

Smoke in the Looking Glass: Effects of Discordance Between Self- and Peer Rated Crowd Affiliation on Adolescent Anxiety, Depression and Self-feelings

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Abstract Peer crowds serve as an identity marker for adolescents, indicating their image and status among peers; but adolescents do not always endorse peer appraisals of crowd affiliation. We report on two studies—one with 924 adolescents in grades 7–12 and a second with a more diverse population of 2,728 students in grades 9–11, followed for 2 years—that examined how congruence between peer and self-appraisals of crowd affiliation relate to self-esteem and internalizing symptoms. Analyses indicate that high-status crowd members may suffer and low-status crowd members benefit by denying their peer crowd affiliation, but effects are modest in size and not entirely consistent across the two studies. Findings underscore the value of symbolic interactionist principles concerning reflected appraisal processes in understanding how peer crowd affiliation affects adolescent self-image.

Keywords Peer groups · Self-concept · Depression · Peer status · Social identity

Introduction

A central feature of adolescent identity development, according to Erikson (1968), is establishing a sense of continuity and sameness between self-image and one's

image in the eyes of others. This means that achieving a healthy identity requires active negotiation between the self and significant segments of one's society in order to reach agreement about who one is. In the dominant American culture, this process is facilitated by the emergence, at adolescence, of peer "crowds" (Brown and Klute 2003): groupings of individuals who share the same basic image or reputation among peers (e.g., jocks, druggies, Mexicans). Crowds offer identity prototypes against which young people can measure themselves and through which they can grasp their reputation among peers. Crowds, however, are more than identity prototypes; they also reflect the status accorded to various identities by the peer social system (Brown et al. 1994; Eckert 1989; Kinney 1993). Crowd affiliation has been found to relate to both self-esteem and internalizing symptoms (Brown and Lohr 1987; La Greca and Harrison 2005; Prinstein and La Greca 2002). Yet, crowd affiliation is more subjective and equivocal than many features of the person, such as gender or age. It may be possible for adolescents to avert the psychological consequences of peers' assessment of their crowd affiliation simply by asserting association with a different crowd. To address these issues we report findings from two studies of American high school students. Appealing to principles of symbolic interactionist theory, we examine how discordance between self- and peer rated crowd affiliation is connected, via crowd status, to adolescents' internalizing symptoms and self-esteem.

Reflected Appraisals

Although the adolescent self-concept has been depicted in a variety of ways, most theorists agree that it contains both descriptive and evaluative components (Dusek and McIntyre 2003). Like Erikson, self-concept theorists endorse a

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basic tenet of symbolic interaction theory (Cooley 1902) that describes the ways in which other people's opinions about or reactions to self influence a person's formulation of self-concept. They argue that the self is socially constructed and that "reflected appraisals" form the core of self-understanding (Harter 1999; Rosenberg 1989). While interacting with others, individuals monitor others' reactions to the self and use that feedback to formulate and update their self-concept, both in terms of who they are and "how good" they are (Mead 1934). Individuals' perceptions of others' opinions about the self have a stronger impact on self-esteem than others' actual opinions about the self (Rosenberg 1979).

The impact of reflected appraisals should be heightened in adolescence because of individuals' preoccupation with identity development at this life stage (Erikson 1968) and their enhanced ability to interpret others' impressions of self accurately (Selman 1980). Adolescents are affected by reflected appraisals from many sources: parents, other important adults and, especially, peers (Harter et al. 1988; Rosenberg 1989). The opinions of peers in general should be more influential than opinions of close friends because the wider peer group constitutes more of a "generalized other" (Mead 1934) and offers a more objective assessment of self (Harter 1999).

Role of Crowds and Crowd Status

In some societies, including the United States, discernment of agemates' reflected appraisals is facilitated by the emergence in adolescence of peer crowds. Unlike smaller groups, which are based primarily on social interaction patterns, crowds are reputation-based entities that reflect important distinctions within the peer system in individual abilities, interests, social background (socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion), or activity patterns. Ethnographic and interview or self-report studies consistently demonstrate that adolescent crowds are arranged in a social status hierarchy (Brown and Lohr 1987; Deyhle 1986; Eckert 1989; La Greca et al. 2001; Larkin 1979). Although status distinctions among groups may dissipate toward the end of high school (Brown et al. 1994; Kinney 1993), they tend to be central to the dynamics of interaction among groups in the middle school and early high school years (Eckert 1989; Eder 1985; Foley 1990). The particular crowds that occupy high and low positions in the status hierarchy may vary among schools. In general, however, high-status groups tend to include youth recognized for their social or athletic prowess (e.g. populars, jocks), and low-status groups typically feature crowds that are at odds with conventional social norms or the norms of the adolescent peer system (e.g. nerds, outcasts, burnouts, druggies) (Sussman et al. 2007).

Young people tend to assign a peer to a given crowd based on the extent to which that peer conforms to the prototypic image of the crowd (Stone and Brown 1999). Thus, adolescents can have an impression of their status among peers based on the status of the crowd to which they are assigned by peers. Entry into these groups may be predicated, in part, on the strength of self-concept that individuals carry into adolescence. Prinstein and La Greca (2002), for example, found significant differences in global self-esteem, anxiety, and depressed affect among late elementary students who later became part of different adolescent crowds. It seems likely, however, that self-esteem and internalizing symptoms also would be affected by constant reminders during adolescence of the status that one has among peers. Interactions intended to affirm and maintain status differentials are a common feature of ethnographic reports of social relationships among crowd members (Deyhle 1986; Merten 1996), and they often feature the sort of public adulation or ridicule that, through reflected appraisals, should affect individuals' self-evaluation and sense of well-being (Merten 1996; Adler and Adler 1998). This helps to explain why investigators have found manifestations of high self-esteem and low depressive affect among members of high-status crowds and just the opposite pattern among low-status crowd members (Adler and Adler 1998; Brown and Lohr 1987). Curiously, however, associations between crowd affiliation and anxiety are more equivocal; members of high-status crowds manifest considerable anxiety in some studies (Eder 1985) but not in others (La Greca and Harrison 2005).

Studies also indicate that crowd affiliation is equivocal and somewhat fluid (Brown et al. 1994; Kinney 1993), allowing adolescents to misread or ignore peers' perceptions of their crowd affiliation (Merten 1996). Adolescents can affirm that they are members of a *different* crowd, or no crowd at all. In other words, they may either deny or distort the reflected appraisal of peers, which may alter the impact that peer ratings of crowd affiliation have on self-esteem and internalizing symptoms. Individuals who are perceived by peers as part of a low status crowd may diminish the blow to their self-concept, which would ordinarily result from such a reflected appraisal, by asserting that they are part of a different crowd that enjoys higher social status or by denying affiliation with any peer group. This dynamic might work in reverse among individuals with high status peer-ratings. Claiming membership in a peer group with lower status, or with no crowd at all, may diminish the positive psychological effects that would be expected among youth associated by peers with high status crowds. It is difficult to predict which of these disavowals (contradicting peers' judgment of one's membership in a high-status versus a low-status crowd) would have stronger effects.

