might give more insight into how exactly individuals influence one another.

In chapter five we wanted to test another possible mechanism by which peer influence might work. We argued that although adolescents learn which behaviors are desirable through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura & McClelland, 1977), they are also inclined to create a perception of what peers do by interacting and communicating with them (Cialdini et al., 1991). Thus, when considering peer influence in risk behaviors, adolescents might indeed mimic what they see their peers do, but could also be influenced in their behavior by how they perceive their peers to behave. The findings of chapter five again showed that the presumed mechanism of behavioral modeling is indeed most likely to be the mechanism that drives peer influence. Here we found no evidence that adolescents' perceptions of what their close peers do influenced their own risk behavior. The study in this chapter raised questions on the operationalization of perceptions of behavior. The way we currently operationalize perceived behavior, might be subject to social desirability meaning that adolescents are unwilling to report on the risky behavior of their peers, especially peers with whom they have shared a close relationship (friends and peer group members). The chapter therefore offers some suggestions on how to deal with these issues.

Combining the expectations and findings of chapters four and five, we consistently found that peers are directly influenced by the risky behavior of their peers. Adolescents tend to mimic the same behaviors that close peers display and not (only) risk behavior in general or what they perceive their peers do. Moreover, adolescents in peer groups seem to either unwittingly or deliberately misperceive the behavior of close peers, which indicates that examining the discrepancy between self-reported and peer-reported behavior might also be a fruitful avenue for future research.

Reflections on This Dissertation

Peer influence among adolescents has been found for a wide variety of behaviors, such as aggression (Rulison, Gest, & Loken, 2013; Sijtsema et al., 2010), delinquency (Burk et al., 2008; Svensson et al., 2012; Weerman, 2011), substance use (De la Haye, Green, Kennedy, Pollard, & Tucker, 2013; Mercken, Steglich, Sinclair, Holliday, & Moore, 2012; Osgood et al., 2013; Steglich, Snijders, & Pearson, 2010), but also weapon carrying (Dijkstra, Gest, Lindenberg, Veenstra, & Cillessen, 2012), bullying (Sentse, Kiuru, Veenstra, & Salmivalli, 2014), or internalizing problems (Giletta et al., 2011; Van Workum, Scholte, Cillessen, Lodder, & Giletta, 2013; Van Zalk, Kerr, Branje, Stattin, & Meeus, 2010).

The goals adolescents have in life might influence how they behave, and determine how vulnerable they are to the influence of others. In the realm of peer relations, goal-framing has shown its value for understanding and predicting peer behavior and affiliations (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2007). Although we expected group dynamics and peer processes to have an effect on behavioral outcomes, this dissertation showed that adolescents do not tend to differ in individual behavior when we consider those dynamics and processes. Although scholars tend to examine peer processes for different individual characteristics or contexts, peer influence in risk behavior might be more general and persistent in peer groups. Adolescents are likely to adjust their behavior to the behavior of close peers to reach their goals, irrespective of the situation in the peer group. Apparently, more often than not, this is done by simply looking at what others do.

Chapter two introduced a new measure of hierarchy that better reveals the internal status structures of peer groups. In other studies, standard deviation is often used as a measure to detect hierarchies (e.g., Garandeanu et al., 2013; Zwaan et al., 2013), but this measure lacks the ability to identify what kind of hierarchical structure is present. Our measure of status structure can detect if a hierarchy consists of more or fewer individuals with a higher or lower status, thus it can identify whether a hierarchy is shaped more like a pyramid, is more egalitarian, or is shaped more like inverted pyramid. Chapter two showed that the internal hierarchy of peer relations in groups can affect behavioral outcomes of its members, but only when considering the hierarchical *structure*.

Another innovative aspect of this dissertation that goes beyond the more traditional examination of peer influence is that we converted a dependent behavioral variable from a scale into a two-mode network. When peers with whom one associates nominated a specific item and adolescents also nominated the same

behavioral act over time, this was considered peer influence. Chapter four also focused on peer selection, which for a two-mode network implies that adolescents would have to nominate the same behavioral act and associate with each other at a later time point. This approach to examining behavior is still novel in child and adolescent research and, depending on the questions researchers seek to investigate, it can offer many benefits. Behaviors allegedly copied from others can possibly be detected better when using a two-mode network approach.

