The Role of Peer Group Norms in Shaping Self-Identity Formation Among Adolescents

Marco. Conti[1] , Eszter. Kovács[2]*

[1] Department of Educational Sciences, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
[2] Department of Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

* **Corresponding author email address**: eszter.kovacs@elte.hu

A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to explore how peer group norms influence the formation of self-identity among adolescents.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed, drawing on an interpretive phenomenological approach to capture adolescents' lived experiences. The study recruited 21 adolescents aged 14–18 years from various regions of Hungary using purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by a flexible interview protocol covering peer influence, self-expression, and identity negotiation. Interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic analysis framework, supported by NVivo 14 software for coding and theme development. Researcher triangulation and reflexive memoing were used to enhance rigor.

Findings: Four overarching thematic categories emerged: (1) Influence of Peer Group Norms on Behavior, including conformity pressure, modeling behavior, and implicit rules; (2) Identity Negotiation within Peer Groups, encompassing exploration of self, role assignment, and identity conflicts; (3) Emotional Impact of Peer Relationships, highlighting emotional support, belongingness, peer-based stress, and social comparison; and (4) Long-Term Effects on Self-Identity Formation, including persistence of peer values, career and academic influences, and shifts in moral perspective. Participants described both positive and negative consequences of aligning with peer norms, emphasizing the enduring influence of group expectations on personal identity.

Conclusion: Peer group norms serve as powerful socializing forces in adolescence, shaping self-concept, emotional well-being, and long-term identity trajectories. While conformity can foster belonging and self-confidence, it can also constrain individuality.

Keywords: Adolescents; peer group norms; self-identity formation.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is widely recognized as a pivotal stage of human development, marked by profound biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes that shape the transition from childhood to adulthood. Among the most salient developmental tasks during this period is the formation of a stable self-identity, a process influenced by a variety of interpersonal and contextual factors (Afful et al., 2021; Z & Qin, 2023). Theories of identity formation highlight that adolescents do not construct their self-concept in isolation; instead, they engage in a dynamic interplay between individual agency and the social environment, particularly within their peer groups (Janabaevna, 2024; Luca & Podina, 2021). Peer groups often provide a reference framework for acceptable behaviors, attitudes, and values, thereby influencing the boundaries and content of self-identity (Agustin et al., 2018; Sinambela et al., 2025).

Peer group norms—informal and often implicit standards shared among members—play a critical role in guiding adolescents' self-expression and identity negotiation (Kühn, 2025; Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024). These norms encompass various domains, from clothing styles and leisure activities to moral stances and political views (Hassan et al., 2024; Shidiqie et al., 2023). Conformity to such norms can foster belongingness and social approval, yet it may also constrain individuality and authenticity (Kumar et al., 2021; Nyman et al., 2018). The balance between autonomy and conformity is especially delicate during adolescence, a time when the need for peer acceptance often peaks (Itsna et al., 2021; Rambe & Santosa, 2023). While social norms in peer settings can encourage positive development, such as prosocial behavior and academic engagement, they can also reinforce maladaptive behaviors, including risk-taking and exclusionary practices (Dai et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2019).

The mechanisms by which peer norms influence identity formation are multidimensional. Social learning theory suggests that adolescents internalize behaviors observed in peers through modeling and reinforcement (Agustin et al., 2018; Asyia et al., 2023). Symbolic interactionism further posits that self-concept emerges from reflected appraisals, wherein individuals perceive themselves as they believe others perceive them (Yue et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in peer contexts, where feedback—both explicit and implicit—can affirm or challenge emerging identities (Shifflet-Chila et al., 2016; Yim & McCann, 2024). Neuroscientific research adds another layer, showing that adolescents exhibit heightened neural sensitivity in reward-related brain regions, such as the nucleus accumbens, when making decisions in the presence of peers, which may increase susceptibility to peer influence (Dai et al., 2023).

Peer group norms also interact with broader sociocultural forces to shape identity. Cultural expectations, media exposure, and technological affordances have transformed the contexts in which adolescents engage with peers (Kühn, 2025; Zhao, 2025). The rise of social media platforms has expanded the reach and immediacy of peer norms, allowing adolescents to curate self-presentations that align with group expectations while simultaneously navigating public visibility (Shidiqie et al., 2023; Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024). Visual symbols, such as Bitmojis and curated profile images, serve as digital proxies for identity expression and are often evaluated according to peer-established standards (Kühn, 2025). Online spaces thus create an intensified environment for both experimentation and conformity, blurring the boundaries between offline and online self-representations (Luca & Podina, 2021; Shifflet-Chila et al., 2016).