Although peer relations and peer group status are important issues for American adolescents (Newman and Newman 2001), they constitute only one of an extensive array of factors affecting young people's self-esteem and psychological well-being (Graber 2004; Harter 1999; Rosenberg 1979). Moreover, the effects of any factor are qualified by the extent to which that factor is important to the individual (Harter 1999). Brown and Lohr (1987), for example, found that, among adolescents who were viewed by peers as "outsiders" (not belonging to any crowd), self-esteem was lower than that of crowd members only if outsiders wished to be part of a crowd. These findings suggest that associations between self-esteem or internalizing symptoms and the reflected appraisal processes related to crowd affiliation are likely to be modest.

Study Objectives and Hypotheses

Our primary objective in the studies reported in this paper was to examine how reflected appraisal processes might modify associations that have been noted in previous research between adolescent peer crowd status and self-concept and psychological well-being. In the first study we examined two hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that crowds would differ significantly in self-esteem and internalizing symptoms. More specifically, we expected that adolescents in high-status crowds would display higher self-esteem and lower levels of internalizing symptoms than those in lower status crowds. Second, we hypothesized that these associations would be moderated by concordance between peer ratings of crowd affiliation (reflected appraisals) and self-assertions of crowd affiliation. Specifically, the heightened levels of self-concept and well-being (higher self-esteem and lower internalizing symptoms) expected from membership in a high status crowd would be mitigated among individuals who placed themselves in a lower status crowd. By contrast, lower levels of self-concept and well-being related to association with a low status group could be mitigated by declaring oneself to be a member of a higher status crowd or no crowd at all.

Previous studies of the correlates or consequences of crowd affiliation have relied on either self- or peer ratings to assign adolescents to crowds. To our knowledge, this is the first study to consider both self- and peer ratings—although both Brown and Lohr (1987) and Urberg et al. (2000) compared peer ratings and self-perceptions of peer ratings. Thus, a secondary objective of the investigation was to evaluate the degree of concordance between these two sources of crowd assignments, with special attention to whether concordance varied as a function of crowd type or status.

Study 1

Sample

Data were derived from a subgroup of a sample of 924 youth attending public middle or high schools in two Midwestern communities. Participants were in grades 7 through 12 and ranged in age from 12 to 19 (median age: 14.7). The sample was evenly split by gender (51% female) and fairly evenly divided by grade level (*n*'s ranged from 169 students in grade 7 to 140 in grade 12), but was primarily (93%) European American. One of the participating communities was a moderate sized city (population over 200,000) with a diverse socioeconomic population. The other community was much smaller (less than 15,000 people), featuring just one middle school and high school that served the largely working and middle class families in the city and surrounding small towns and rural areas.

Students who were selected to participate had all been nominated by classmates as members of one of the major peer crowds in their school, using procedures outlined below. Analyses reported in this paper were restricted to respondents associated by peers with one of six major crowd types that appeared consistently across schools (with minor variations in names) and were consistently regarded as either high (populars, *n* = 108; jocks, *n* = 162), moderate (brains, *n* = 103; normals, *n* = 55), or low in peer status (druggie/toughs, *n* = 197; outcasts, *n* = 201). Overall, the demographics of this subgroup did not differ significantly from those of the entire sample. Among crowds, however, there was some variability in gender composition. Females dominated the popular and normal crowds (83% and 71%, respectively), whereas most jocks (73%) were males. The other three crowds had a more even gender ratio.

Procedure

During the fall semester, peer ratings of student crowd affiliation were obtained using Brown's (1989) adaptation of Schwendinger and Schwendinger's (1985) Social Type Rating (STR) procedure. Key administrators in each school were asked to identify a small set of socially perceptive students in each grade who represented a cross-section of the student body in terms of social or extracurricular involvements, orientation toward school, and social standing among peers. These students were asked to complete an STR interview; over 90% of those asked agreed to do so. Between 10 and 15 students ("raters") per grade were interviewed. Following the Schwendingers' guidelines, each target rater invited a close friend to accompany him or her to the interview. After describing the task and providing the rating pair with a definition of peer crowds ("a label that you put on kids who act the same

ways or do the same sort of things, even if they don't spend a lot of time together"), we asked them to enumerate the crowds that existed in the school, describe the characteristics of each group (including the level of status they had among peers), then indicate the crowd with which each of their grade-mates was affiliated. Raters could indicate that a classmate did not fit into any of the crowds or that they did not know the person well enough to place in a crowd.

These data were used to identify the major crowds in each school and the status attributed to each crowd. Ratings of classmates served to identify students consistently associated with one of the school's major crowds. Following Brown (1989), we considered a student to be a member of a specific crowd, in the eyes of peers, if at least half of the STR raters placed the student in that crowd and no more than one-third of the raters assigned the student to a different crowd.

We selected 6 to 8 crowds per school for further study, focusing on the crowds most frequently mentioned by raters and most consistently mentioned across participating schools. Members of these groups were invited to complete a self-report questionnaire during the spring semester, several months after the STR interviews had been conducted. Of those asked, 86% completed useable questionnaires. Participants were not told that they had been selected for study because classmates had associated them with a specific crowd.

Measures

In addition to basic demographic information, respondents provided information about a number of other constructs, three of which are relevant to this study.

Self-rated Crowd Affiliation

Lists of crowds were collated across STR raters in each school to derive a school-specific list of major crowds. Questionnaire respondents were given the crowd list for their school and asked to answer the question, "Which crowd would *you personally* say that you belong to?" If they felt that they belonged to none of the crowds they could write "none." Their response was coded as their self-rated crowd affiliation.

Self-esteem

Respondents completed Rosenberg's (1989) 10-item measure of global *self-esteem*. The scale contains both positive and negative self-descriptions (e.g., "It's easy for me to make friends," "Most people like me," "At times, I think I am no good at all"), rated on a 4-point scale. It has been

widely used with adolescents and has strong validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .81. The mean of item responses was calculated after reversing scores for negatively worded items.

Internalizing

The questionnaire also contained two widely used and well validated measures of internalizing symptoms: the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (Reynolds 1987) and the anxiety subscale of the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (Derogatis 1974). Both measures were answered on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores (representing the mean of scale items) indicating higher levels of depression and anxiety, respectively. Scale reliabilities were very good in this sample (Cronbach's alpha of .91 for depression and .90 for anxiety).