Put together, this dissertation not only offers new insights into the processes associated with adolescent risk behaviors and peer groups, but also gives general new insights for individuals working in adolescent research or with adolescents in practice. Although peer influence processes are persistent, we found that adolescents often influence each other in specific behaviors. Possibly this might be because peer influence is most likely to occur in certain settings (Osgood et al., 2013). Minimizing opportunities of where risky behaviors tend to occur could help reduce peer influence because it may prevent influence being exerted in specific behavioral acts (e.g., by reducing unsupervised ‘hangouts’).

Furthermore, I believe that the worth of social network analysis should be emphasized for peer group research. We can do so much more when we have information about the (indirect) relations between individuals, the structure of networks and groups, and the (risk) behavior of adolescents. A recent article by Wölfer, Faber, and Hewstone (2015) discusses how social network analysis is underused in the field of group research. The authors correctly note that social network analysis can potentially help understand intra- and intergroup processes in addition to traditional analyses. Researchers examining group processes can use social networks to look closer at contextual factors, such as characteristics of (individuals in) peer groups, to advance the research on relations and behaviors in and between groups. With these means we can gain a better understanding of functionality or directionality of behaviors, social norms, the development of social identity, susceptibility to peer influence, the formation and dissolution of intra- and intergroup ties, and the longitudinal effect of group membership on different behaviors, and vice versa. There should be few obstacles to stepping into the line of social network analysis research, because many inexpensive software programs can analyze social networks and much information is available on how to perform analyses (see for example <http://www.stats.ox.ac.uk/~snijders/siena/>). However, we should keep some considerations in mind when conducting longitudinal social network analyses. I reflect on some of these issues in the following section.

Using SIENA

SIENA is now widely used in child and adolescent research to examine with whom children and adolescents choose to hang out with, to study the formation and dissolution of relations, and investigate how children and adolescents change their attitudes and behaviors when considering the attitudes and behaviors of the peers they have relations with. Obtaining the right data for analysis to answer research questions or hypotheses can be a complex matter with regard to the use of SIENA. Therefore, I would like to address a couple of things to think about before one starts using SIENA, to increase the feasibility of future studies and projects.

As a researcher using SIENA, it is important to realize that starting off with different choices can have very different outcomes. There are some things everyone should think about even before running any analyses at all. In general, it is crucial to think about why one wants or needs to use SIENA. Setting up models is not easy to do when you are just starting to use the program. The one thing that can save time and frustration later on is to think about whether or how one's data, study, or project is suitable for SIENA analysis. For that, I advise researchers to always be led by their theory and mechanisms.

For example, try to think about how research questions or hypotheses translate into SIENA effects. With regard to the 'influence effect' in SIENA, researchers mostly look at two options: the *average alter effect* and the *average similarity effect*. Both can examine whether individuals adjust their behavior or characteristics to that of their peers. The average alter effect says something about whether individuals who have relations with others with *higher levels* of the behavior or characteristic will themselves have a *higher* tendency to *high* levels of that behavior or characteristic. However, the latter effect implies becoming more *similar* (assimilation) and can also mean a reduction of the behavior or characteristic. Depending on one's theory or the mechanism of interest, researchers might be more interested in one of these effects than the other.

Next, consider the practical aspects of the sample, letting the theory and mechanisms lead. For example, researchers should contemplate the boundaries of the network. When you are interested in friendships, the question arises whether these friendships remain in, for example, a class, or cross class boundaries. In the latter case you might want data on the relationships across classes or even grades. Questions that might also arise include: Do the boundaries of the network change over time? Do adolescents for example change classes? Or can individuals affiliate in other contexts, such as a sports club or in extracurricular activities? All of these

questions are very important to think about, because they ultimately determine how valuable and complete network data are for SIENA analyses.

Finally, researchers should think about what behaviors are expected to be influenced and where or when this influence takes place. Think of where influence takes place, not just as contexts or opportunities, but also consider where on a scale this influence is most likely to occur. For example, will you be influenced by your peers in the first beer you drink or in the tenth? This last notion is particularly important in deciding how to categorize your outcome variable (as SIENA at the moment cannot process continuous outcome variables). The data might have more variation at a different end of the scale, but if one does not expect influence there, then it makes no sense examining it. Also, outliers on that scale can have a substantial, yet meaningless effect on the models, and the important thing is to always bring a scale back to where meaningful movements are made. Again, always keep thinking about which mechanisms drive the research questions and hypotheses, and thus the effects.