The influence of peer norms on self-identity formation is not uniform; it is moderated by individual differences such as self-esteem, social self-efficacy, and pre-existing values (Nyman et al., 2018; Tian et al., 2019). Adolescents with higher self-esteem may be more resilient to negative peer pressures, selectively internalizing norms that align with their personal goals (Itsna et al., 2021; Yim & McCann, 2024). Conversely, those with lower self-esteem may adopt group norms more indiscriminately to secure acceptance (Asyia et al., 2023; Khanolkar et al., 2025). Family dynamics also exert a moderating influence; high levels of family intimacy and psychological capital can buffer adolescents against detrimental peer influences and strengthen their ability to negotiate group expectations (Zhou et al., 2023).

Moreover, the content and enforcement of peer norms are shaped by gendered and cultural contexts (DeLay et al., 2017; Khanolkar et al., 2025). For instance, in some settings, gender role expectations within peer groups may influence the extent to which adolescents feel free to explore nontraditional aspects of identity (DeLay et al., 2017). Similarly, cross-cultural studies highlight differences in how collectivist versus individualist cultures frame conformity and autonomy within peer relationships (Afful et al., 2021; Janabaevna, 2024). Adolescents embedded in collectivist cultures may perceive conformity as an affirmation of group solidarity, whereas those in individualist contexts might view it as a threat to personal authenticity (Sinambela et al., 2025; Z & Qin, 2023).

Identity formation is also influenced by the bidirectional nature of peer influence. While adolescents adapt to group norms, they also contribute to shaping those norms through active participation and feedback (Agustin et al., 2018; Rambe & Santosa, 2023). In supportive peer environments, this can lead to the co-construction of positive norms that promote mutual respect and self-expression (Hassan et al., 2024; Yim & McCann, 2024). In less supportive contexts, however, group norms may become rigid and exclusionary, reinforcing hierarchies and marginalizing those who deviate (Kumar et al., 2021; Shidiqie et al., 2023). The digital sphere amplifies both possibilities, as online peer interactions can rapidly mobilize supportive communities or facilitate cyberbullying and social exclusion (Kühn, 2025; Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024).

Recent literature has emphasized the developmental significance of moral and ethical dimensions within peer norms (Luca & Podina, 2021; Yue et al., 2022). Adolescents often calibrate their moral self-concept through feedback from peers, who serve as both audience and collaborators in moral decision-making (Tian et al., 2019; Z & Qin, 2023). Moral self-representations are susceptible to the perceived actual appraisals of peers, which can either reinforce ethical behavior or normalize moral disengagement (Yue et al., 2022). In contexts where peers value prosocial behavior, adolescents may integrate these values into their core identity; in contrast, when antisocial behaviors are condoned, moral reasoning may be compromised (Afful et al., 2021; DeLay et al., 2017).