Results

Crowd Differences in Self-esteem and Internalizing Symptoms

Prior to addressing study hypotheses and in order to allow closer comparison to previous research, we assessed crowd differences in self-esteem, anxiety, and depression by performing a 6 (crowd type) \times 2 (gender) \times 3 (grade grouping: 7–8, 9–10, 11–12) \times 2 (community) ANOVA on each outcome measure. Crowds differed significantly in self-esteem $F(5,818) = 9.01$, $p < .001$, and depression, $F(5,818) = 4.18$, $p < .001$, but not anxiety (see Table 1). The crowd effect was considered moderate in size for self-esteem (partial $\eta^2 = .056$) and small for depression (partial $\eta^2 = .027$). Post-hoc analyses, based on the Fisher LSD test, indicated that jocks and brains reported significantly higher self-esteem than populars, druggie/toughs, and outcasts; jocks also outpaced normals in self-esteem. Depression scores were significantly lower among jocks than any other crowd except the normals; normals had lower scores than both druggie/toughs and outcasts. There were no significant interaction effects involving crowd type on any of the outcomes. There were significant main effects for gender, however, on all three variables (girls reporting lower self-esteem and higher anxiety and depression scores) and significant community differences in anxiety (higher scores in the larger city).

Status Group Differences

Our first hypothesis predicted that self-esteem would vary directly with crowd status (the higher a crowd's status, the higher the self-esteem should be), whereas anxiety and

Table 1 Crowd differences in mean scores on self-esteem and internalizing measures, study 1

Measure	Popular	Jock	Brain	Normal	Druggie-Tough	Outcast
Self-esteem	3.00 (.06)	3.28 (.04)	3.18 (.05)	3.04 (.08)	2.97 (.04)	2.91 (.04)
Depression	2.07 (.05)	1.94 (.04)	2.07 (.04)	1.95 (.07)	2.13 (.03)	2.13 (.53)
Anxiety	2.32 (.06)	2.24 (.04)	2.30 (.04)	2.13 (.08)	2.34 (.03)	2.32 (.03)
<i>N</i>	108	162	103	55	197	201

Note: Scores represent mean scale scores adjusted for the effects of grade level, gender, and community. Figures in parentheses are standard errors

depression would vary inversely with crowd status (the higher a crowd’s status, the lower these scores should be). To test this hypothesis we repeated the ANOVAs, substituting the three-category crowd status grouping variable (collapsing crowds into high, moderate, and low status groupings) for crowd type. There were significant differences among status groups in self-esteem, $F(2,818) = 18.88, p < .001$, and depression, $F(2,818) = 11.06, p < .001$, but not in anxiety (see Table 2); in both cases the differences constituted small effect sizes (partial $\eta^2 < .05$). Post-hoc analyses indicated that both high and moderate status groups had significantly higher self-esteem and lower depression scores than the low status group, but they did not differ significantly from each other on either variable. Again, there were no significant higher order interactions involving crowd status group. These findings provided partial support for the first hypothesis.

Table 2 Status group differences in mean scores on self-esteem and internalizing symptoms, study 1

Measure	Crowd status group		
	High status	Moderate	Low status
Self-esteem	3.16 ^b (.03)	3.15 ^b (.04)	2.94 ^a (.03)
Depression	1.98 ^b (.03)	2.03 ^b (.03)	2.13 ^a (.02)
Anxiety	2.26 (.03)	2.26 (.04)	2.33 (.02)
<i>N</i>	270	158	398

Note: Scores represent mean scale scores adjusted for the effects of grade level, gender, and community. Figures in parentheses are standard errors. Groups with different superscripts are significantly different on post hoc comparisons (Fisher LSD test)

Moderating Effects of Self-ratings of Crowd Affiliation

The second hypothesis dealt with the possibility that self-ratings of crowd affiliation moderated associations predicted in the first hypothesis. This brings to the fore the study’s second objective: examining the concordance between self- and peer ratings of crowd affiliation. We considered this second objective before focusing directly on the second hypothesis. As can be seen in Table 3, concordance was moderately high (over 50%) among jocks, normals, and druggies/toughs, fairly low among populars and brains, and extremely low among outcasts. In each crowd, those who failed to concur with peer ratings were most likely to claim membership in the normals or in no crowd at all. This could be interpreted as an effort to “blend in” with the masses (being part of the normal or average or regular crowd) or to remove oneself from the crowd system altogether. However, for some respondents, association with the normals constituted a “step up” in social status; for others it amounted to a “step down.” For still others (e.g., students associated with the brain crowd) it was a lateral status move. Likewise, those who claimed membership in crowds other than the normals or their peer-rated group were asserting lateral, upward, or downward moves in peer status. Did such assertions alter the effects of crowd affiliation on self-esteem or internalizing symptoms, as predicted by the second hypothesis?

To examine this hypothesis we divided the high status group from our earlier analyses into three categories: those who acknowledged their high status by claiming membership in the crowd to which peers assigned them or the other crowd that consistently fell into the high-status

Table 3 Concordance between peer and self-rated crowd affiliation, study 1

Self-rated crowd affiliation	Peer-rated crowd affiliation						<i>N</i>
	Popular	Jock	Brain	Normal	Druggie-tough	Outcast	
Popular	27	5	8	2	4	1	55
Jock	13	57	10	2	3	5	132
Brain	0	3	20	0	0	4	34
Normal	19	11	28	67	14	42	210
Druggie-Tough	14	8	5	2	55	13	166
Outcast	3	2	6	2	5	8	37
None	19	11	19	22	19	23	150
Other	5	3	6	4	0	5	27
<i>N</i>	106	160	102	55	193	195	811

Note: Figures represent the percentage of members of each (peer rated) crowd who claim membership (self-rating) in each crowd type. “Other” includes all crowd types not included in analyses of peer ratings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage concordance between peer- and self-rated crowd affiliation for each crowd

category, those who claimed membership in another, lower status crowd, and those who said they were not part of any crowd. Likewise, respondents whom peers placed into one of the two low-status crowds were divided into those who also claimed membership in a low-status group, those who asserted membership in a higher status crowd, and those who denied membership in any group. These three-category comparison groups formed the basis of separate sets of ANOVAs for high-status and low-status crowd members. Along with self-rated comparison group the analyses included gender, grade level, and community as factors. Because of concerns about statistical power we did not consider anything beyond two-way interactions to be interpretable.

For members of high-status crowds, there were significant comparison group differences for self-esteem, $F(2,219) = 16.48, p < .01$, and depression, $F(2,221) = 6.04, p < .01$; these effects were moderate in size for depression (partial $\eta^2 = .06$) and large for self-esteem (partial $\eta^2 = .13$). Post-hoc group comparisons indicated that, consistent with our hypothesis, adolescents who denied their position in a high-status crowd, either through putting themselves in a lower status group or no crowd at all, reported lower levels of self-esteem than those who acknowledged their status position (see Fig. 1). Also, depression scores were lowest among those who concurred with peers that they were part of high-status crowds—significantly lower than those who claimed to belong to no crowd. Group differences in anxiety were in the direction predicted by Hypothesis 2 but were not statistically significant. No higher-order interaction effects involving self-ratings of crowd affiliation were observed.

