BELONGING, CONFORMITY AND SOCIAL STATUS IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE

By

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As social beings, humans share a fundamental need to belong (Maslow, 1970; Baumeister & Leary, 1995); a question that arises is how does this need affect social behaviour? This study examined whether peer-rated acceptance and feelings of belonging were associated with one's willingness to conform to antisocial and neutral peer activities. In a single group-testing session, students in grades 5-7 (172 girls, 180 boys) provided background information, and completed sociometric measures of peer acceptance as well as self-report measures of belonging and peer conformity.

Results indicated significant ethnic differences in both early adolescents' sense of belonging and in their willingness to accede to peer pressures that called for antisocial (but not neutral) behaviour. Asian and Indo-Canadian students reported less willingness to acquiesce to antisocial activities than Caucasian students. A significant relationship was also found between grade and conformity to antisocial activities, with older students reporting a greater willingness to conform than younger participants.

Consistent with previous research (Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989), more accepted early adolescents reported significantly greater feelings of belonging than their less accepted peers. There was also a significant but moderate relationship between neutral and antisocial forms of conformity -- participants who were more willing to conform to pressures for neutral behaviours were also more willing to acquiesce to pressures for antisocial behaviour. Contrary to hypotheses, no significant relations were observed between acceptance and conformity to antisocial or neutral peer pressures.
For males, there was no significant relationship between belonging and conformity to antisocial or neutral pressures. However, females’ sense of belonging predicted some of the variance in their willingness to follow peers in neutral but not antisocial types of activities. Female participants who reported a greater sense of belonging were more willing to follow peers in neutral activities.
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Introduction

The importance of peer relationships during early adolescence has been well established (e.g., Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998). Early adolescence is a crucial period of life during which individuals place an increased value on being in the popular group and perceive more conformity within their group (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Gavin & Furman, 1989). During this time period, young adolescents are influenced by their peers in regard to relatively neutral behaviours, such as clothing choices, as well as more risky or antisocial behaviours (e.g., Berndt, 1979; Readdick, Grise, Heitmayer, & Furst, 1996).

Relationships within the peer group can be examined in terms of the degree to which an adolescent feels that he/she fits into the group (i.e., belonging), as well as in terms of how much an individual is liked or accepted by peers (i.e., acceptance). Belonging is usually thought of as an individual's perception of his/her acceptance within a social group, while acceptance is more objective, reflecting the level of acceptance that members of the peer group express toward a given individual. Research suggests that these two phenomena are related but distinct constructs (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989).

The present study considers the hypothesis that an early adolescent's level of belonging and acceptance influences their tendency to conform to the larger group's behaviour in various situations. Specifically, this study examined how acceptance and belonging affects conformity behaviour to neutral and antisocial activities encouraged by peers. Gender is also a variable that was thought to influence conformity, and was examined in terms of belonging and acceptance, given that previous research
suggested that males conform more than females on antisocial activities (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986).

In order to allow for a better understanding of the study, an outline of the relevant theory and research relating to belonging, peer acceptance, and conformity is included in several sections. A consideration of possible gender differences is also presented. A statement of the problem and methodology for the proposed study follows the literature review.

**Need for Belonging and Peer Acceptance**

"No [person] is an island, entire of itself" (Donne, 1975, p. 87). According to a recent review of literature stemming from the psychoanalytic tradition (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), all humans have a "pervasive drive" or motivation to "form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). This drive forms an important tenet of theories such as that of Abraham Maslow. In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1970) proposed that feeling a sense of belonging is one of the most important human needs, preceded only by physiological and safety needs. Given that belonging is thought to be a basic need, much of human behaviour can be seen as an attempt to fulfill this fundamental necessity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Research from a variety of sources suggests that people behave in ways that support the need for belonging. Several studies show that social bonds can form easily (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995 for a review). For example, simply living in close proximity has been shown to be a significant factor in relationship formation (Festinger, Schacter, & Back, 1950). Furthermore, group ties seem to form with relatively little effort, as demonstrated in a study by Sherif and colleagues. When previously
unacquainted boys were randomly assigned to groups, strong loyalty and group ties quickly developed (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif, 1961).

Further support for the theory of belonging as a fundamental human need comes from evidence that forming social bonds with others is associated with positive emotions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Research has demonstrated that people who experience higher levels of motivation to have intimate relationships tend to enjoy greater levels of happiness and well being (McAdams & Bryant, 1987). Weiss (1973) suggested that in order to maintain a healthy sense of well being, people must form several different relationships. Conversely, several studies show that a lack of supportive relationships is related to feelings of unhappiness (see Baumeister, 1991). Studies also show that people are reluctant to break social bonds once they are established, often crying or showing signs of distress when separation occurs (Bridges, 1980).

In order to fulfill the need for belongingness, people need frequent and pleasant interactions with others in an enduring context in which there is concern for each other's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If these associations with others are not developed, a person will suffer various emotional outcomes, primarily due to a lack of intimacy (i.e., emotional isolation) and/or a lack of social integration (i.e., social isolation). Intimacy refers to the establishment of a close intimate relationship, whereas social integration derives from social affiliations or membership within a group. Of particular interest in the present study is a lack of integration, or social isolation, which occurs when a person lacks access to a social network and socially integrative relationships. Social loneliness arises from this type of isolation, due to a perceived lack of belonging; a person does not feel accepted by a group that shares common activities and interests (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990; Weiss, 1973; for a review see Terrell-Deutsch, 1999).
Social integration and belonging also have relevance for children's social development. According to Sullivan's (1953) theory of development, between the ages of 8½ and 10, children develop sensitivity to what matters to the other person. Children at this age become tuned into peer behaviour and concerned with their own acceptance among peers. Some studies suggest that a lack of healthy peer relations at this age has long-term negative consequences. For example, Bagwell, Newcomb, and Bukowski (1998) found that being disliked (i.e., rejected) by peers and lacking friends in fifth grade predicted difficulties in overall mental health 12 years later. Moreover, students who are rejected by their peers have been shown to demonstrate poor academic achievement, internalizing behaviour problems (e.g., low self-esteem, loneliness and depression), and externalizing behaviour problems (e.g., criminality and aggression) (for a review see McDougall, Hymel, Vaillancourt, & Mercer, 2001). The evidence thus suggests that peer relationships and peer acceptance are very important for children's healthy adjustment in adolescence and adulthood (Hymel, Vaillancourt, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2002).

An important aspect of peer relationships is the perception that one is accepted by peers. Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin (1993) hypothesized that early adolescents' sense of belonging (i.e., how much early adolescents feel that they are part of their peer group) would be associated with their group acceptance. Self-report measures of belonging and loneliness, as well as peer assessments of social status were obtained in a sample of 169 early adolescents from grades 5 and 6. Bukowski et al. found that students who were not well accepted felt a lower sense of belonging, and also reported greater loneliness than their better-accepted peers. Similar links between peer acceptance and self-reported belonging have been demonstrated in students from grades 3 to 8 (Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989).
Although even a single positive peer relationship can have beneficial effects, relationships with groups of peers seem to be particularly important in late childhood and adolescence (Parker & Asher, 1993). In order for individuals to gain social approval, they may need to allow themselves to be influenced by their peers (Hoving, Hamm, & Gavin, 1969; Juvonen & Weiner, 1993), and similarly, they may need to accept peer influence in order to gain group membership (Rugkasa, Sittlington, Kennedy, Treacy, & Abaunza, 2001).

During early adolescence, stable, same-sex peer groups are predominant, and individuals prefer to spend time with the group rather than with those who are not group members (Gavin & Furman, 1989). It is also during this time that more value is placed on being in a popular group (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Gavin & Furman, 1989), and individuals perceive more conformity within their group (Gavin & Furman, 1989). In the next section, the relationship between the need for belonging and group behaviour is explored, with particular interest in one aspect of group behaviour - conformity to group norms.

Need for Belonging and Peer Conformity: Group Socialization Theory

The development of belongingness can be discussed in terms of socialization. Socialization is described as the process by which an infant becomes “an acceptable member of his or her society – one who behaves appropriately, knows the language, possesses the requisite skills, and holds the prevailing beliefs and attitudes” (Harris, 1995, p. 462). Most theories of social development emphasize parents as the principal agents of socialization (e.g., Sroufe, 1978; Rubin & Sloman, 1984). Although young children have been shown to be socialized by their parents, in part, through imitation, they also imitate both adults and children outside of their family (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Perry & Bussey, 1984). Rowe (1994) further postulated that it would not make
evolutionary sense for children to only learn from their parents, as they would fail to incorporate useful innovations into their lives. According to Hartup (1979), children grow up in at least two social worlds, one with adults and the other with peers.

One important aspect of peer relationships is the feeling that one belongs to a group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging needs can motivate various forms of social behaviour, including the tendency to form groups and to establish relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Group behaviour has been a focus of interest for social science theory and research over the past several decades, and some of the better-known studies in the field of social psychology have focused on behaviour within groups (e.g., Asch, 1951).

One author who has emphasized the importance of group behaviour for social development is Harris (1995). Harris (1995) has proposed a controversial theory called Group Socialization Theory, which suggests that peers may actually be the primary socialization agent for at least some facets of development, such as personality development (Harris, 1995, 1998). When more than two people are “allied with each other in some way or similar to each other along some socially relevant dimension” (Harris, 1995, p. 463), a peer group is formed.