Given the central role of peer group norms in adolescence, examining their influence on self-identity formation is crucial for understanding both positive and negative developmental trajectories. This study seeks to contribute to this understanding by exploring how adolescents perceive and negotiate peer norms, the mechanisms through which these norms are internalized or resisted, and the long-term implications for identity consolidation.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research was conducted using a phenomenological approach to gain insight into how adolescents perceive and interpret the influence of peer group norms on their self-identity formation. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of individuals who could provide rich and relevant data related to the research question. The study involved 21 adolescents aged between 14 and 18 years, all residing in Hungary. Selection criteria included current enrollment in secondary education and active participation in peer group activities, whether formal (e.g., school clubs, sports teams) or informal (e.g., friendship circles). Diversity in gender, socioeconomic background, and school type was considered to capture a broad range of experiences. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews no longer yielded new insights or themes.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted either face-to-face or via secure video conferencing platforms, depending on participants' preferences and logistical considerations. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature and refined through expert consultation to ensure clarity and relevance. The guide covered key themes such as perceived peer norms, conformity and resistance behaviors, identity negotiation within peer contexts, and perceived long-term effects on self-concept. Interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. To promote open discussion, participants were assured of confidentiality and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the data. NVivo software (version 14) was used to manage, code, and organize the dataset efficiently. Initial coding was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Codes were iteratively refined and grouped into broader thematic categories representing the core influences of peer group norms on self-identity formation. Researcher triangulation was implemented, with multiple researchers reviewing and discussing coding decisions to enhance analytic rigor. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout the process to record analytical decisions, researcher assumptions, and emerging theoretical linkages. The final thematic framework was developed through repeated engagement with the data, ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' authentic accounts.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 21 adolescents from various regions of Hungary, aged between 14 and 18 years (M = 16.2). Of these participants, 11 were female (52.4%) and 10 were male (47.6%). Regarding educational level, 8 participants (38.1%) were enrolled in lower secondary school, while 13 (61.9%) were attending upper secondary school. Socioeconomic backgrounds varied, with 7 participants (33.3%) reporting low-income household status, 9 (42.9%) from middle-income households, and 5 (23.8%) from high-income households. All participants were actively engaged in peer group activities, with 13 (61.9%) involved in both formal school-based groups and informal social circles, and 8 (38.1%) participating exclusively in informal peer gatherings. The majority (n = 15, 71.4%) reported living in urban areas, while the remaining 6 (28.6%) resided in rural communities.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts

Category	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Influence of Peer Group Norms on Behavior	Pressure to Conform	Following group dress codes; Adopting shared slang; Attending group-selected events; Avoiding disapproved activities
	Modeling Behavior	Copying leaders' habits; Emulating academic attitudes; Adopting risk behaviors; Mimicking body language
	Peer Sanctions and Rewards	Teasing non-conformers; Social exclusion; Praise for compliance; Increased group status
	Shared Group Goals	Aligning with team success; Supporting collective hobbies; Participating in activism
	Implicit Rules	Unspoken dress etiquette; Informal social rules; Accepted communication styles
2. Identity Negotiation within Peer Groups	Exploration of Self	Experimenting with music styles; Trying new hobbies; Changing fashion identity; Shifting personal values
	Role Assignment	Being "the funny one"; Assigned leadership roles; Taking on caretaker roles; Becoming the "quiet observer"
	Group Identity Internalization	Using group catchphrases; Identifying with shared history; Feeling pride in group achievements
	Identity Conflicts	Balancing family vs. peer values; Hiding certain beliefs; Feeling torn between groups
	Self-Validation	Seeking peer approval; Comparing self to group norms; Feeling accepted for uniqueness
3. Emotional Impact of Peer Relationships	Emotional Support	Receiving empathy from peers; Getting encouragement; Feeling understood
	Peer-Based Stress	Fear of rejection; Anxiety over group acceptance; Pressure to maintain image
	Belongingness	Feeling "at home" in group; Experiencing emotional safety; Shared rituals
	Social Comparison	Measuring success against peers; Envy of others' abilities; Motivation from peer competition
	Conflict and Reconciliation	Arguments over decisions; Apologies restoring bonds; Learning conflict resolution
	Emotional Dependency	Relying on group for mood; Needing validation to feel happy; Feeling lost without group contact
4. Long-Term Effects on Self-Identity Formation	Persistence of Peer Values	Continuing group habits into adulthood; Retaining speech patterns; Maintaining worldview
	Career and Academic Choices	Choosing fields supported by peers; Avoiding careers peers disliked; Inspired by peer role models
	Self-Confidence Development	Gaining confidence from peer praise; Losing confidence from criticism; Overcoming shyness through group activities
	Resilience and Adaptation	Learning to adapt to new groups; Coping with rejection; Using peer lessons in challenges
	Shifts in Moral Perspective	Adopting ethical stances; Rejecting earlier values; Reevaluating social norms

Category 1: Influence of Peer Group Norms on Behavior

Pressure to Conform emerged as a pervasive theme in shaping adolescents' everyday decisions. Participants often described subtle and overt pressures to align with the group's appearance, language, and activities. Several reported feeling "odd" if they deviated from group expectations. One 16-year-old male participant reflected, *"If I wore something different from the rest of them, they'd joke about it all day until I changed it next time."* This conformity extended to adopting specific slang and attending events endorsed by peers, even when personal interest was minimal.