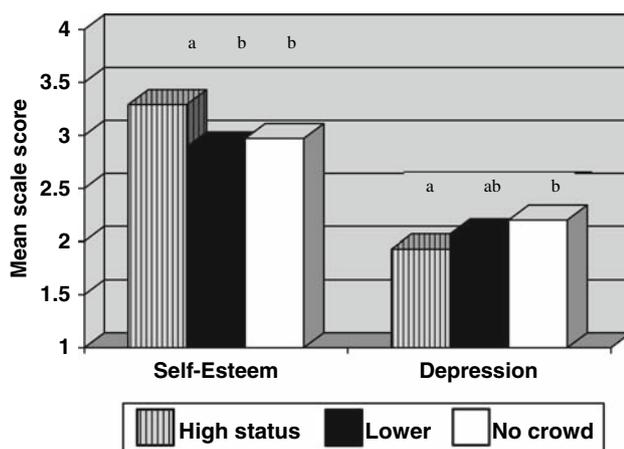


Fig. 1 Differences in mean self-esteem and depression scores for high status crowd members who place themselves in a high status, lower status, or no crowd, Study 1. *Note:* Comparison groups with different letters above them are significantly different on post hoc (Fisher LSD) tests

A parallel set of analyses was conducted on members of low-status crowds. Contrary to expectations, adolescents who concurred with peers that they belonged to low-status crowds did not fare significantly worse on any of the outcome measures than adolescents who claimed to be part of higher status crowds or no crowd at all. However, there was a significant Grade Level \times Crowd Comparison Group interaction for anxiety, $F(4, 372) = 3.78, p < .01$, as well as depression, $F(4, 372) = 4.21, p < .01$. In both cases, comparison groups differed significantly only among the youngest respondents (grades 7–8). For these low-status youth, anxiety scores were significantly lower if they said they were not part of any crowd than if they were in either other comparison group (see Fig. 2). Depression scores were also lowest among those disavowing any crowd affiliation, significantly lower than those who acknowledged that they were part of a low-status group.

Discussion

Findings add to previous indications in both quantitative and qualitative research that crowds differ on some aspects of psychological well-being. In this sample, jocks, in particular, were advantaged in terms of both self-esteem and depression over low-status groups (druggie-toughs and nobodies), echoing some of the patterns reported by Brown and Lohr (1987), Eckert (1989), Eder (1985), Merten (1996) and Prinstein and La Greca (2002). Most of these investigators have pointed to peer status as a primary factor accounting for crowd differences. Our results lend some credibility to this argument, but they suggest that low status

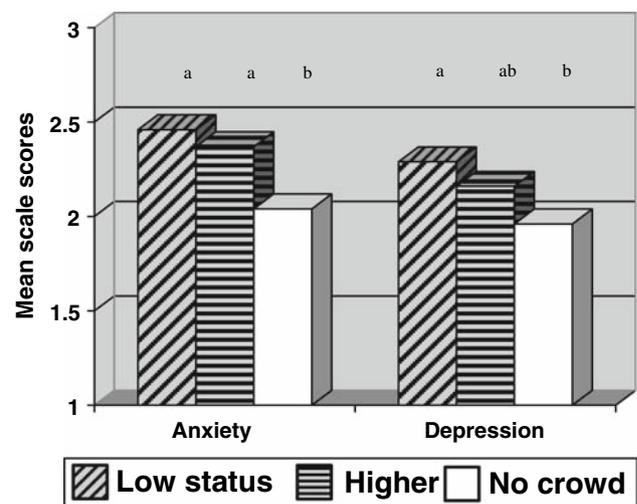


Fig. 2 Differences in mean anxiety and depression scores for younger (grades 7–8) low status crowd members who place themselves in a low status, higher status, or no crowd, Study 1. *Note:* Comparison groups with different letters above them are significantly different on post hoc (Fisher LSD) tests

is more of a disadvantage than high status is an advantage, at least in terms of global self-esteem and depressive affect.

Anxiety levels, on the other hand, were not significantly different among crowds or status groups. This result ran counter to our first hypothesis and was also inconsistent with two other studies in which anxiety was highest among members of moderate, versus high or low status crowds (La Greca and Harrison 2005; Prinstein and La Greca 2002). Adler and Adler (1998) as well as Eder (1985), on the other hand, observed anxiety in many middle school girls who were in high status groups—especially those with more marginal positions in the crowd. Such inconsistent findings across studies are difficult to explain from any theoretical perspective, but they may be accounted for in part by the different ways in which anxiety has been operationalized in these investigations.

The most intriguing findings, however, stem from analyses related to the second hypothesis, showing that associations between peer group status and psychological well-being were conditioned by adolescents' own perceptions of their crowd affiliation. In contrast to Hypothesis 1, it is the members of high status crowds who stood out in these analyses. Those who concurred with peers on their placement in high-status groups manifested the predicted advantages in self-esteem and depression over high-status adolescents who saw themselves as members of lower status groups or, especially, no crowd at all. By contrast, the conditional effects that we predicted for low status crowd members were apparent only for our youngest respondents, still in middle school. Low status crowd members in this age group who disavowed membership in any crowd displayed lower internalizing symptoms than those who concurred with peers on their crowd status. These patterns are consistent with Kinney's (1993) longitudinal ethnography, indicating that whereas high status crowds continued to be clearly demarcated across the transition from middle to high school, the proliferation of crowds in high school dilutes the effects of low status. The need to deflect unflattering reflected appraisals seems to be stronger in early than middle adolescence.

Although Study 1 yielded some provocative findings, it suffered from several limitations. First and foremost, because all data were collected at a single time point we could not discern any causal ordering to the associations observed. Was crowd affiliation a cause or consequence of individual differences in self-esteem and internalizing symptoms? Second, the relatively small and ethnically homogeneous sample did not provide a strong basis for generalizations to youth in the United States as a whole. Third, the sample excluded an important segment of the adolescent population: youth who were not associated (by peers) with any crowd, for whom reflected appraisal processes might be quite different. Finally, given the debate

about the complex and multidimensional nature of self-esteem (Harter 1990), we wondered whether a more tightly focused measure of self-esteem would be better suited to capturing the dynamics of reflected appraisal processes that we were trying to measure. In an effort to replicate and elaborate Study 1 findings and address its shortcomings, we conducted a second study.

Study 2

Associations between crowd affiliation and global self-esteem are important because they hint at the capacity of reflected appraisals from peers to touch core elements of adolescents' self-concept. One would expect these associations to be modest, however, because so many other aspects of adolescents' lives are related to self-esteem. The more differentiated view of self-esteem presented by Harter (1999) and others suggests that peer group affiliations may be more central to specific dimensions of self-concept. Because peer groups are an organizing feature of adolescents' social lives, we expected that they would be especially salient to young people's social self-concept—their evaluation of how effective they are in interactions and relationships with peers. Thus, we decided to focus Study 2 on these two aspects of self-concept: global self-esteem and (peer oriented) social self-concept.