According to Harris (1995), five processes are essential to the phenomenon of group socialization. The first, in-group favouritism, refers to the fact that members of a group tend to prefer their own rather than other groups (Harris, 1995). In support of this theory, studies by several researchers (e.g., Tarrant, 2002; Tarrant, North, Edridge, Kirk, Smith, & Turner, 2001) have shown that adolescents aged 14 to 15 rated the in-group more positively than the out-group on various dimensions, such as being nice and being honest.
A second group process is that of out-group hostility, in which the tendency to favour the in-group is accompanied by hostility towards those who do not belong to the group (Harris, 1995). This phenomenon is demonstrated in one of the few experimental studies of children's group socialization behaviour. In their classic "Robber's Cave" experiment, Sherif et al. (1961) randomly assigned 11-year-old boys to one of two groups in a summer camp setting and observed the ensuing group dynamics. Animosity between the "Rattlers" and the "Eagles" quickly developed even before they encountered each other, with the Rattlers wanting to "run them off" when they heard the Eagles playing in the distance (Sherif et al., 1961, p. 78). In another study (Platow et al., 2000), university psychology students aligned their opinions with those of an in-group member (i.e., the experimenter who professed to be a psychology student) if the person behaved in a fair manner towards in-group members. The participants in this study favoured in-group (i.e., psychology students) versus out-group members (i.e., dental students).

Between-group contrast is a third group process, in which there are assumed differences between groups (Harris, 1995), and there is even an attempt to increase the magnitude of these differences (Wilder, 1986). For example, in the Sherif et al. (1961) study, the Eagles decided not to use any more swear words because the Rattlers used them frequently. Gavin and Furman (1989) also demonstrated that early adolescent students in grades 7 and 8 reported negative behaviour towards those outside of their peer groups.

A fourth group process is that of within-group assimilation, in which members of a group adopt the norms of its members (Harris, 1995). In Sherif et al.'s (1961) study, the two groups quickly distinguished themselves in terms of their behaviours and attitudes, with the Rattlers adopting the norm of being tough, and the Eagles adopting a
norm of behaving in a more sensitive manner. Members of each group quickly adopted and conformed to these norms. Thus, a Rattler who sustained a minor injury did not cry, whereas an Eagle was permitted to cry under such circumstances. Other researchers have demonstrated this group process with adults. Indeed, Jetten, Postmes, and McAuliffe (2002) found that adults who highly identified with a group were more likely to conform to the group's norms.

Observations of early adolescents have also demonstrated that those who identify with a group take on the behaviours, speech, and styles of dress and adornment of the other members (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Harris, 1998; Meyer, & Anderson, 2000). Peer influence may be either negative or positive. For example, friends' substance use has been found to be a predictor of health risk behaviours such as smoking and alcohol use (Chopak, Vicary, & Crockett, 1998). However, for most students, friends' pressure is more positive than negative. High school students reported that their friends discouraged drug and alcohol use more than they encouraged them (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Keefe, 1994).

Finally, Harris (1995) points out that individuals who make up a group are not identical, which leads to a fifth characteristic of groups: within-group differentiation. Hartup (1983) has also posited that within every group there are differences in social status and dominance. Among the Rattlers and the Eagles, one or two boys were regarded as leaders, although these positions did change over time (Sherif et al., 1961).

It is the tendency of members of a group to become more similar over time (i.e., within-group assimilation) that is of particular interest in the present study. Does belonging to a group require a person to assimilate by conforming to the group's norms? Peer conformity is defined as a behavioural disposition related to individuals' willingness to follow their peers (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumaker, 2000). Studies with
both adults and children have demonstrated that humans do assimilate to group norms, attitudes, and behaviours over time (for reviews, see Harris, 1995, 1998.) Once people categorize themselves as members of a group, they are thought to take on the group’s “rules, standards, and beliefs about appropriate conduct and attitudes” (Turner, 1987, p. 1). In so doing, a person gains a sense of acceptance within his/her social context (Adler et al., 1992).

Affiliation with certain peer groups may necessitate identification with group values and norms. In order for a person to experience a sense of belonging, he/she may be required to conform to a certain extent. Individuals who will not or cannot conform to the norms of the group, or who are different in any way, may be laughed at or excluded from the group (Asch, 1952; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Jaffe, 1998; Harris, 1998). There has been little empirical evidence to evaluate such claims, but there are a few studies to confirm that those who fail to assimilate to group standards are indeed ostracized in various ways. One of Asch’s now classic studies of group conformity demonstrated this phenomenon. When an experiment was conducted in which a confederate was required to give an incorrect response in the presence of sixteen college students, everyone, including the experimenter, openly laughed at the individual (Asch, 1952).

In studies by Asch (1951, 1952), adult subjects were led to believe that they were participating in an experiment on visual discrimination. An experimenter seated the participant with confederates around a table and then asked each person to indicate which of several lines was the same length as a standard line. The correct response was obvious, but the confederates responded correctly to only six out of eighteen questions. In a control group in which subjects made judgments in isolation, they made almost no errors (Asch, 1952). Yet, when tested in the presence of others, university
students went along with the incorrect majority 37% of the time! A majority (74%) of participants conformed at least some of the time. There were individual differences in conformity, with some individuals conforming to a large extent and 26% refusing to conform to an incorrect majority on any of the trials.

Why is it that some individuals will conform to the group while others will not? It is evident from Asch's (1951, 1952) studies that adults, at least, vary in terms of their degree of conformity, ranging from absolute conformity to complete nonconformity. In interviews, adult participants stated that they conformed so as not to appear different and experience rejection by other members of the group. Those who did not conform said they felt like a "misfit" and "crazy" (Asch, 1956, p. 31). Some participants may have chosen to conform to avoid appearing deviant, and to avoid the experience of a lack of belonging within the larger group.

It is this degree of conformity in relation to a sense of belonging that was examined in the present study. Of particular interest was whether one's willingness to conform to peers varied as a function of one's feelings of belonging. Based on the preceding review, one might expect greater conformity among individuals who feel that they belong, given previous research suggesting that people behave in ways that support this fundamental need to belong (Festinger et al., 1950; Sherif et al., 1961). The links between conformity and feelings of belonging, however, may vary as a function of one's status within the peer group, as suggested in the next section.

Belonging, Peer Acceptance, and Peer Conformity

As described by Harris (1995), group assimilation is a characteristic of group dynamics. Individuals conform to group standards and norms in order to belong to a group. Conforming to group norms has, in fact, been shown to be a successful way to be liked or accepted by group members. Kindermann (1993) used self and teacher
reports to demonstrate not only that grade five children who belonged to the same cliques had similar attitudes toward schoolwork, but also that, as children moved from one clique to another over the course of eight months, their attitudes changed in accordance with the clique's attitude. Given the human tendency toward group assimilation, it is not surprising that individuals who are different from the majority have been shown to risk rejection by group members.

This point becomes obvious in an study by Bierman, Smoot, and Aumiller (1993) that demonstrated that 6- to 13-year-old boys who were rated by classmates as rejected or disliked were also found to exhibit high rates of incompetent, socially awkward behaviour that was different from the majority of their peers. It was not clear whether nonconforming children were rejected because of their nonconformity or because of some other attribute, but further research is needed to determine whether nonconformity and social rejection go hand in hand among children at this age.

If students who do not act in ways that are similar to their peers tend to be rejected (Bierman et al., 1993), then children's degree of acceptance within the classroom may vary as a function of their conformity to group norms. An experiment performed by Schacter (1951) examined the effect of conformity on a person's likeability within a group. Several groups of university students were asked to read and discuss the case of a juvenile delinquent named Johnny Rocco. They were then asked to suggest a treatment for Rocco on a scale from "very lenient" to "very hard." A typical group consisted of approximately nine participants -- six real subjects and three paid confederates of the experimenter. The confederates took turns playing the modal person (i.e., conformed to the average position of the real subjects), the deviate (i.e., took a position opposite to the general orientation of the group), and the "slider" (i.e., took an initial position that was similar to the deviate, but in the course of the
discussion, gradually slid into a modal, conforming position). The most liked of the
confederates was the modal person, who conformed to the group norm, while the
deviate was liked least. Thus, in the Schacter study, conformers were more readily liked
or accepted by the group than non-conformers.

In examining popularity among children, there appear to be similar dynamics.
Indeed, popular children are viewed as supportive and cooperative by others (Coie,
Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982). Could such individuals be gaining acceptance by
conforming to their peers? The relationship between peer conformity and peer
acceptance is suggested by results of two studies (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman,
1981). In the study by Putallaz and Gottman (1981), second and third grade children
were asked to name three classmates that they liked. Peer nominations were then used
to identify children who were popular (acceptance scores higher than the class mean)
vs. unpopular (those whose scores were lower than the class mean). The most popular
and unpopular students were then designated as entry children, and the remaining
children were grouped in dyads, homogeneous in terms of sex and popularity. Pairs of
either popular or unpopular children who were experimental confederates were
videotaped playing a word game, when a third child who was either popular or
unpopular attempted to enter the group. Results indicated that popular children
accurately perceived the group’s behaviour, considered the playgroup’s frame of
reference, and established themselves as sharing in this frame of reference by adopting
the group’s behaviour. Even when the study was repeated by Putallaz (1983), using
unfamiliar dyads of grade one boys, the tendency of participants to fit into the group’s
activities and more accurately perceive the group’s ongoing activity was related to their
popularity 4 months later. Popular children were thus more likely to conform to peers in
order to gain entry into a group.
Given that children who are popular (i.e., more accepted) are liked by most peers, these children likely fit into their peer group and therefore experience more feelings of belonging. Support for this association is provided by Connor (2001) who demonstrated that higher status or more sociometrically accepted students in grades 6 and 7 reported significantly greater feelings of belonging than did less accepted students. Furthermore, children in grades 3 to 8 who reported having more friends, also reported a significantly greater sense of belonging (Hayden, 1989). In contrast, low-accepted children (i.e., disliked by most peers) have been found to report significantly lower levels of belonging than average or well-accepted children (Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989).