Modeling Behavior was also significant, with adolescents emulating both positive and negative habits of

admired peers. This ranged from adopting a peer's academic diligence to mirroring risk-taking behaviors. A 17-year-old female participant noted, *"When my best friend started studying harder, I suddenly cared more about my grades, too."* Conversely, others admitted copying body language and social postures to "blend in better" with influential group members.

Peer Sanctions and Rewards functioned as powerful behavioral regulators. Participants described teasing, subtle mockery, or even social exclusion for non-compliance with group norms. However, compliance was often rewarded with praise, increased inclusion, and elevated status within the group. One respondent shared, *"When I finally joined them for the school football tournament, they started inviting me to everything."*

Shared Group Goals provided adolescents with a sense of collective identity, whether through team sports, collaborative hobbies, or participation in activist causes. Adolescents found these goals reinforcing, with one interviewee stating, *"When we all trained for the drama competition together, it felt like we were one person, not ten."*

Implicit Rules operated beneath conscious awareness but were nonetheless influential. Many adolescents described "unspoken" guidelines on acceptable dress, humor, or interaction styles. As a 15-year-old participant put it, *"Nobody says it out loud, but you just know what's okay to wear or say."*

Category 2: Identity Negotiation within Peer Groups

Exploration of Self was evident in adolescents' experimentation with interests, hobbies, and personal style under peer influence. Participants often described "trying on" identities as a way to test fit and peer approval. *"I changed my playlist completely because my group was into rock,"* recalled one 16-year-old male, illustrating music as a site of identity play.

Role Assignment within groups shaped self-concept over time. Some were cast as the "funny one" or the "organizer," while others assumed quieter, supportive roles. A female participant observed, *"I never planned to be the one who keeps everyone calm, but they always look at me when things get tense."*

Group Identity Internalization was a common pattern, with adolescents incorporating the group's language, humor, and shared history into their self-image. *"We have phrases only we understand, and it makes me feel like I belong,"* said a 17-year-old male participant.

Identity Conflicts emerged when peer norms clashed with family or personal values. Adolescents sometimes concealed aspects of their identity to avoid friction. As one participant noted, *"I never tell my group I go to church; they wouldn't get it."*

Self-Validation was sought through peer feedback and acceptance. Many participants linked self-esteem to perceived approval from the group, with one girl stating, *"When they liked my outfit, I felt more confident all day."*

Category 3: Emotional Impact of Peer Relationships

Emotional Support was a recurrent benefit of peer affiliation, with many adolescents describing their friends as a primary source of comfort and encouragement. *"When I was stressed about exams, my group was the only place I could relax,"* explained a 16-year-old male participant.

Peer-Based Stress arose when maintaining group image became burdensome. Adolescents expressed anxiety over the possibility of rejection or failure to meet unspoken expectations. *"If I missed a hangout, I worried they'd replace me,"* said one participant.

Belongingness was described as the emotional glue of peer bonds. Participants valued feeling "at home" within their group, citing shared rituals and inside jokes as integral to that sense. *"It's like a second family,"* shared a 15-year-old female.

Social Comparison drove both motivation and envy. Adolescents frequently compared their achievements, looks, and popularity to peers. One participant admitted, *"When my friend got better grades, I studied more, but I also felt jealous."*

Conflict and Reconciliation episodes were common but often seen as growth opportunities. Disagreements, when resolved, strengthened bonds. *"We fought over a school project, but talking it out made us closer,"* recalled a 17-year-old male.

Emotional Dependency appeared in cases where well-being hinged on peer validation. *"If they ignored me, I felt like my day was ruined,"* confessed one interviewee.

Category 4: Long-Term Effects on Self-Identity Formation

Persistence of Peer Values was evident, with several participants recognizing that certain group habits and attitudes continued beyond adolescence. *"Even now, I use the same slang we had in high school,"* reflected a 17-year-old female.

Career and Academic Choices were sometimes influenced by peer aspirations. *"I'm studying tourism because two of my friends wanted to work in hotels,"*

explained one participant, showing the durability of peer influence.

Self-Confidence Development was closely tied to early peer experiences. Positive reinforcement built lasting self-assurance, while criticism left enduring insecurities. *"My group always said I was good at speaking, and now I'm in debate club,"* noted one adolescent.