Hypotheses

To facilitate comparisons with Study 1, we again considered concurrent associations between self-esteem measures and crowd affiliation or status. With longitudinal data, however, we were able to entertain more causally oriented hypotheses. That is, we hypothesized that adolescents in high-status crowds would display higher levels of global self-esteem and social self-concept than peers in lower status crowds, even after controlling for baseline levels of self-concept. Second, in considering the moderating effects of concordance between peer ratings of crowd affiliation (reflected appraisals) and self-assertions of crowd affiliation, we hypothesized that, even after controlling for baseline scores, members of high status crowds would display higher global self-esteem and social self-concept if they proclaimed membership in a high-status group, versus a crowd with lower status or no crowd at all. Controlling for baseline levels, we expected global self-esteem and social self-concept would be lower if low status crowd members affirmed their membership in a low status crowd, rather than a group higher in status or no crowd. To facilitate interpretation of the “no crowd” option, we also included adolescents whom peers could not place in any peer group in analyses prior to testing the second hypothesis.

Sample

Data were drawn from a large-scale, longitudinal study of students in six public high schools in the Midwest and West Coast. Analyses presented here involved the first 2 years of the three-year study. The schools varied substantially in size as well as ethnic and socioeconomic composition. Analyses were restricted to a subset of the sample: students in their first 3 years of high school at the study baseline (seniors were excluded because they were not available for the 1-year follow-up) who were associated by peers with one of seven major crowd types—populars ($n = 254$), jocks ($n = 140$), brains ($n = 151$), normals ($n = 341$), ethnically based crowds (e.g., Latinos, rappers, Vietnamese; $n = 505$), druggies ($n = 229$) and outcasts (e.g., nerds, loners, misfits; $n = 441$)—or who were not well enough known by raters to place into any crowd (e.g., “unknowns,” $n = 667$). Across these crowd categories, there were 2,728 students in the sample. They ranged from 13 to 19 years old (mean age = 15); 48% were female. Collapsed into major ethnic categories, the sample was 14% Asian descent, 10% African American, 16% Latino, 57% European American, and 3% from other ethnic backgrounds.

Procedure

Social Type Rating interviews were conducted in the fall of the study's first year in each participating school, following the same procedures as in Study 1 with two exceptions. First, target raters were interviewed individually, rather than with a close friend, because of the difficult logistics of arranging for pair-based interviews. Second, to provide a more definitive measure of peer group status, STR raters rank-ordered the crowds that they identified in terms of status. Between 10 and 20 students per grade were interviewed, constituting 82% of those approached to participate.

Several months later, self-report questionnaires were administered to all students in the school who were present on the day of questionnaire administration, except for a small number who declined or were denied permission by parents to participate in the study. Approximately 73% of the student bodies of participating schools successfully completed the baseline questionnaire. One year later, self-report questionnaires were again administered to all students in the schools (excepting those who were absent, declined or were denied permission by parents). Follow-up measures were derived from this second questionnaire administration. The overall retention rate was 72%, but it was lower among the druggies (67%) and, especially, unknown students (46%) than in other crowds. Students who successfully completed the follow-up had significantly

higher baseline self-esteem levels ($M = 2.96$) than cases lost at follow-up ($M = 2.91$), $F(1, 2503) = 5.03$, $p < .05$, but the difference was practically trivial; the two groups did not differ in baseline levels of social self-concept.

Measures

Peer Rated Crowd Affiliation

Based on the STR ratings, a student was assigned to a specific crowd if at least half of the STR raters placed the student in that crowd and no more than one-third of the raters assigned the student to a different crowd. Students were classified as “unknown” if at least half of the raters indicated that they did not know the student well enough to identify his or her crowd affiliation.

Peer Rated Crowd Status

Each STR rater's rankings of crowd status were standardized, then collated across raters in each school to derive a school-wide status score for each crowd. Among the crowd types that were consistently observed across schools, two (populars and jocks) were routinely rated as high in peer status (e.g., in the top third of status ratings), three (brains, normals, and ethnically based crowds) were consistently rated as average (middle third of ratings) in status, and two (druggies and outcasts) received low status ratings. The “unknowns” was not a crowd label identified by STR raters. Rather, it was our classification for students whom most raters did not know well enough to place in a crowd. Thus, this group did not receive a status rating.

Self-report Questionnaire Measures

In addition to basic demographic information (gender, ethnic affiliation, grade level, and age), respondents who completed the self-report questionnaire indicated the one crowd that “you personally think you belong to,” based on a list derived from STR ratings and specific to their school. They were instructed to write “none” if they felt they did not belong to any of the crowds. This served as a measure of *self-rated crowd affiliation*. The questionnaire also included two measures of self-concept: Rosenberg's (1989) 10-item measure of global *self-esteem* and a five item measure of *social self-concept* based on Harter's (1982) Self-Perception Profile for Children. Items for both measures were rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Mean scores were calculated across items for each scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem or social self-concept. Unlike Rosenberg's assessment of global self-esteem, Harter's measure examines social and interpersonal self-efficacy (e.g., “It's easy for me to make friends,”

“Most people like me”). Internal consistency alphas were acceptable for both scales in the full sample of the current study (.86 for global self-esteem and .75 for social self-concept). Respondents completed the two self-concept measures in both baseline and follow-up questionnaires.

Results

Initially, analyses included gender, ethnicity, grade level, and community as control variables. However, the latter two variables displayed no significant interactions with the focal variable in any analysis. To preserve power, analyses were re-run with these variables eliminated. We report results from this second set of analyses. Significant main effects involving the focal variable were followed up with post hoc Fisher LSD tests.

Crowd Differences on Self-concept Measures

To replicate analyses in Study 1, we conducted 2 (gender) × 5 (ethnicity) × 8 (peer-rated crowd affiliation) ANOVAs on baseline measures of self-esteem and social self-concept. As can be seen in Table 4, the crowds differed significantly at baseline in self-esteem, $F(7, 1843) = 2.27, p < .05$, but not in social self-concept. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that baseline self-esteem was significantly lower among druggies and unknowns than jocks, populars, normals, and brains; jocks also outpaced the ethnic crowd. Collectively, these differences in self-esteem constituted a small effect (partial $\eta^2 = .01$), and there were no significant interactions involving crowd membership in these analyses.

To examine the evidence for socialization effects, we conducted 2 (gender) × 5 (ethnicity) × 8 (peer-rated crowd affiliation) ANCOVAs on follow-up measures of self-esteem

and social self-concept, co-varying for the baseline score. There was no significant main effect for self-esteem. Social self-concept scores did vary significantly among crowds, $F(7, 903) = 2.37, p < .05$, although the effect was small in magnitude (partial $\eta^2 = .012$; see Table 4). Post-hoc analyses indicated that the outcasts had significantly lower social self-concepts than all groups except druggies and brains.