SIENA develops rapidly and it is important to be aware of knowledge about the ‘new standards’ of doing analyses and reporting of results, such as goodness of fit. I firmly believe that it is necessary to keep oneself informed about developments in SIENA, and discuss issues with others who work with the program and with experts. To perform well designed and executed analyses that will help the field of adolescent research in a proper manner, this is of vital importance.

Further Implications and Directions for Future Research

With this dissertation I wanted to obtain a better understanding of the processes that go on in adolescent peer groups, and go beyond the examination of relations between adolescents and their behavior, wishing to examine more closely how and under which conditions adolescents become similar to each other with regard to their risky behaviors. Although the findings did not always match expectations, they do show that peer groups are complex, and I hope to have advanced the research on adolescent influence processes, not only with regard to risk behaviors, but also in a more general sense. In our studies we can conclude that even more underlying processes are likely to be going on than expected beforehand. Although we know quite a lot about when behaviors are displayed, we know far less about to whom those behaviors are directed. Possibly, functional behaviors such as aggression, apply particularly when we consider intergroup processes. Studies have shown that conflicts *between* groups can actually strengthen in-group relations, specifically in

situations where groups compete for resources and power (e.g., Brewer, 1999; Sherif & Sherif, 1953), which would imply that behaviors such as aggression might be expressed mostly to outgroup members. Social network analysis could help examine the directionality of behaviors, because it facilitates testing relationships among adolescents in peer groups, but also their behavior to each other and others. Thus, if we truly want to understand why adolescents display certain behaviors, we should examine options for testing the underlying mechanism that we expect to be at the basis of those behaviors.

Similarly, we argue that behavior arises from a goals and needs perspective. However, to know if these are the underlying processes, we should also test them in the same framework. If adolescents are for example more motivated to attain a higher status, they will be more likely to behave in a way that is helpful to achieving their goal (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010). Some might even be influenced in another goal, such as overall acceptance, rather than having a high status, making it possible that they are (also) influenced by behaviors regarded as normative by their peer group (Dishion et al., 2001; Killeya-Jones, 2007). Therefore, the literature on the motivations of adolescents' behavior would benefit greatly from a closer study of when adolescents move to one goal rather than another and how their (influence in) behaviors coincide with that. This will help us better understand why susceptibility to peer influence seems to be so general, and why we (and others) found no moderating effects of characteristics (of individuals) in peer groups.

Our findings also showed that adolescents tend to behave similarly to peers and appear to be influenced on a behavior-specific level. They imitate what others actually do rather than what they think others do. However, it should be noted that (chapter four) we found that those with a higher level of delinquency tended to influence others who were not (so) delinquent, without making the distinction what delinquent acts adolescents are exactly engaged in. To rule out that adolescents are influenced by other types of risky behavior, future research might want to examine sub-scales of delinquency or other risk behavior, studying influence in similar types of behavior or examining influence processes in same behavioral acts compared to different acts in a two-mode network approach. Unfortunately, this is not possible yet, but it could be programmed in the SIENA framework.

Furthermore, in chapter five, we, again, took a novel approach to examining a peer influence mechanism, using peer nominations of perceptions of behavior and constructing a network of perceived behavior. However, perceived behavior operationalized in this way might lead to an underreporting of perceived risk

behaviors because adolescents are unwilling to report on the risky behaviors of peers. Therefore, focusing on “relationships” between unconnected or less closely connected peers might be a better approach to examine the effect of perceptions of behavior on adolescents’ own behavior. More importantly, the chapter suggests taking a new perspective on current data on peer relations, which might open up a whole new direction in which to examine non-related peers and their (risk) behaviors.