In summary, previous studies (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989) have shown that there is a moderate correlation between acceptance and feelings of belonging, with more popular or accepted individuals generally expressing greater feelings of belonging. Moreover, research also suggests a positive relationship between acceptance and conformity to peers, with more accepted individuals displaying greater willingness to conform to group behaviours. These three variables have not been studied together, however, because belonging and acceptance have been shown to overlap to some extent, higher levels of both may be associated with greater conformity. The present study addressed the links between these variables.

Gender Differences

Another issue that bears further examination is that of gender differences in the relationships among conformity, belonging, and peer acceptance. Gender differences in belonging have not been demonstrated (Hayden, 1989), but gender differences in conformity have been documented (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986). Early studies showed women conforming more than men when confronted face-to-face
with contradictory judgments provided by a unanimous group, but these gender
differences were small (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Later research with adults, however,
has indicated that the extent to which individuals conform varies with gender as a
function of task familiarity (Eagly, Wood, & Fishbaugh, 1981; Eagly, 1983). In research
by Eagly and colleagues, male and female university students were required to give
their opinions on stereotypically masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral topics.
Women tended to conform more to the majority on masculine topics such as football,
while men conformed more on feminine topics such as fashion design. There were no
sex differences on gender-neutral questions (for reviews see Eagly & Carli, 1981;
Sistrunk & McDavid, 1971) Gender differences seem to depend upon the comfort level
with the task at hand; people seemed to conform more when faced with an unfamiliar
task.

In the present study, a variation of Berndt’s (1979) self-report peer conformity
measure was used to assess students’ willingness to conform to peers. This measure
assessed whether or not a child or adolescent would adopt a certain course of action
that is encouraged by his or her friends (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986) across a
variety of common situations that were either neutral or antisocial in nature. Using this
scale, previous research has shown that boys report a greater willingness to conform to
antisocial behaviour than girls, but no gender differences were found in terms of
willingness to conform to neutral behaviour (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Berndt,
1979). In this study, variations in the links observed among belonging, acceptance, and
conformity were examined as a function of gender.
Statement of the Problem

Research has established the importance of relationships for well-being in life (e.g., Bagwell, et al., 1998). By developing relationships, our need for belonging is fulfilled (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Particularly during early adolescence, belonging to a group is important (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Clasen and Brown (1985), for example, found that perceived pressures to conform to peer norms diminished after grade 7. Much of social behaviour may be motivated by this need to belong, but studies to date have not examined these links. As an initial exploration, the present study investigated how feelings of belonging and peer acceptance were related to one's willingness to conform to peer pressure.

Conformity to peers, operationally defined in the present study as an individual's reported willingness to follow their peers' preferences for activities (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumaker, 2000), has been shown to vary across adults (e.g., Asch, 1951). During early adolescence, peer relationships are very important, and pertaining to a popular group is particularly critical (e.g., Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Gavin & Furman, 1989). Early adolescents have been shown to perceive more conformity within their groups and to be especially susceptible to conformity behaviour across both neutral and antisocial types of behaviour (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986).

Moreover, results of previous studies suggest that conforming to one's peers may be a characteristic of students who are better accepted within the group (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981; Schacter, 1951). Given theoretical arguments (e.g., Harris, 1995; 1998) and empirical findings (Jetten et al., 2002; Sherif et al., 1961) that
assimilation with and conformity to group norms and behaviours is a common characteristic of groups, and one which may enhance the likelihood of group acceptance and inclusion (Asch, 1952; Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981; Schacter, 1951), the present study sought to examine whether or not conformity behaviour varied as a function of one's feelings of belonging and overall acceptance.

Gender is another variable that was thought to have a bearing on the tendency to conform, (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Eagly et al., 1981; Eagly, 1983). Particularly relevant to the present study is previous research with adolescents (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986) indicating that boys and girls were similar in the degree to which they reported a willingness to conform to peer pressure in neutral situations but that boys were more likely to conform to antisocial peer pressure than were girls (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986). Accordingly, the present study examined gender differences in the relationships among peer acceptance, belonging, and conformity to both neutral and antisocial behaviour.

Specifically, the present study examined the links between feelings of belonging, peer acceptance and willingness to conform among a sample of early adolescents. Students in grades 5 to 7 were asked to complete self-report measures of conformity and belonging as well as a peer assessment measure of social acceptance within the classroom peer group. Of interest was whether the degree to which students would conform to neutral as well as antisocial behaviour of peers would vary as a function of gender as well as one's feelings of belonging and level of acceptance within the peer group. Accordingly, the study was designed to address the following research question: Does reported willingness to conform to antisocial versus neutral peer pressure among early adolescents vary as a function of feelings of belonging, peer acceptance and gender?
Based on theoretical arguments about the importance of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), as well as previous research that suggests that people behave in ways that support feelings of belonging (Festinger et al., 1950; Sherif et al., 1961), it was expected that participants who felt they belonged would be more likely to conform to their peers. This hypothesis is consistent with Harris' (1995) contention that within-group assimilation is critical in order to belong to a group. Based on previous research suggesting that more accepted or popular students are more likely to conform (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981; Schacter, 1951), it was also expected that conformity would be more likely among students who were highly accepted within their peer group than among those who were less accepted. Finally, given previous findings by Berndt (1979) and Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986), boys were expected to conform more than girls in the face of peer pressure for antisocial behaviour, but no such differences were expected for neutral forms of pressure. Gender interactions with belonging and acceptance were also examined in an exploratory fashion in order to determine whether these interactions predicted conformity behaviour.

Method

Participants

Early adolescents from grades 5 to 7 were selected for consideration in the present study in part because peer relationships are very important at this age (e.g., Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986), and the pressure to conform is increasingly evident (Berndt, 1979; Clasen & Brown, 1985). In addition, grade 7 was the final year of elementary school for participants in the present study. Once students enter secondary school, the increased school size and the fact that students no longer spend the entire
day with the same classmates, make conformity to peers, as well as belonging and acceptance within the classroom context less relevant (Inderbizen, 1994).

Participants initially included 382 students (186 females, 196 males) in grades 5 to 7 (see Table 1), ranging in age from 10.35 to 13.30 years, with a mean age of 11.8 years. Students came from three different elementary schools in two, inner city Greater Vancouver districts. Students who were described by teachers as lacking proficiency in English were not included in the study. In addition, thirty students from two different classes (14 females, 16 males) were dropped from the sample due to a low overall participation rate for the class (i.e., 50% and 59%). These two classes were not included because previous researchers have indicated that at least 75% of group members should participate in order to ensure valid and reliable sociometric data (Crick & Ladd, 1989).

The final sample therefore consisted of 352 students (172 females, 180 males). In terms of racial background, 172 (48.9%) were Asian, 68 (19.3%) of were White (of European descent), and 66 (18.8%) were Indo Canadian, with the remaining 46 students (13.1%) being from Aboriginal, Latin, Black, Fijian, and other backgrounds (see Tables 1 and 2).

Students were contacted in their classrooms to request participation. Only those students who obtained parental permission (Appendix A), and who themselves agreed to participate (Appendix B) were included. The overall rate of participation was 80%, and all classes that were included had a participation rate of at least 75%.

A power analysis was conducted to determine an appropriate sample size for the Analyses of Variance that were used to examine the data in the present study. The power analysis was determined via a Statistical Analysis Program (Friendly, 2001). It was established that at an alpha level of .05, a small effect, and power of .79 would be
determined by obtaining approximately 8 individuals per treatment cell. As such, it was
determined that if subjects were equally distributed across cells, 150 students would be
necessary. Given that subjects were not equally distributed, more than 150 students
were needed.

Table 1
Composition of the Final Sample in terms of Demographic Variables (N=352)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latin White</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Ethnic Composition in by School (N=352)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity by School</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Number (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latin White</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latin White</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Latin White</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Procedure*

Upon receiving university ethics approval for this project, two local school boards were contacted regarding their interest in participating in this research project. Once the research was approved by the school boards, the principals of schools were invited to
participate in the study, and three schools agreed to do so. The research project was then presented to teachers at a staff meeting in each school. Teachers were asked to specify convenient days for consent form distribution and data collection. Students were then visited in their classrooms to explain the purpose and procedures of the study and to send home student information forms (Appendix A), as well as parental consent forms and information letters (Appendix B). Parental permission was required for participation. Students who returned their signed permission slips, indicating whether they would or would not participate, were entered into a draw for a $15 gift certificate at a movie theatre or local music store. The draws were conducted upon completion of testing.