Resilience and Adaptation emerged from navigating peer challenges, teaching skills transferable to adult relationships. *"After being excluded once, I learned how to make friends fast,"* said one respondent.

Shifts in Moral Perspective reflected the evolving nature of values, with some adolescents adopting peers' ethical stances or rejecting earlier beliefs. As one participant put it, *"I used to think certain jokes were fine, but now I realize they were hurtful."*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the central role that peer group norms play in shaping adolescent self-identity formation. Across the four major thematic categories—Influence of Peer Group Norms on Behavior, Identity Negotiation within Peer Groups, Emotional Impact of Peer Relationships, and Long-Term Effects on Self-Identity Formation—it was evident that adolescents navigate a complex interplay of conformity, resistance, and co-construction of norms. The presence of implicit and explicit standards within peer groups exerted significant influence over personal expression, decision-making, and perceptions of self, echoing the premise that peers act as powerful agents of socialization during adolescence (Agustin et al., 2018; Sinambela et al., 2025). This aligns with prior work demonstrating that peer norms function both as behavioral guidelines and as symbolic markers of group membership, which adolescents internalize to reinforce belongingness (Afful et al., 2021; Z & Qin, 2023).

One of the key results was the strong effect of pressure to conform in domains such as dress, language, and shared activities. Participants reported that deviation from established group norms often resulted in social sanctions, including teasing or exclusion, whereas compliance garnered praise and inclusion. These findings support previous studies indicating that conformity pressures are amplified during adolescence, as peers become primary reference points for acceptable behaviors (Kumar et al., 2021; Nyman et al., 2018). Moreover, modeling behaviors from admired group members—whether prosocial or

risky—was a consistent pattern, reflecting social learning processes described in earlier literature (Agustin et al., 2018; Asyia et al., 2023). The data also resonate with neuroscientific evidence showing heightened sensitivity to peer influence at the neural level, where decision-making in the presence of peers activates reward-related brain regions (Dai et al., 2023).

The identity negotiation processes identified in this study, particularly through exploration of self and role assignment within peer contexts, illustrate how adolescents experiment with and refine aspects of their identity. Participants described shifting musical preferences, fashion styles, and even personal values to align with group expectations or test boundaries. These findings echo the theoretical premise of symbolic interactionism, wherein self-concept develops through reflected appraisals from significant others—in this case, peers (Yue et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). Group identity internalization, as observed in the adoption of shared language and humor, parallels findings by Kühn (Kühn, 2025) and Zillich (Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024) on adolescents' self-presentation practices in digital environments, where conformity to group-specific visual and verbal codes enhances social cohesion. However, the presence of identity conflicts in participants' narratives also underscores the tension between peer and family norms, consistent with research showing that adolescents often compartmentalize aspects of self to maintain harmony across different social contexts (DeLay et al., 2017; Khanolkar et al., 2025).

Emotional experiences emerged as both outcomes and drivers of peer influence. Emotional support provided by peers fostered a sense of security and belongingness, supporting previous research on the role of social support in adolescent identity development (Itsna et al., 2021; Yim & McCann, 2024). At the same time, peer-based stress—stemming from fears of rejection or social replacement—highlighted the costs of high group dependence. These dynamics align with findings by Rambe (Rambe & Santosa, 2023) on the role of conformity in maintaining peer acceptance, and with studies showing that peer presence can amplify both positive motivation and risk-taking behaviors (Dai et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2019). The recurrent theme of social comparison in the present study also mirrors earlier evidence that adolescents evaluate their abilities and self-worth relative to peers, shaping self-esteem and motivational patterns (Afful et al., 2021; Asyia et al., 2023).

The long-term effects reported by participants, including persistence of peer values and influence on career and

academic choices, emphasize that peer norms have enduring implications beyond the adolescent period. Similar to prior studies, these results suggest that early peer experiences can leave a lasting imprint on self-concept and life trajectories (Janabaevna, 2024; Sinambela et al., 2025). For example, adolescents who were praised by peers for specific competencies (e.g., public speaking) often pursued related academic or extracurricular paths, consistent with findings on the cumulative effect of peer reinforcement on self-confidence development (Hassan et al., 2024; Yim & McCann, 2024). This enduring impact is also evident in the moral domain, where participants reported adopting ethical stances—or rejecting earlier norms—based on peer group values, in line with literature on moral self-representation shaped by peer appraisals (Luca & Podina, 2021; Yue et al., 2022).