Before closing, I want to address “the peer group”, or more specifically let the reader think about what “the peer group” is or may consist of. This dissertation has used two ways of identifying peer groups. First, we tried to identify peer groups using hierarchical clustering. Measures that specifically identify peer groups are often based on finding unique (non-overlapping) groups of individuals, but analyses with those measures also take into account individuals that an adolescent might not have nominated as a group member (Cairns et al., 1985; Kreager et al., 2011; Moody, 2001; Richards & Rice, 1981). The question is whether it is reasonable to assume that non-related peers have the same influence on adolescents as peers that have been identified as friends or group members. Furthermore, the external validity of other measures (e.g., NEGOPY, RNM, Social Cognitive Maps, or Moody’s CROWDs routine) has not been consequently assessed. It is thus difficult to determine which individuals actually do have an influence on adolescents’ behavior. After the first study, that is why I started wondering whether there is such a thing as “the” peer group. Perhaps there is no such thing. That is also why in the studies described in chapter three and onwards we identified peer groups from the individual’s perspective. I tried to identify peers that could directly influence the adolescents’ own behaviors. For the future I believe that there is a great need to examine closely what constitutes a peer group, to identify which peers are actually influential. One way of doing this could be by setting up a study that specifically looks at how methodologically relevant groups translate into reality, by creating a focus group among adolescents so that we can test the external validity of our methodological measures of peer groups.

Lastly, governments, schools, parents, and others invest greatly in trying to make our youth grow up as healthily as possible. Reducing adolescents’ engagement in risk behaviors is a part of that aim. It is important to realize that what we adults would like to see is not per se normative for adolescents. They are more likely to rebel against what we find safe and healthy for them. From this dissertation, we can (carefully) conclude that peer influence processes are

persistent and likely to exist throughout a diverse range of contexts. This means that generalized interventions against risk behaviors might work, but we should keep in mind that matters, such as individual characteristics (Franken et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2012), might be more or less influenced or influential in those behaviors. When trying to battle the proliferation of risk behaviors by reducing peer influence in those behaviors, tailored approaches to specific forms of risk behaviors might be the best way to go. It is important to realize that adolescents (also) influence one another with regard to specific behaviors, and that intervening in those processes, such as making it harder if not impossible for adolescents to find themselves in situations where this behavior occurs can help reduce the transfer of a specific type of behavior from one adolescent to the other. Thus, interventions on the behavior-specific level that target adolescents in peer groups might be particularly fruitful, while acknowledging that peer influence is persistent and adolescents have a hard time resisting their peers.

Concluding Words

This dissertation posited that adolescents are influenced especially by the behavior of the members of their peer group. Adolescents pursue certain goals and needs, wherein conforming to peer members' behavior leads to success in reaching those goals and needs. I showed that peer groups might sometimes have different dynamics than expected, but these are quite similar to what the literature has already theorized. The adolescent realm is a complex world with many factors at play. Although we sometimes expect certain mechanisms to be present, sometimes they are and sometimes not. I believe that this dissertation offers further insight into peer processes in specifically adolescent peer groups and into their risky behavior. It also showed that it can go beyond the dimensions treated in this dissertation and indeed might apply to many more topics in adolescence. We have taken only the first steps on a winding road and I hope that readers of this dissertation will take up new ideas and considerations to continue the advances in the field of child and adolescent research and practice.

Some final quotes by students in the first year of our data collection:

“Als ik zakgeld krijg, dan geef ik het meestal gelijk terug, omdat ik het niet aan kan zien dat mijn ouders mij geld geven.”

“Ik voel me niet zo lekker in de klas. Ik wordt gepest en mijn vriend doet erg dom tegen me, verder ga ik met mijn vriend vaak gamen.”

“De leukste school ooit. ☺ En we hebben alleen maar aardige leerlingen. Voel me veilig en vertrouwd op deze school.”

“Er moet een rookverbod komen voor op het plein en wie dan rookt de ouders bellen en uurtjes geven.”

“Als jullie maar niks doorvertellen, dat is echt zwaar naaierij.”

“Ik vind dit een goed onderzoek en jullie moeten hier echt mee door gaan.”

“Ik vind de school net een gevangenis. Je mag er bijna niks. Er staan grote hekken omheen en er zijn camera's en een zoeklicht dat langzaam over de school heen gaat.”

“De schoolvakantie moet niet ingekort worden!! Weetje hoeveel stress school geeft een week extra is precies wat we nodig hebben, dus pak onze vakantie week niet af!!”

