The Influence of Peers on Adolescents’ Behavior

Adolescence is an important period in everyone’s life. During this period, one forms as a personality and acquires his or her unique features. There are many factors which influence adolescents on their way to adult life. Considering the fact that they spend most of their time with friends, the impact of peers becomes more and more significant. In most cases, peers’ opinion is a crucial thing defining teenagers’ preferences, tastes, views, and choices. However, this impact has two sides: positive and negative. Therefore, peers’ influence, whether direct or hidden, encourages good as well as bad behavior among adolescents.

It is suggested that the effect of negative peers’ influence on adolescents’ behavior is much stronger than positive one. Current investigation shows a direct connection between negative peer association and its consequences. With reference to this, the example of the negative behavior produces negative results while positive behavior has positive results. Furthermore, many researches manifest that adolescents, following the negative example of aggressive peers, are more inclined to antisocial behavior. For example, they become involved in various brutal actions, vandalism, delinquency, drug dealing, and dangerous sexual activity. Moreover, the multivariate analyses of variance, aimed at the investigation of relations between such factors as gender and different behavior samples, reported that boys were more prone to vicious behavior than girls. According to the results of the study, boys demonstrated higher negative peer association, problems with self-esteem, and a high rate of delinquency. Girls, in contrast to boys, showed higher positive peer association, tendency to empathy, and higher willingness to social activities. However, it was suggested that girls were more prone to depression than boys.
In spite of all evidences in favor of bad peers’ impact on adolescents’ behavior, there are still some supporters of the idea that positive example plays crucial role in defining teen’s behavior pattern. Some investigations demonstrated that positive behavior pattern did not lose its authority among youth. Adolescents who behave well, still have good potential for setting a positive example to their peers, encouraging them to appreciate their families and to be successful in their learning. Moreover, they can even sometimes prevent their friends from being involved in illegal activities. Positive peer association plays a role of the motivator, which makes adolescents improve their behavior. Furthermore, it gives adolescents an opportunity to make their own choice only after taking into consideration all the benefits of diligence. Many scholars, who investigate peers’ influence on adolescents, lay the stress on their relations with family. There is a regularity that the closer children to their families are, the fewer problems connected with their behavior occur. It is obvious that children from the families with favorable conditions do not look for any role models to follow among their peers. However, the effect of relationship with close relatives on adolescents differs from family to family and from ethnicity to ethnicity. For instance, African American youth, in contrast to European American adolescents, have stronger affection to their families and appreciate family bonds more than their relations with friends.

In such a way, ethnicity was shown to be a very significant factor defining the intensity of peers’ influence. It goes without saying, that the impact of peers on the behavior of minority adolescents would not be equal to the impact on majority. Due to the results of MANOVA analyses, African Americans and European Americans demonstrate lower rate of negative peers’ influence and delinquency than Hispanics. African American youth, unlike European and Hispanic American youth, are endued higher self-esteem. However, their ability to feel empathy was found to be lower. Another series of studies also give support to the hypothesis that even indirect positive peers’ influence does not change the behavior pattern of minority and majority equally. European Americans tend to be more influenced by positive behavior pattern of their
peers. African Americans and Hispanics mostly remain unaffected by this influence. It is caused by the fact that African American and Hispanic American adolescents, as the representatives of minority, refuse to relate themselves to their peers and follow examples set by the majority youth. They are closely connected with their families and respect their ethnicity. Therefore, positive peers’ impact has smaller chances to influence their traditional behavior pattern and prevent them from being involved in bad activities.

In spite of the claims that negative peers’ influence is more potential, positive peers’ influence also makes its contribution to the development of the most widespread behavior patterns among adolescents. The ethnicity occurred to be one of the factors which define the degree of peers’ impact on adolescents’ behavior. Furthermore, even positive indirect peers’ association has more potent influence on European Americans, rather than on the representatives of minority youth. All in all, taking into consideration the fact that negative behavior pattern is more appealing to all adolescents, it is very important for youth to be aware of possible results.