Data were collected in April, 2002, late during the school year, so that students knew each other well. Data collection was overseen by trained assistants and the author, and was conducted within students' classrooms during single testing sessions of approximately 40 minutes. Students provided consent for participation by completing consent forms prior to beginning the questionnaires (Appendix B). Questionnaires designed to obtain information about demographics (Appendix C), peer acceptance (Appendix D), peer conformity (Appendix E), and belonging (Appendix F) were given to each student. Instructions and most of the questions were read aloud to pace testing and allow children of all reading abilities equal opportunities to respond.

Sociometric measures quantify the degree of attraction between an individual and members of a group (Hymel et al., 2002). Given that such measures were used in the present study, special efforts were made to decrease the possibility that students discuss their answers (Bell-Dolan & Wessler, 1994; Landau & Milich, 1990). First, students were asked to keep their answers to themselves and not discuss them following completion of testing. Second, efforts were made to avoid testing prior to
lunch, recess, or the end of the day, periods during which students have the opportunity to spend time with their classmates. Only one class was tested prior to the end of the day due to scheduling difficulties. Third, across classes, sociometric evaluations were embedded within the sequence of measures administered, with the conformity and belonging measures completed after the sociometric one. Thus, efforts were undertaken to reduce any potential negative interpersonal effects of sociometric testing. In the present study, one teacher expressed concern that sociometric testing could have a negative effect on the social environment within her classroom. However, many researchers have found that children do not have negative experiences as a result of sociometric testing (Bell-Dolan, Foster, & Sikora, 1989; Hayvren & Hymel, 1984; Iverson, Barton, & Iverson, 1997). In fact, children who talked about their responses were found to be more public about whom they liked, and were more private in discussing whom they did not like (Iverson et al., 1997). No child was reported to be directly teased or described as having hurt feelings as a result of sociometric testing (Iverson et al., 1997).

Measures

Demographic Information. In order to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the samples being studied, students were requested to provide information regarding their grade, birth date, gender, and ethnic background (see Appendix C). These data were used to provide descriptive information about the sample (see Table 1).

Peer Acceptance. Peers were used to assess overall status or acceptance within the same-sex classroom peer group. Given that peers provide an “insider” perspective on a child’s status and acceptance within the classroom group, peer evaluations have more face validity than those obtained from teachers or other adults (see Hymel et al.,
In addition, each individual is evaluated by various peers who have had different experiences with the particular child (Hymel et al., 2002).

In the present study, a roster-and-rating sociometric procedure (Singleton & Asher, 1977) was used in order to obtain a continuous measure of peer acceptance (Appendix D). Participants were given a list of their same-sex classmates and asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how much they like to “be with” each person at school. Researchers have found that there is a strong association between the sociometric ratings obtained from same-sex and opposite-sex peers (Hymel et al., 2002). Therefore, only same-sex ratings were used in the present study, as there may not be an advantage to the more time-consuming practice of including both boys and girls. A child’s level of acceptance was determined by the mean rating received from their same-sex peers, with higher scores reflecting greater peer acceptance or higher social status within the same-sex peer group.

**Peer Conformity.** Conformity to friends was evaluated using the Peer Conformity Disposition scale, developed by Berndt (1979) for use with children in grades 3 through 12. On this measure, children were presented with scenarios in which they had to decide between doing what they want to do versus what their friends want them to do.

In the original version of this measure (Berndt, 1979), three types of scenarios were included, considering antisocial, neutral, and pro-social conformity situations. In previous research with children from grades 3 through 12 (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986), children’s responses to these scenarios were found to be reliable, with Spearman Brown split-half correlations of 0.70 for the entire scale across grades (ranging from 0.50 to 0.80). Internal consistency, however, varied across type of scenario, with reliabilities of 0.81 for antisocial situations (range of 0.76 to 0.89), 0.61 for neutral situations (range of 0.46 to 0.71), and only 0.07 for prosocial situations (range of
-0.48 to 0.38). Subsequently, Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986) modified the original scale, omitting the less reliable pro-social scale, removing five items that were criticized by participants in their first sample, and rewording certain items that had become outdated, such as "stealing apples from an orchard."

Brown, Clasen, and Eicher's (1986) modified version of Berndt's (1979) Peer Conformity Disposition Scale was used in the present study, as it is the more recent version of the only global measure that has been developed as a reliable index of early adolescents' willingness to conform within the peer context. This shortened version has been found to exhibit internal consistency comparable to that of the original measure in a sample of 6th to 12th graders, with reported alpha coefficients of 0.61 to 0.63 for neutral conformity items, and 0.77-0.80 for antisocial conformity items (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986).

Specifically, students were given 15 vignettes describing both neutral (n=7) and antisocial (n=8) scenarios (e.g., neutral, "Tomorrow a group I belong to in class is having a picnic. I want to go early but my friends want me to go with them a little later" and antisocial, "One day after supper, me and a couple of my friends from class meet at school. No one is around and my friends decide that we should all write on the walls of the school. I don't think it's a good idea, but my friends tell me to do it anyway"). For each scenario, students were asked, "What would you REALLY do?" indicating whether she or he would "definitely" or "probably" carry out the actions sanctioned by their group (e.g., "go later with your friends" and "write on the walls"), or do as she or he originally wanted (e.g., "go early to the picnic" and "not write on the walls") (see Appendix E for a full copy of the measure).

The original 6-point response format for this scale was simplified to a 4-point Likert response format in order to clarify response alternatives for participants. The
response alternatives used in the Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986) adaptation of the scale ("absolutely certain," "fairly certain", and "I guess so") were difficult to distinguish from one another. Instead, in the present study, students were asked to respond whether they would "definitely" or "probably" do what they want or what their friends want. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for this adapted version of the measure was found to be .80 for antisocial conformity, and .60 for neutral conformity within the present sample. Responses to the scale were quantified and averaged across items to provide separate indices of conformity to antisocial and neutral behaviour, with higher scores indicating greater willingness to conform to friends from class in each case.

**Belonging.** In order to examine student's feelings of belongingness, as distinct from feelings of intimacy, Hayden (1989) developed the Relational Provision Loneliness Questionnaire (RPLQ). The RPLQ is a 28-item scale that assesses peer and family relationships with regard to group-integration (i.e., belonging), and personal-intimacy support (i.e., intimacy). The RPLQ has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity (Hayden, 1989). Substantial correlations (i.e., .75 for belonging and .52 for intimacy) were found in a sample of students from grades 3 to 8 between the RPLQ and reported social self-concept.

In the present study, seven items that comprise the peer group-integration scale were used to assess students' feelings of belonging in relation to peers. The RPLQ peer group-integration scale has been found to have good internal consistency when examined in children from grades 3 to 8 (alpha = .87), and to be stable over a two-week period (test-retest reliability, \( r = .79 \)) (Hayden, 1989). Reliability analyses in the present study also indicated good reliability (alpha = .82).

Students in the present study were asked to indicate how much each of seven statements (e.g., "I am outgoing and friendly") was true for them (Hayden, 1989, p. 46)
on a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix F for a copy of the scale). Scores were
computed by averaging responses across the seven items for each participant. Higher
scores indicated higher levels of perceived belonging within the classroom peer group.

**Results**

**General Overview**

Demographic variables were initially examined for sample description purposes.
Next, preliminary analyses were conducted to examine variations in the major variables
considered in the present study (belonging, acceptance, and conformity) as a function
of sample characteristics (e.g., school, ethnic background, and grade). Subsequently,
correlational analyses were conducted in order to determine the relationships among
the primary variables considered in the present study (belonging, acceptance,
conformity to neutral and antisocial behaviour). Finally, regression analyses were
conducted to examine variations in antisocial and neutral conformity as a function of
gender, feelings of belonging and overall peer acceptance. An alpha level of .05 was
utilized for all statistical tests.

**Preliminary Analyses**

Means and standard deviations for each of the four primary variables considered
in the present study were computed, and are presented in Table 2 below. The observed
levels of reported conformity and belonging in the present sample were consistent with
those reported by other researchers (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986;
Connor, 2001). Previous researcher's (Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989) mean scores for
reported belonging were 3.65 and 3.86, which are similar to the one obtained by using
the same scale in the current study (i.e., $M = 3.74$). When the means and standard
deviations of previous researchers were changed into a 4-point scale like the one used
in the present study, the mean scores obtained by Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986)
and Berndt (1979), respectively, were 2.45 and 2.27, which are comparable to the mean score found in the present study (i.e., $M=2.60$). In terms of antisocial conformity, Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986) and Berndt (1979), respectively, obtained mean scores of 1.95 and 1.60, which are comparable to the mean found in the present sample (i.e., $M=1.78$). Given the comparability of mean scores in the present study relative to those reported in previous studies, the present sample can be considered representative.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Measures (N=352)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.43-5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Acceptance</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.00-4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Peer Conformity</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.00-3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Peer Conformity</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>1.00-4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-way Analyses of Variance were conducted in order to examine whether there were variations in conformity to neutral behaviour, conformity to antisocial behaviour, belonging, and/or peer acceptance as a function of the demographic variables (i.e., grade, school and ethnicity). Findings revealed no significant variations as a function of grade (i.e., grades 5 vs. 6 vs. 7) for acceptance, $F(2,349) = .39$, $ns$, conformity to neutral pressure, $F(2, 349) = .87$, $ns$, conformity to antisocial pressure, $F(2,349) = 2.69$, $ns$, or belonging, $F(2,349)=1.17$, $ns$.