Status Group Differences in Self-concept Measures

To test the first hypothesis (that self-concept scores would vary directly with crowd status in both baseline and longitudinal analyses), analyses of crowd differences on the two self-concept measures were repeated with the crowds collapsed into status categories (high, moderate, low). In addition, unlike Study 1, we included a fourth comparison group, comprised of the unknown students. Again, there was a small but statistically significant difference in self-esteem at baseline, $F(3, 1804) = 3.26, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$; the high status group significantly outscored all other comparison groups. The groups showed the same pattern of differences in social self-concept, but the differences were not statistically reliable (see Table 5). The unknowns had the lowest average scores on both measures, but, with the one exception already noted, not meaningfully lower than the crowd status groups.

Controlling for baseline scores, these four comparison groups displayed small but statistically significant differences at follow-up in both self-esteem, $F(3, 1095) = 2.66, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, and social self-concept, $F(3, 864) = 4.52, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$ (see Table 5). Adjusting for baseline levels, the three status groups had equivalent levels of self-esteem at follow-up, but the

Table 4 Crowd differences in mean baseline and follow up self-concept scores, study 2

Self-concept measure	Peer rated crowd affiliation							
	Popular	Jock	Brain	Ethnic	Normal	Druggie	Outcast	Unknown
Baseline scores								
Self-esteem	3.11 (.09)	3.10 (.08)	3.14 (.11)	2.90 (.05)	3.00 (.07)	2.73 (.12)	2.97 (.06)	2.83 (.04)
Social self-concept	3.19 (.11)	3.06 (.13)	2.94 (.14)	2.92 (.1)	3.04 (.11)	3.00 (.14)	2.78 (.08)	2.86 (.08)
N	141	73	107	161	191	91	231	166
Follow-up scores								
Self-esteem	3.11 (.07)	2.76 (.1)	2.92 (.08)	3.00 (.06)	2.98 (.07)	3.07 (.12)	3.02 (.07)	2.80 (.06)
Social self-concept	3.18 (.11)	3.10 (.12)	2.92 (.1)	3.05 (.07)	3.04 (.09)	2.90 (.15)	2.71 (.08)	3.11 (.09)
N	92	45	94	105	149	44	181	49

Note: Scores represent mean scale scores adjusted for the effects of ethnicity and gender. Figures in parentheses are standard errors

Table 5 Status group differences in mean scores on baseline and follow-up self-concept measures, study 2

Self-concept measure	Crowd comparison group			
	High status	Moderate	Low status	Unknowns
Baseline scores				
Self-esteem	3.07 ^a (.06)	2.92 ^b (.04)	2.88 ^b (.06)	2.83 ^b (.04)
Social self-concept	3.12 (.1)	2.92 (.06)	2.9 (.07)	2.86 (.08)
<i>N</i>	214	454	322	166
Follow-up scores				
Self-esteem	2.93 ^{ab} (.07)	2.99 ^b (.05)	3.03 ^b (.07)	2.8 ^a (.06)
Social self-concept	3.12 ^b (.09)	3.07 ^b (.06)	2.75 ^a (.08)	3.11 ^b (.09)
<i>N</i>	137	348	225	49

Note: Scores represent mean scale scores adjusted for the effects of gender and ethnicity. Figures in parentheses are standard errors. Groups with different superscripts are significantly different on *post hoc* comparisons (Fisher LSD test)

moderate and low status groups were significantly higher in self-esteem than the unknowns. By contrast, adjusting for baseline scores, levels of social self-concept at follow-up were significantly lower among respondents in low status crowds than all other comparison groups. Curiously, however, the adjusted score for unknowns was as high as those for average and high status crowd members.

These findings suggest that crowd status did figure into adolescents' self-evaluations and that there were both selection and socialization effects. Baseline scores followed our prediction (increasing in magnitude according to crowd status), but with one exception the group differences

were small and not statistically significant. Social self-concept changed over time as we had hypothesized, except that the magnitude of change was not significantly higher for high than moderate status groups. Contrary to prediction, status groups did not differ significantly in the magnitude of change in self-esteem over time.

Agreement Between Self-rated and Peer Rated Crowd Affiliation

Before examining the moderating role of self-rated crowd affiliation on associations between peer-rated crowd status and self-concept measures, we checked levels of concordance between self- and peer ratings of crowd status in this larger and more diverse sample. Results were similar to Study 1 (see Table 6), with about half or the normals, jocks, and druggies concurring with peer ratings; this was also true of those in ethnically based crowds. Concurrence was somewhat lower among the populars, but especially low among the brains and outcasts. Among those who failed to agree with peer ratings, with minor exceptions the most common alternative self-ratings were into the normals or no crowd. Unknowns, who were not known well enough by peers to rate into any of the crowds, also tended to place themselves among the normals or no crowd at all, but a substantial portion (21%) also claimed membership in an ethnically oriented crowd. This suggests that ethnically oriented crowds may not have the same visibility across the school as a whole as other crowd types.

Moderating Effects of Self-ratings of Crowd Affiliation

As in Study 1, the appreciable discordance between peer and self-ratings of crowd affiliation bolstered the case for entertaining the second hypothesis, the potential for self-

Table 6 Concordance between peer and self-rated crowd affiliation, study 2

Self-rated crowd affiliation	Peer rated crowd affiliation								<i>N</i>
	Popular	Jock	Brain	Ethnic	Normal	Druggie	Outcast	Unknown	
Popular	37	11	8	6	16	9	7	8	223
Jock	2	43	0	2	5	2	3	4	99
Brain	2	2	13	1	0	1	6	2	53
Ethnic	2	1	6	46	4	1	3	21	257
Normal	30	29	52	22	51	17	45	27	641
Druggie	9	6	0	6	6	50	7	13	205
Outcast	2	1	4	0	2	3	6	2	46
None	17	7	16	15	14	15	20	20	305
Other	1	0	2	1	3	3	5	4	49
<i>N</i>	200	116	135	323	274	156	338	336	1878

Note: Figures represent the percentage of members of each (peer rated) crowd who claim membership (self-rating) in each crowd type. "Other" includes all crowd types not included in analyses of peer ratings. Numbers in italics indicate percentage concordance between peer- and self-rated crowd affiliation for each crowd

ratings to modify associations between peer status (derived from peer ratings of crowd affiliation) and self-concept measures. We conducted 2 (gender) × 5 (ethnicity) × 3 (peer versus self-rated group) ANOVAs on baseline measures of self-esteem and social self-concept scores and similar ANCOVAs (covarying for baseline scores) on these two measures. Analyses of social self-concept scores did not yield significant differences. Baseline levels of self-esteem differed significantly among crowd comparison groups, $F(2, 270) = 3.54, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, such that respondents who concurred with peers that they were part of a high status crowd had significantly stronger self-esteem than those who placed themselves in a lower status crowd (see Fig. 3). Curiously, however, those who claimed affiliation with no crowd had the highest self-esteem scores—significantly higher than adolescents who claimed membership in a lower status crowd. There was also a significant main effect for self-esteem in the assessment of follow-up scores, $F(2, 171) = 4.44, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$, with those who denied being part of any crowd scoring lower than both other groups.