The results of this study also shed light on the dual role of peer influence, which can be constructive or detrimental depending on the nature of the norms and the social climate within the group. Supportive peer environments, where inclusivity and respect are valued, foster adaptive identity development (Agustin et al., 2018; Yim & McCann, 2024). Conversely, rigid and exclusionary groups may restrict individuality and reinforce negative behaviors, paralleling concerns raised in research on harmful peer dynamics in both offline and online spaces (Shidiqie et al., 2023; Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024). The expansion of peer interactions into the digital sphere intensifies these processes, as adolescents' self-presentations are increasingly shaped by instant, widespread feedback from peers (Kühn, 2025; Shifflet-Chila et al., 2016).

Interestingly, participants' reflections on implicit rules and unspoken expectations suggest that much of peer influence operates at a tacit level, aligning with prior research on the subtlety of social norms (Kühn, 2025; Zillich & Wunderlich, 2024). Adolescents seemed acutely aware of these unwritten codes and adjusted their behavior accordingly to maintain social harmony. This finding resonates with Hassan's (Hassan et al., 2024) work on fashion trends among adolescents, where implicit style cues function as a form of symbolic communication within peer groups. Moreover, the persistence of such implicit codes in shaping long-term behaviors supports the idea that once internalized, these norms become embedded in self-identity (Afful et al., 2021; Sinambela et al., 2025).

The present study's Hungarian context adds a culturally specific dimension to the literature on adolescent identity. While the themes identified are consistent with international findings, cultural nuances likely influence the salience and interpretation of peer norms. For example, as noted in cross-cultural analyses, collectivist tendencies within certain communities may frame conformity as a positive expression of solidarity, whereas individualist orientations might emphasize self-expression and personal choice (Afful et al., 2021; Janabaevna, 2024). The intersection of cultural values and peer group dynamics warrants further examination to fully understand the variability in identity development processes (Sinambela et al., 2025; Z & Qin, 2023).

Overall, these findings contribute to a growing body of evidence that peer group norms are not peripheral influences but central structures within which adolescents construct, negotiate, and solidify their self-identities. By illuminating the nuanced ways in which adolescents perceive, internalize, and sometimes resist these norms, the study underscores the need for educators, parents, and policymakers to consider the formative role of peer relationships in adolescent development (DeLay et al., 2017; Khanolkar et al., 2025; Yim & McCann, 2024).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the use of a qualitative design, while valuable for capturing rich, contextualized experiences, limits the generalizability of findings to broader adolescent populations. The sample was relatively small and confined to adolescents in Hungary, meaning cultural and contextual factors unique to this setting may limit applicability elsewhere. Second, data were based on self-reported accounts, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability effects; participants may have underreported behaviors or opinions perceived as socially undesirable. Third, although theoretical saturation was reached, the perspectives of adolescents who are socially isolated or disengaged from peer groups were not represented, potentially excluding important variations in identity formation experiences. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study precludes conclusions about the long-term causal relationships between peer norms and identity outcomes.

Future research could build on these findings by employing longitudinal designs to trace the developmental trajectory of identity formation in relation to peer norms over time. Comparative studies across cultural contexts would help elucidate the influence of sociocultural factors on peer norm content and salience. Quantitative approaches, perhaps incorporating social network analysis, could complement

qualitative insights by mapping the structural features of peer groups and their relationship to identity development outcomes. Additionally, exploring the role of online peer networks—particularly the interaction between offline and online norms—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the modern adolescent social landscape. Including the voices of adolescents with limited peer engagement or those in marginalized communities could further expand the inclusivity and applicability of findings.

Practitioners working with adolescents—such as educators, school counselors, and youth program facilitators—should consider integrating peer group dynamics into identity development interventions. Structured peer mentoring programs can harness positive peer influence to promote self-esteem, prosocial values, and resilience. Encouraging critical reflection on group norms may empower adolescents to differentiate between constructive and harmful influences. In educational settings, fostering inclusive peer cultures can help mitigate the negative effects of exclusionary norms while supporting diverse forms of self-expression. Finally, parental and community awareness initiatives can enhance adult understanding of peer group influence, enabling more effective guidance and support for adolescents navigating this formative period.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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