Results of one-way analyses of variance also showed no significant variations as a function of school for conformity to neutral peer pressures, $F(2,349) = .69$, $ns$, or acceptance, $F(2,349) = .76$, $ns$. However, significant variations as a function of school
were observed for conformity to antisocial pressure, $F(2,349) = 5.52, p < .05$. Post Hoc analyses (Tukey) revealed that school 2 reported significantly greater levels of conformity to antisocial pressure than schools 1 and 3 (see table 4). Significant variations as a function of school were also found for self-reported belonging, $F(2,349) = 5.81, p < .05$. Post hoc analyses (Tukey) indicated that students in school 3 reported significantly higher levels of belonging than did students in school 1 (see Table 5).

Table 4

*Conformity to Antisocial Peer Behaviours as a Function of Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Variations in Belonging as a Function of School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to gender no significant differences were found for conformity to neutral pressure, $F(1, 350) = .52, ns$, conformity to antisocial pressure, $F(1,350) = 3.55, ns$, acceptance, $F(1,350) = 2.65, ns$; or belonging, $F(1,350) = .24, ns$. Nevertheless, gender was retained as an independent variable in subsequent analyses, given
previous research suggesting that gender differences may be evident in terms of conformity (Berndt, 1979; Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986).

No significant differences in acceptance were observed as a function of ethnicity, $F(2,303) = .09$, ns. However, there were significant differences in belonging as a function of ethnicity, $F(2,303) = 5.32$, $p < .05$. Post hoc analyses (Tukey) revealed that Asian children reported significantly less belonging than either Caucasian or Indo-Canadian students. There were no significant differences between the Caucasian and Indo-Canadian students in terms of reported belonging (see Table 6).

Table 6

Variations in Belonging as a Function of Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of conformity, no significant ethnic differences were found for conformity to neutral pressure, $F(2,303) = 1.27$, ns. However, results of a one-way analysis of variance for conformity to antisocial peer pressure indicated a significant main effect for ethnicity, $F(2,303) = 9.92$, $p < .05$. Post hoc follow-up analyses (Tukey) revealed that Caucasian students reported significantly greater conformity to antisocial pressure than did Asian or Indo-Canadian students. However, there were no significant differences between the Indo-Canadian and Asian groups in terms of conformity to antisocial pressure (see Table 7).
Preliminary results indicated that belonging and conformity to antisocial peer behaviour varied as a function of both school context and ethnicity, indicating that these variables have an impact on the two main variables under study, and should be controlled for in regression analyses.

**Correlational Analyses**

In order to examine the strength of the relationships among the primary variables considered in the present study, Pearson-product-moment correlations were computed (see Table 8). One-tailed correlations were considered in all cases.

Consistent with previous research, the correlation matrix shown in Table 8 below indicates that belonging and peer acceptance were significantly related in the present sample, \( r(350) = .34, p < .05 \), which is comparable to the correlation found by Connor (2001), \( r = .35 \). Not surprisingly, more accepted students reported a greater sense of peer belonging than did less accepted students. The magnitude of this correlation was moderate, however, suggesting that the two measures were not completely overlapping and could be utilized as separate predictor variables in subsequent regression analyses.
Antisocial and neutral peer conformity were also found to be moderately, but significantly correlated, $r(350) = .29$, $p < .05$. Although students who conformed to peers regarding neutral behaviours were also more likely to conform to peers regarding antisocial behaviour, the magnitude of this relationship was not large. Thus, willingness to accede to neutral versus antisocial peer influence were distinct and could be examined separately in subsequent analyses.

Contrary to expectations, level of peer acceptance was not significantly related to reported willingness to conform for either antisocial, $r(350) = .04$, $ns$, or neutral behaviour, $r(350) = .02$, $ns$. Also contrary to expectations, results of the correlational analyses indicated no significant relationships between feelings of belonging and conformity to either antisocial peer behaviour, $r(350) = -.03$, $ns$ or conformity to neutral peer behaviour, $r(350) = .10$, $ns$. At the level of zero-order correlations, then, results of the present study suggest that the degree to which children felt that they belonged within the peer context as well as the degree to which they were actually accepted within the peer group were both unrelated to their reported willingness to conform to antisocial and neutral peer pressure.
Table 8

*Intercorrelations Among the Primary Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Belonging</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Peer Acceptance</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Antisocial Conformity</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Neutral Conformity</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

*p < .05, **p < .01

Given the results of preliminary analyses, indicating that there were variations in the primary variables as a function of school and ethnicity, further analyses using regressions were thought to be more appropriate tests of the hypotheses to control for these demographic variables.

Regression Analyses

Given results of preliminary analyses, indicating variations in conformity to antisocial peer behaviour and belonging as a function of both ethnicity and school, simple zero-order correlational analyses may not provide the most powerful test of the present hypotheses. As well, correlational analyses do not permit examination of interaction effects. Regression analyses were conducted in order to examine gender,
acceptance and belonging as predictors of conformity to neutral and antisocial peer behaviours, when variations as a function of demographic variables (i.e., schools, ethnicity, age) were statistically removed.

Prior to conducting the regression analyses, the data were examined graphically to determine whether the assumptions of normality (i.e., scores of the criterion variable are normally distributed for all possible combinations of predictor levels), linearity (i.e., the relation between the criterion and predictor variable is linear, when all other independent variables are held constant), and homoscedasticity (i.e., variances of criterion variables for each of the possible combinations of predictor levels are equal) had been met (Shavelson, 1996). SPSS plots of the standardized residuals against the standardized predicted values were graphed. Scatterplots were examined, and random scatter was observed, indicating that the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals had been met (Chatterjee, Hadi, & Price, 2000; Hamilton, 1992). Specifically, a series of two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted, one predicting reported conformity to neutral peer behaviour and one predicting reported conformity to antisocial peer behaviour, in order to determine the amount of variance accounted for by belonging, acceptance, gender, and the interactions of these three predictors.

Given results of preliminary analyses indicating variations in several of the primary variables (belonging, acceptance, conformity) as a function of some of the demographic characteristics (i.e., schools and ethnicity), variations in these demographic variables, as well as grade, were entered into the first step of the regression, in order to control for their effects. For these regression analyses, demographic variables of school, gender, grade and ethnicity were dummy-coded (i.e., values of 0/1 were assigned), because categorical variables cannot be entered into a
regression equation and be meaningfully interpreted (Hamilton, 1992). In the second step, reported feelings of belonging, peer-rated acceptance and gender were entered as predictors. In the third step, the interactions of these predictors (i.e., gender x belonging, gender x acceptance, belonging x acceptance) were entered, in order to determine whether there were interaction effects, when all of the other primary variables were controlled.

Regression Analyses for Conformity to Antisocial Peer Behaviours. This first regression analysis examined whether belonging, acceptance and gender, as well as the interaction of these variables could significantly predict conformity to antisocial peer behaviours, once the variations as a function of school, ethnicity and grade were controlled. Specifically, predictor variables were entered into the regression equation for antisocial conformity in three different steps: (1) Demographic variables of School (1, 2, 3), Ethnicity (Indo-Canadian, Asian, Caucasian) and Grade (5, 6, 7) (2) Belonging, Peer Acceptance, and Gender (3) Interactions of Gender x Belonging, Gender x Acceptance, Belonging x Acceptance. The interaction terms were entered last in order to determine whether they could significantly predict conformity to antisocial pressure, once the variations as a function of the main effects were statistically removed.

Results of this analysis indicated that demographic variables, including school context, ethnicity, and grade significantly contributed to an increase in the variance of reported conformity to antisocial peer behaviour, $\Delta F = 5.14, p < .05$, accounting for 9% of the variance. After school, ethnicity and grade variations were accounted for, however, the effects of belonging, peer acceptance and gender and their interactions did not make statistically significant contributions to the prediction of conformity to antisocial peer behaviour (see Table 9). Thus, contrary to expectations, neither feelings
of belonging, level of peer acceptance, nor gender predicted conformity behaviour, at least with regard to conformity to antisocial peer behaviour.

Table 9

*Predicting Early Adolescents’ Conformity to Antisocial Peer Behaviours from Belonging, Acceptance, and Gender*

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*Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.*

*$p<.05$*
With regard to the demographic predictors of conformity to antisocial activities, an examination of the standardized beta weights (see Table 10) revealed the following. First, with regard to ethnicity, the negative standardized beta weights obtained for Indo-Canadian and Asian ethnic groups indicated that Indo-Canadian and Asian students reported lower levels of antisocial peer conformity than did Caucasian students. With regard to variations across schools, an examination of the beta weights indicated that students in School 2 reported greater willingness to conform to peer antisocial behaviour than did students in the other two schools. However, this school effect may, to a large extent, reflect the differential ethnic composition of the schools and the demonstrated ethnic differences in reported conformity. Specifically, School 2 had the greatest proportion of Caucasian students relative to Asian and Indo-Canadian students, as compared to Schools 1 and 3. Given findings that Caucasian students generally reported greater willingness to conform to antisocial peer behaviour than did other ethnic groups, the elevated levels of reported conformity observed in School 2 may simply reflect differences in ethnic composition.