As predicted, then, those who denied their position in high status crowds, asserting affiliation in a lower status group instead, displayed relatively low levels of self-esteem at the outset of the study; however, their self-esteem recovered substantially by a year later. Contrary to expectations, high-status crowd members who claimed to be part of no crowd at all seemed to enjoy relatively high

self-esteem initially; not until a year later did this advantage disappear. Again, group differences were modest and did not extend to our domain-specific measure of self-concept.

In analyses of comparison groups among members of low-status crowds, significant effects were again observed only for self-esteem, and only for baseline scores, $F(2, 402) = 6.08, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$ (see Fig. 4). As predicted in the third hypothesis, adolescents who acknowledged their position in a low-status crowd reported lower self-esteem than those claiming membership in a higher status group, but contrary to expectation, denying membership in any crowd did not bolster these respondents' self-esteem very much. The same pattern was apparent at follow-up, but group differences were not statistically reliable. Therefore, it seems that when youth perceived by peers as part of low status crowds (and therefore most at risk for low self-esteem) disagree with peers by claiming membership in a higher status crowd, they escape the negative effects of low status, although the success of this strategy over time is dubious.

General Discussion

Formulating a self-image in adolescence is a complex process, involving both self-reflection and consideration of feedback from significant others (Offer et al. 1988;

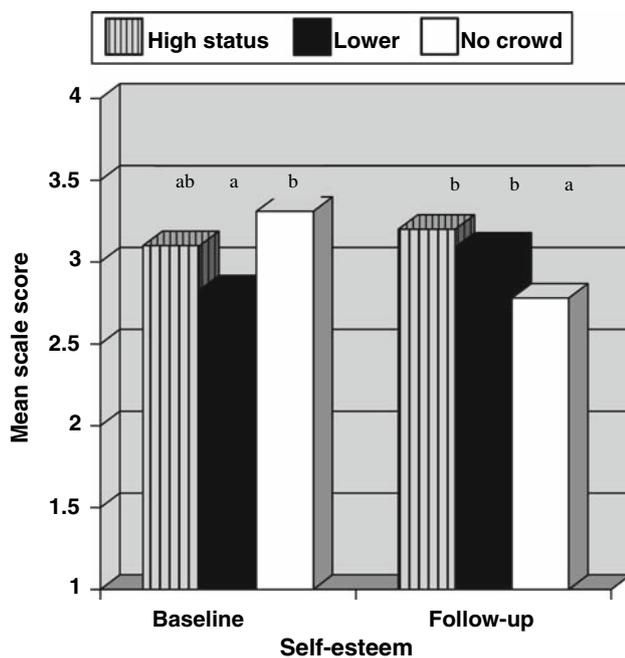


Fig. 3 Differences in mean self-esteem scores for high status crowd members who place themselves in a high status, lower status, or no crowd, Study 2. *Note:* Comparison groups with different letters above them are significantly different on post hoc (Fisher LSD) tests

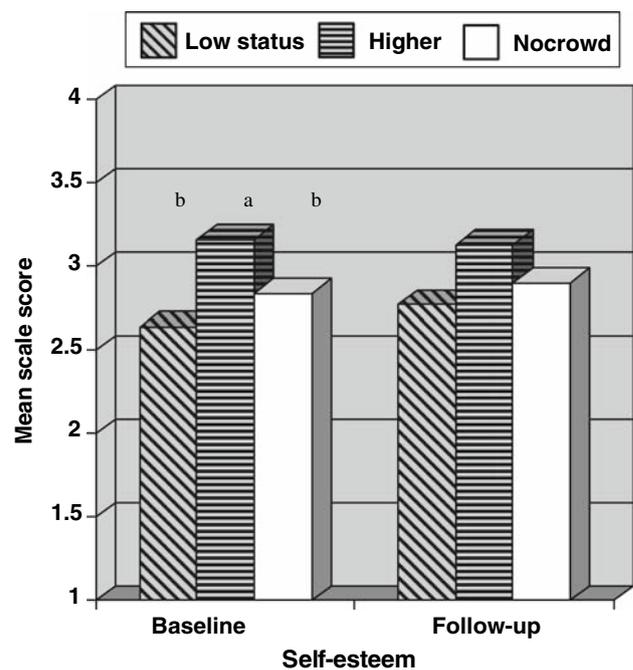


Fig. 4 Differences in mean self-esteem scores for low status crowd members who place themselves in a low status, higher status, or no crowd, Study 2. *Note:* Comparison groups with different letters above them are significantly different on post hoc (Fisher LSD) tests

Rosenberg 1979). Peers constitute just one among several sets of significant others from whom adolescents can draw reflected appraisals, so their unique effects on self-evaluation or the feelings flowing from this evaluation (including anxiety and depression) should be modest. Nevertheless, it appears as if the peer system is structured at adolescence in a way that is responsive to young people's need for identity development. The peer crowd system is a social construction, common in American high schools, that not only demarcates different identity prototypes that can be used to clarify one's self-image, but also organizes individuals by social status (Brown et al. 1994; Kinney 1993). Peer groups that are common across schools (e.g., popular, athletic, academically oriented, ethnically oriented, antisocial or delinquent, and socially inept) also tend to occupy consistent positions in the status hierarchy across schools. However, because these groups, like the status hierarchy they encompass, are social constructions, the status messages that they convey to adolescents are equivocal and subject to individual and group interpretation (Stone and Brown 1999). This means that individuals may deflect the psychological impact of peers' judgment about their status by distorting or denying the crowd affiliation assigned to them by peers.

One indication of such "self-image management" strategies in our data set was the relatively high number of respondents who placed themselves in a crowd that was different from their assignment by peers. This was true of nearly half of the members of most crowds, and a much higher percentage in some groups. One could argue that this casts doubts on the validity of peer ratings, but the pattern of self-ratings suggests that other dynamics are at work. Of those who failed to concur with peers on their crowd assignment, a surprisingly high proportion (between half and three-quarters of various crowds) either claimed membership in the normals or in no crowd at all. The rates of selecting these two crowd affiliations were well beyond chance and were tantamount to asserting either that "I'm just your average adolescent, not remarkable in identity or status among peers," or "I really don't subscribe to that identity-status-crowd thing." Adolescents' inclinations to obscure reflected appraisals from peers are surprising, given the central role that identity exploration and social status play in the lives of American teenagers (Erikson 1968; Hollingshead 1949). They deserve closer attention in subsequent studies of adolescent crowd dynamics, as they may help to account for the modest level of association between crowd status and our outcome measures.