Grade was also found to be positively associated with conformity to antisocial peer pressures. An examination of relevant beta weights (see Table 10) revealed that older participants in grade 7 demonstrated significantly greater conformity to antisocial peer pressure than did younger students in grade 5.
Table 10

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions Examining the Influence of Belonging, Acceptance, and Gender on Conformity to Antisocial Peer Behaviours

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Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

*p<.05,  **p<.01
Regression Analyses for Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours. The second regression analysis was conducted to determine whether belonging, acceptance and gender, as well as the interaction of these variables, could significantly predict a linear relationship with reported conformity to neutral peer behaviours, once the variations of school (School 1, 2, vs. 3), ethnicity (Indo-Canadian, Asian, Caucasian), and grade (Grade 5, 6, vs. 7) were controlled. Accordingly, student reports of their willingness to conform to neutral peer behaviour was predicted from a series of 3 steps: demographic variables (i.e., school, ethnicity, and grade) were entered on the first step, the primary variables (i.e., belonging, peer acceptance and gender) were entered on the second step, and the interactions of the primary variables were entered on the third step (i.e., Gender x Belonging, Gender x Acceptance, Belonging x Acceptance).

As can be seen below in Table 11, none of the steps of the regression equation contributed to a significant increase in the variation of reported conformity to neutral peer behaviours. However, upon examination of the standardized beta weights for this analysis (see Table 12), belonging was positively correlated with conformity to neutral pressure. In other words, students who reported greater belonging were more likely to conform to neutral peer pressure. Furthermore, the interaction of gender and belonging was also positively correlated with conformity to neutral peer behaviours.
Table 11

*Predicting Early Adolescents’ Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours from Belonging, Acceptance, and Gender*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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*Note.* Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

All effects non-significant.
Table 12

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions Examining the Influence of Belonging, Acceptance, and Gender on Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours

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Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.  
* p<.05
To clarify the relationship between belonging, and conformity to neutral peer behaviours as a function of gender, separate 1-tailed Pearson correlations were calculated for boys and girls. Results indicated a significant relationship between conformity and belonging for girls ($r (170) = .17, p < .05$) but not for boys ($r (178) = .02, ns$). Girls (but not boys) who reported greater feelings of belonging were more likely to conform to peers' neutral behaviours.

As a final follow-up, two hierarchical regressions were conducted, one for boys and one for girls, examining the prediction of conformity to neutral peer behaviour as a function of demographic variables (grade, school, ethnicity, Step 1), belonging and acceptance (Step 2), and the interaction of belonging and acceptance (Step 3). As expected from the correlations, a significant positive linear relationship was found between self-reported belonging and willingness to conform to neutral peer behaviours in girls but not boys. The addition of belonging and acceptance in the third step of the regression contributed to an additional 6% of the variance in conformity to neutral peer pressure in girls ($\Delta R^2 = .06$). Results of these analyses are summarized in the tables below.
Table 13

*Predicting Early Adolescent Girls' Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours from Belonging and Acceptance*

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Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

*p<.05*
Table 14

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions Examining the Influence of Belonging and Acceptance on Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours for Girls

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Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

*p<.05, **p<.01
Table 15

*Predicting Early Adolescent Boys' Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours from Belonging and Acceptance*

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*Note.* Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1 = Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1 = Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

All effects non-significant.
Table 16

Summary of Hierarchical Regressions Examining the Influence of Belonging and Acceptance on Conformity to Neutral Peer Behaviours for Boys

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<td>$SE_B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging (B)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B x A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Gender is coded 0 = Females, 1 = Males; Ethnicity is coded 0 = Asian and White, 1= Indo-Canadian; Grade is coded 0 = Grade 6 and Grade 7, 1= Grade 5; School is coded 0 = School 2 and School 3, 1 = School 1.

All effects non-significant.

Unexpectedly, belonging, acceptance and gender were not found to significantly predict conformity to antisocial pressure, and acceptance was not found to predict conformity to neutral behaviours. Of concern was the possibility that the lack of significant findings may be due to curvilinear, rather than linear relationships between
the variables. To evaluate this possibility, curvilinear regressions were conducted, using belonging squared and acceptance squared as predictors. Results indicated no curvilinear relationships between conformity to antisocial peer behaviour and belonging, $F(2,349) = .12, p>.05$, nor between conformity to antisocial peer pressure and acceptance, $F(2,349) = .95, p>.05$. Furthermore, no curvilinear relationship was found between conformity to neutral peer behaviour and acceptance, $F(2,349) = .91, ns$. To be thorough, a curvilinear regression was also examined between conformity to neutral peer behaviour and belonging, but no curvilinear relationship was found, $F(2,349) = 2.18, ns$.

**Discussion**

Belonging has been postulated to be a fundamental human need which motivates behaviour (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970). The present study sought to examine whether feelings of belonging affect early adolescent students' willingness to conform to peer behaviour. Specifically, it was hypothesized that children's levels of belonging and acceptance within the classroom would be associated with greater willingness to conform to antisocial and neutral peer behaviours, with more conformity among those students who were accepted and who felt they belonged.

Contrary to expectations, correlational analyses revealed that neither belonging nor acceptance was significantly related to conformity in neutral or antisocial situations. However, when the influence of demographic variables (grade, ethnicity, and school context) was controlled, using hierarchical regression analysis, a significant relationship was found between belonging and neutral conformity, but only among girls. Girls who reported higher levels of belonging were more likely to conform to neutral behaviour encouraged by peers. Conformity to antisocial peer behaviour was unrelated to
belonging, among both boys and girls. Moreover, conformity was unrelated to peer acceptance, for boys as well as girls and regardless of whether conformity to neutral or antisocial peer behaviours was considered. Thus, despite suggestions from research on peer entry behaviour (Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981) that more accepted children display more behaviour that reflects a greater willingness to adopt the behaviours and frame of reference of the peer group, peer acceptance was not related to conformity in the present study.

The present results do provide some support for the hypothesized relationship between belonging and conformity, but only for girls in terms of conformity to neutral behaviours. The step in which belonging was added to the regression equation accounted for 6% of the variance in reported conformity to neutral behaviour in girls, when the effects of age, school and ethnicity were statistically removed, although no significant relations between conformity and belonging were observed for boys. Similarly, although the zero-order correlations between belonging and conformity to neutral behaviours was non-significant for the entire sample, when boys and girls were examined separately, a significant, but modest relationship was observed for girls (i.e., $r(170) = .17, p < .05$). The reasons for this gender variation are not clear, but may reflect sex differences in socialization, with girls encouraged to be more oriented towards social relationships than boys (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Connor, 2001). For girls, then, the need to belong appears to have a stronger impact on behaviour than for boys. Further research is needed to replicate this finding, especially given the modest relationship obtained between belonging and conformity to neutral peer behaviour in girls.
Interestingly, the hypothesized relationship between conformity and belonging was only evident for neutral but not for antisocial behaviours. Perhaps when the situation is a neutral one (i.e., without moral/ethical implications or threat of harm), factors such as one's place in the peer group may have some influence on the tendency to conform (at least for girls), because the consequences for the behaviour in question are relatively trivial. In the case of antisocial behaviour, ethical and moral issues, as well as concerns about the consequences of the behaviour may override the effects that belongingness and acceptance might have on the behaviour.

Overall, however, the results of the present study failed to provide strong support for the hypothesized relationship between belonging and conformity. The limited results observed in the present study may reflect a number of methodological as well as conceptual difficulties inherent in the present test of this hypothesis. Of initial concern was whether the present sample was representative of students in this age group. An examination of the means obtained in this study for belonging and conformity, however, indicate that reported levels were similar to those observed in previous research (e.g., Berndt, 1979, Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986 for conformity; Connor, 2001, Hayden, 1989 for belonging). Moreover, correlational results indicated similar relations between belonging and peer acceptance as those found in previous research (Connor, 2001; Hayden, 1989), with more accepted early adolescents reporting greater feelings of belonging. Thus, the present sample was similar to others in terms of the degree of conformity, belonging, and level of acceptance, indicating that the failure to support some of the hypotheses does not seem to be attributable to unusual sample characteristics.
The general lack of significant findings might also be due to the fact that the present hypothesis was developed on the basis of studies that used different age groups. For example, previous studies have demonstrated relationships between conformity and peer liking/acceptance for adults (e.g., Schacter, 1951) or for younger (second and third grade) children (e.g., Putallaz, 1983; Putallaz & Gottman, 1981). It is possible that the processes linking conformity to peer acceptance are different among early adolescents. Moreover, these previous studies did not focus on reported willingness to conform, but rather, considered behaviours that were consistent with the notion of conformity (e.g., acceptance of a group's frame of reference and engaging in behaviours similar to those of the group were examined in the Putallaz (1983) and Putallaz and Gottman (1981) studies).

Methods used to measure conformity may also have played a role in the current study. Previous conformity experiments have utilized contrived, but real situations, so that participants were hoping to get others to accept, or at least not ridicule them (e.g., Asch, 1951; 1952; 1956). In contrast, in the present investigation, there was no fear of ridicule because participants were asked to imagine, rather than actively partake in the conformity situations. In addition, conformity was examined with a self-report measure, which assumed that conformity was not situation-specific, but rather a pervasive personality disposition. Perhaps, the Peer Conformity Disposition Scale was too global, and the effects of conformity, too situationally-specific to be adequately demonstrated in the present study. In future research it may be preferable to use a variation on Asch's visual conformity experiments to assess conformity within a specific situation, as these experiments provide concrete evidence for conformity when faced with an unambiguous visual stimulus. To further examine the relationship between conformity behaviour and belonging, future researchers could first identify which classmates participants do and
do not feel that they belong with. Then the protagonists in the conformity situations could be varied to see whether students are more likely to conform when the other individuals are friends (i.e., people who they feel that they belong with) or not (i.e., people who they do not feel that they belong with).

A further issue related to the measurement of conformity was the fact that young adolescents in the present study were asked to report what they thought they would do in hypothetical situations, which may or may not reflect their actual behaviour when confronted with similar situations in real life. A study by Gibbons, Frederick, Gerrard, Blanton, and Russell (1998) suggests that much of adolescent health-risk behaviour, such as smoking and drinking, is not pre-meditated, but instead occurs more or less spontaneously. As such, if asked, students may not believe that they would partake in antisocial activities. Rather, it is only when faced with real-life pressures to perform antisocial acts that they would participate in these activities. There has not been extensive research using real-life antisocial scenarios, because although interesting from a researcher's point of view, they are not ethically appropriate for use with school-age children and adolescents.

Another issue in the present study concerns the frame of reference used to measure belongingness as it related to conformity behaviour. In this study, a global sense of belonging within the classroom was examined, rather than belonging in terms of specific friends. A study by Urberg, Degirmencioğlu, and Pilgrim (1997) suggests that friends, rather than the general peer group, may be the important frame of reference. They found that friends had a greater influence on conformity to health-risk behaviours than the social crowd, particularly in terms of smoking and alcohol use among 6th to 10th graders. Future research examining feelings of belonging within a smaller circle of friends, rather than a classroom group of peers may be useful.
An additional concern can be raised regarding the fact that, in the present study, participants' reported on their perceptions of the degree to which they actually belonged, or fit in with the classroom social group. Theoretical formulations speak of a "need to belong" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970) rather than the actual feeling that one does belong, and these may be two distinct concepts. It is possible that students who rate themselves high on a measure of "belonging" would have relatively low "need to belong," given that the need would presumably be satisfied. A more precise measure that focused on the need to belong might have yielded different results.

Social desirability may also have been a significant influence in the present study. This may be particularly true for the conformity measure. Students may have responded in a socially desirable manner rather than giving answers that reflected their true behaviour. Although anonymity was stressed, some students voiced concerns about the possibility of being identified. Indeed, when students were observed in the present study, it became evident that many were quick to answer in very pro-social ways, selecting socially acceptable answers, even before the questions were completely read aloud. For this reason, the Asch method assessing actual behaviour in real life events may be a better way to assess conformity behaviour, rather than self-reports assessing how participants perceive that they would act in hypothetical situations.

Further studies in this area could address some of the methodological and conceptual issues mentioned above. Refinements in the methods used to measure belonging and conformity, as described above, could enhance the ability to detect and sort out the relationships among belonging, acceptance, and conformity.
Although not a primary focus in the present study, results did reveal variations in student reports of belonging as well as conformity as a function of ethnicity, grade, and school context. Specifically, in terms of feelings of belonging, Asian students reported significantly less belonging than did Caucasian or Indo-Canadian students. Furthermore, students in School 3 reported significantly more belonging than those in School 1. These school context differences may simply reflect variations in ethnic composition across the different schools, with School 1 having proportionately more Asian students. There may, however, still be other variations across these schools. Schools have been found to differ greatly in the extent to which they can be characterized as caring communities (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). High levels of school community in Grades 3 through 8, achieved via teacher warmth, supportiveness, promotion of cooperation, and emphasis on prosocial values, has been found to be associated with self-reported concern, respect, and acceptance of others (Battistich et al., 1997; Goodenow, 1993). In other words, perhaps there was a more caring environment created by staff in school 3, and as such students interacted with each other in ways that made them feel more included, experiencing greater feelings of belonging.

In addition, results of the present study indicated that reported conformity to antisocial peer behaviour was more likely among Caucasian participants, older students (Grade 7 compared to Grade 5), and students in School 2, with these variables accounting for 9% of the variance. Although school context, ethnicity, and grade were related to self-reports of conformity to antisocial peer behaviour, such relationships were not evident in more benign, or neutral situations. Although grade differences were not expected, given the narrow age range considered in the present study, regression analyses indicated that students in grade 7 were more likely to report willingness to
conform to peer antisocial behaviour than were those in grade 5. Previous research on age differences in peer conformity has been mixed. In the two previous studies assessing self-reported willingness to conform, using essentially the same measure, Brown, Clasen, and Eicher (1986) reported no grade differences across Grades 6 to 12, whereas Berndt (1979) found an increase in conformity from grades 3 to 9 and then a decrease in conformity from grades 9 to 12. Thus, although one of the previous studies has demonstrated that, until grade 9 at least, older students were more likely to report acceding to antisocial peer pressure than younger ones, future research is needed to examine this possible developmental trend more systematically.

The tendency for older students, in this case early adolescents, to conform more to antisocial behaviours than younger students is not surprising. Indeed, early adolescence is described as a period of transition, in which individuals are thought to forge independent identities by experimenting with values and beliefs, testing the limits of normative behaviours and personal boundaries (Erikson, 1968). Antisocial behaviour such as criminal activity has been shown to increase during adolescence, peaking at the age of 17 (Blumstein, Cohen, & Farrington, 1988). Substance abuse also increases from ages 11 to 15 (Sutherland & Shepherd, 2001). The fact that adolescents are engaging in more antisocial activities with increasing age suggests that they may also be more willing to acquiesce to antisocial peer pressure as they get older.

Ethnicity was also found to be an important predictor of conformity to antisocial peer pressure in the present study. Both Indo-Canadian and Asian students were less likely to accede to antisocial peer pressure than Non-Latin Caucasian students. Although the Asian and Indo-Canadian students in the present study live in Canada, a relatively individualistic, westernized country, they may still be retaining their cultural roots at home and may also be interacting with peers from their own culture within the
Asian and Indo-Canadian students generally came from more collectivist societies, where conformity to family is very important, but conformity to peers is not as prevalent. These differences may be partially explained by the theory that social behaviour is different in collectivist and individualistic societies. In individualist cultures (e.g., non-Latin Caucasians), social behaviour is largely determined by personal goals; in collectivist societies (e.g., Asians or Indo-Canadians) behaviour is dictated by group goals (Triandis, 1995). Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) found that people in collectivist cultures (i.e., Japan) reported less conformity than those in individualist cultures (i.e., United States). Using the Asch experiment, Frager (1970) found that Japanese adults conformed 25% of the time, which is lower than the American conformity rate of 37%.

Collectivist cultures stress the need to maintain a harmonious relationship with family and close friends; however, in individualist cultures, people are more accustomed to a wider social circle with more transitory and non-intimate relationships. Those in collectivist societies are often born into their social network. In contrast, those in individualist societies must work hard to establish relationships such as those within the classroom, attempting to maintain good relations with those who are similar in social class, race, beliefs, attitudes, and values. One of the ways in which an individual may attempt to maintain good relations is by conforming. For this reason, young adolescents in individualist societies (i.e., Caucasian students) may report greater conformity when pressured by peers than those in collectivist ones (i.e., Asians or Indo-Canadians).

Alternatively, other researchers have reported that parents in collectivist societies tend to exert more control over their children (Triandis, 1989). A study by Arora, Verma and Agrawal (1985) demonstrated that Indian adolescents were more conforming to parents than to peers. Usually parents are less likely to pressure their children to
engage in antisocial activities than peers (Au & Donaldson, 2000). In view of the fact that families tend to exert more control in non-Western cultures, such as that of East-Indians, there may be less of a propensity to engage in antisocial or health-risk behaviours instigated by peers. Consistent with these notions are results of cross-cultural studies of smoking and alcohol consumption. Indeed, research by Chen and Unger and associates (Chen & Unger, 1999; Chen, Unger, Cruz, & Johnson, 1999) have found that Asian-American youth aged 12 to 18 smoked less than their non-Asian counterparts. Seventh grade Asian students also reported less alcohol and cigarette consumption (Au & Donaldson, 2000). Asians also reported spending less time with friends. For both Asian and European-Americans, spending more time with friends has been associated with greater peer influence and a higher prevalence of alcohol and cigarette use (Au & Donaldson, 2000).

Ethnicity had an interesting influence on the variables in the current study, and further investigation of ethnicity in relation to conformity seems warranted. Different cultures seem to vary significantly in the extent to which they foster conformity among their members. An examination of conformity among adolescents from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds could provide interesting insights into the phenomenon.

In conclusion, the results of the present research suggest that the relationships among belonging, acceptance, and conformity may be more subtle and complex than originally believed. Measurement issues are significant. It is important to use precise measures that capture the phenomena and are relatively free from extraneous influences such as social desirability or other response sets. This is especially true in the case of conformity to antisocial behaviours, where concerns about getting caught or being perceived negatively may influence adolescents' tendencies to report such behaviour.
The role of gender in conformity behaviour also appears more complex than expected. The type of behaviour being coerced makes a difference, and gender plays a role only in situations when the behaviours called for are relatively neutral. It would be useful to examine why this is the case, looking at gender differences in socialization and in the value placed on belonging in various situations.