At the extreme of this effort to deflect peers' reflected appraisals were the brains and outcasts. No more than 20% of the members of these crowds concurred with their group assignment by peers. In the case of outcasts this was not surprising because this group bears the brunt of peer

derision and is routinely excluded from peer social activities (Larkin 1979; Merten 1996). The plight of outcasts has even been the subject of many major motion pictures about adolescence (e.g., *Revenge of the Nerds*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Can't Buy Me Love*). The brains constitute a more unusual case because they tend to have average social status among peers and they posted self-esteem levels as high (if not slightly higher) than members of more prestigious peer groups. It seems, however, as if teenagers both admire the brains' academic prowess and resent it because of the challenge it poses to their own efforts to do well in school (Brown and Steinberg 1990). Most adolescents regard brains as a "close cousin" to the outcasts (Brown et al. 1994), and it appears as if few high school students are willing to risk being perceived as so closely aligned with this low-status crowd. In some cases, the brains may also be the subject of teasing or bullying (Fordham and Obgu 1986). Again, then, self-image management seems to be at work in the inclination of brains to profess membership in some other crowd.

Given these dynamics, it is surprising that a relatively high proportion of druggies, another crowd with low social status, concurred with their peer crowd assignment. This group, however, thrives on defiance of social norms and a mix of envy of and hostile opposition to peers with more prominent social status (Eckert 1989). Many of the druggies seem to draw support from within the crowd that can offset the low opinion that others may have of them. It is noteworthy, however, that druggies had one of the lowest average levels of self-esteem of any crowd, along with comparatively (but not significantly) high levels of anxiety and depression.

For this study, however, we were less concerned with the specific crowd to which adolescents were assigned by peers than with the position of a young person's crowd in the peer status system. We expected that self-esteem would be higher and internalizing symptoms lower as one moved up the crowd status hierarchy, and that these associations would show both selection and socialization effects. The data offered some support for these expectations. Members of high-status crowds displayed high levels of self-esteem and low levels of depression—significantly different from peers in low-status crowds. Yet, the high-status group was not distinctive in either anxiety or social self-concept, and their advantage in self-esteem did not increase over time as we had predicted. It may be that by this point in middle adolescence high-status crowd members are too high in self-concept to display much improvement over time, and the "flattening" of status differentials among crowds that occurs later in high school (Brown et al. 1994; Kinney 1993) may allow lower status groups to begin to catch up to higher status peers in self-esteem.

The unknowns, rather than low-status crowd members, suffered the most in self-esteem over time. Yet, adjusting for baseline levels, the unknowns actually displayed strong social self-concepts, significantly more so than their peers in low status crowds. One possible explanation for these patterns is that a substantial number of unknowns located a group of peers beyond their own high school who could form a base for social interactions. This is often the case for sexual minority youth, for example, and for teenagers whose interests are relatively esoteric (Savin-Williams 1998). Locating peers in the broader community or via the Internet who support their interests may elevate their sense of social acceptance or their opportunities for social interactions, but still leave them vulnerable in terms of more global self-assessments. Others have found that the unknowns are a diverse group, composed of youth who have little interest in participating in their school's peer crowd system as well as youth who are eager to fit in with schoolmates (Brown and Lohr 1987). These two subgroups show different patterns of self-esteem that would be important to trace over time.

According to symbolic interaction theory, adolescents might be able to escape some of the impact of peer crowd appraisals by deflecting these reflected appraisals, affirming membership in a different crowd or no crowd at all. We found evidence for such effects on global self-esteem, but it was less consistent for low-status than high-status youth. As expected, members of high status crowds who concurred with their peer crowd assessment posted greater self-esteem than fellow high status crowd members who asserted that they were part of a crowd with lower status. Their advantage seemed to increase marginally over time. Respondents who acknowledged their advantaged position in the peer crowd system also displayed lower levels of depression than high-status crowd members who professed to be part of no crowd, but they did not stand out in terms of anxiety or social self-concept.

More curious was the situation in Study 2 for high status crowd members who proclaimed affiliation with no crowd. These respondents had the highest level of self-esteem of all high-status groups at baseline, but the lowest at follow-up. One possible explanation for these findings stems from the fact that although students regard high status crowd members with some envy and awe, they also bear some resentment because of the way they are often treated by high status peers (Cillessen and Rose 2005; Eder 1985). Over time, high status crowd members who attempt to portray themselves as not part of any crowd may be admonished by peers within high status crowds to display stronger allegiance to the crowd and its norms, while also encountering derision from lower status peers for what might appear to be a disingenuous effort to distance themselves from popular peers. The weight of these peer

pressures and peer reactions could drive down the high self-esteem that this subgroup of populars used to enjoy. This, however, is sheer speculation on our part that requires closer scrutiny in future research.

The situation for low-status crowd members confirmed our expectations, but only for self-esteem and only in Study 2. Professing membership in a crowd that enjoys higher status was an effective way to avoid the blow to self-esteem that is associated with membership in a low-status crowd. Asserting that one is not part of any crowd was not quite as effective, but still a marginal improvement over confessing one's true crowd status. These differences were modestly but not significantly strengthened over time (at least over the short duration of our study). In Study 1, members of low-status crowds who acknowledged their status position also suffered greater anxiety and depression than low-status peers who said they were not part of any crowd, but only among the youngest age group in the sample.

In most cases, the significant effects that we discovered were modest in magnitude. This is understandable because peer crowd affiliations, the focus of our study, comprise just one of many factors that influence self-concept and internalizing symptoms (Graber 2004; Harter 1999). It is possible, however, that we have underestimated the effects of peer crowd dynamics because of two features of the study design. First, self-concept tends to change slowly across adolescence (Harter 1990); our one-year interval between baseline and follow-up assessments may not have been long enough to capture the full effect of crowd assignments on self-concept scores. Second, our samples focused on middle adolescence when peer crowds and crowd status are well established and the salience of peer crowds is beginning to wane (Brown and Klute 2003; Kinney 1993). The age of our respondents at initial assessment was too old for us to claim with confidence that the baseline differences were purely the result of selection effects. Prinstein and La Greca (2002) were able to show clear trajectories in self-esteem from middle childhood to adolescence that were related to crowd affiliation, suggesting that in some respects membership in certain crowds was predestined by characteristics that predated adolescence. Low status crowd members' efforts to deny or deflect reflected appraisals from peers were associated with internalizing symptoms only among our youngest respondents (in Study 1). This suggests that more attention should be focused on early adolescence and middle school peer dynamics, although the absence of consistent age differences in our studies weakens this argument.

Our findings affirm that associations between peer crowd affiliation or peer status and adolescents' self-esteem and psychological well-being are not always direct. Young people's inclinations to misread or countermand

reflected appraisals of peer status can alter the impact of peer assessments in ways that depend upon one's position within the adolescent social system. These more complex facets of reflected appraisal processes are essential to understanding the link between crowd affiliation and psychological outcomes for youth.

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