Finally, age and ethnicity should be considered when examining conformity behaviour among early adolescents. The phenomenon of conformity may be subject to influence from both of these variables. Further research in this area could illuminate the role that ethnic identification plays in determining whether individuals conform to various group norms. Further exploration of developmental trends in conformity to various forms of peer behaviour would also be valuable.

Conformity is an important phenomenon that may have a key influence on the behaviour of young adolescents. Students in this age group are faced with decisions that may have long-term consequences and implications, including decisions about violence, criminal behaviour, and substance abuse. It is important to continue refining our research and exploring the variables that influence peer conformity in order to better understand this complex phenomenon.
References


Raffaelli, M. & Duckett, E. (1989). "We were just talking...": Conversations in early adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 18*(6), 567-582.


Parent Consent Forms

Study title: Understanding Student Social Relations and Decision-Making
Principal Investigator: Shelley Hymel, Ph.D., Professor, University of British Columbia
Co-Investigator: Mariana Grinman, B.Sc., B.Ed., Master's candidate, University of British Columbia

Consent:

I have read and understood the attached details outlined in the letter regarding the study entitled "Understanding Student Social Relations and the Decision-Making." I am aware that I can keep the letter of request, as well as the top portion of this consent form for my own records.

I understand that my child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or impact on his/her schoolwork. I am aware that my child will be given a regular classroom assignment if he/she does not participate in this study. My decision regarding my son/daughter's participation in this study is indicated below.

____ Yes, my son/daughter has my permission to participate
____ No, my son/daughter does not have my permission to participate

PLEASE KEEP THIS PORTION FOR YOUR OWN RECORDS

------------------------------------------------------------

PLEASE RETURN THIS PORTION TO THE SCHOOL

Consent:

I have read and understood the attached details outlined in the letter regarding the study entitled "Understanding Student Social Relations and the Decision-Making." I am aware that I can keep the letter of request, as well as the top portion of this consent form for my own records.

I understand that my child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and that he/she may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or impact on his/her schoolwork. I am aware that my child will be given a regular classroom assignment if he/she does not participate in this study. My decision regarding my son/daughter's participation in this study is indicated below.

____ Yes, my son/daughter has my permission to participate
____ No, my son/daughter does not have my permission to participate

Son or Daughter (please circle)

Son/Daughter's Name (please print): ________________________________

Grade: __________

Parent/Guardian's Signature: __________________________ Date: __________
Appendix B: Student Consent and Information Forms

Student Information Form

Dear student:

You have been invited to participate in a research project that we are conducting at your school, called “Understanding Student Social Relations and Decision-Making.” We want to find out how students your age get along and how you make decisions when you are with your classmates.

If you choose to be in this project, you will be asked to fill out questionnaires during one class period about: how you feel in school, how much you like to be with your classmates, how much your classmates like to be with you, and what kind of decisions you would make in different social situations. You can choose not to be in this project at any time. Being in this project does not affect your schoolwork in any way. If you choose not to participate in this study, you will be given a regular classroom assignment to do.

All of the information you give us will be kept confidential, so we are not going to show your answers to students, or school staff. In fact, your name will be removed from the questionnaires and replaced with a number. This is NOT a test, so your answers will NOT affect your grades in any way. It is very important that you answer all of the questions as honestly as you can. If you return your signed permission slip, your name will be entered into a draw for a $15 gift certificate for A & B Sound or movie theatre. One student's name will be drawn in each class. Please have your parents fill out and sign the attached permission slip, and return it to your teacher by tomorrow.

We would be very happy if you decide to participate. If you have any further questions, please feel free to call Shelley Hymel (daytime: --, evenings: --) or Mariana Grinman (--).

Thank you very much for your help,

Shelley Hymel, Ph.D. & Mariana Grinman

PLEASE KEEP THIS FORM
I have read and understood the details outlined in the letter regarding the study "Understanding Student Social Relations and Decision-Making."

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to participate without my grades being affected.

___ Yes, I would like to participate.

___ No, I would not like to participate.

NAME: (Please print) __________________________________________
________________________________________________________

DATE ___________________________ GRADE _______
Appendix C: Demographics Measure

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

We are interested in learning a bit about your background. Please answer all of the questions as honestly as you can.

REMEMBER: ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS WILL REMAIN PRIVATE AND WILL ONLY BE SEEN BY THE RESEARCHERS

1. Are you girl or a boy? (check one) _____Girl  _____Boy

2. How old are you? _______ years old

3. When were you born? ________/______/______
   (Month)  (Day)  (Year)

4. What grade are you in right now? (check one) ____5th ____6th ____7th

5. What is your postal code? _____________________________

6. What would you say is your ethnic or cultural origin? (check one or more)
   _____White
   (European, Caucasian, etc.)  _____First Nations
   (Native Canadian, Metis)
   _____Indo Canadian
   (East Indian)  _____Asian
   (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)
   _____Latin
   (Mexican, South American, etc.)  _____Black
   (African, Haitian, Jamaican, etc.)
   _____Other (please describe): ____________________________
Appendix D: Peer Acceptance Measure

My Relationships With Other Kids In My Class

For each classmate given in the list on the next page, circle the word that best describes how much you like to be with each person.

Circle the big "NO" if you do NOT like to be with the person at all

Circle the little "no" if you do NOT like to be with the person most of the time, but sometimes you do like to be with the person

Circle "sometimes" if sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't like to be with the person

Circle the little "yes" if you like to be with the person most of the time

Circle the big "YES" if you really like to be with the person

Examples:
Do you like to be with each person in your class?

Clara          NO       no       sometimes       yes       YES

There are no right or wrong answers
Please be honest
Your name will not appear anywhere on this form
Mr. X's class – Girls

Do you like to be with each person in your class?

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cynthia Lamont</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Samantha Rocher</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Miranda Carlen</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Simona Nather</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Michelle Blumfield</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rachel Tanenbaum</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jenny Ho</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

☐ Please check that you have answered all of the questions on this page and that you have marked only 1 answer for each question.
Appendix E: Peer Conformity Measure

How do you make decisions?

INSTRUCTIONS:
For each situation:
1) Read each situation and choose one thing you would do if you were in that situation
2) Put a check mark (✓) or cross (X) next to the one that best describes what you would do if you were in that situation

EXAMPLE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU DO?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. On Sunday, a couple of my friends from class want to go fishing, but I</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want to go play basketball instead. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>--- Definitely go fishing with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--- Probably go fishing with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--- Probably play basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--- Definitely play basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. On Saturday, I promised my parents that I would cut the lawn. A couple</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of my friends from class want me to go hiking with them instead. What</td>
<td>--- Definitely go hiking with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>--- Probably go hiking with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--- Probably cut the lawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>--- Definitely cut the lawn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no right or wrong answers
Please be honest
Your name will not appear anywhere on this form
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU DO?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Tomorrow a group I belong to in class is having a picnic. I want to</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go early but my friends want me to go with them a little later. What</td>
<td>___ Definitely go later with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>___ Probably go later with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Probably go early to the picnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Definitely go early to the picnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) On Saturday I go to an amusement park with a couple of my friends</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from class. You are all standing in line for one ride, but I really</td>
<td>___ Definitely wait in line with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want to go on another one instead. While I'm still in line with my</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends, I see a guy taking tickets for the ride I like better. What</td>
<td>___ Probably wait in line with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Probably go on the ride I want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Definitely go on the ride I want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) One day after supper, me and a couple of my friends from class</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet at school. No one is around and my friends decide that we should</td>
<td>___ Definitely write on the walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all write on the walls of the school. I don't think it's a good idea,</td>
<td>___ Probably write on the walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but my friends tell me to do it anyway. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>___ Probably not write on the walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Definitely not write on the walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Me and a couple of my friends from class are walking home from</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school when I come across a house that's being built. There's a sign</td>
<td>___ Definitely go inside with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saying &quot;No Trespassing,&quot; but my friends all want to go inside. I don't</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think it's a good idea, but they say, &quot;come on!&quot; What would I REALLY</td>
<td>___ Probably go inside with my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do?</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Probably refuse to go inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Definitely refuse to go inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I meet a couple of my friends from class in the park one Saturday.</td>
<td>Choose one:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of my friends brought along a frisbee, and all of my friends want</td>
<td>___ Definitely play frisbee with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to play, but I want to do something else. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Probably play frisbee with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Probably do what I want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Definitely do what I want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>WHAT WOULD YOU DO?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) I meet a couple of my friends from class on Halloween. They're going to soap windows, but I'm not sure whether I should or not. My friends all say I should, because there's no way I could get caught. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>Choose one:&lt;br&gt;— Definitely soap windows with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably soap windows with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably not soap windows&lt;br&gt;— Definitely not soap windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) A couple of my friends from class are getting together tonight to watch a TV program. They want me to come too, but my favourite show is on at the same time. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>Choose one:&lt;br&gt;— Definitely watch TV with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably watch TV with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably watch my favourite show&lt;br&gt;— Definitely watch my favourite show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) I'm making something special, and just as I start working on it, a couple of my friends from class come by and ask me to do something with them. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>Choose one:&lt;br&gt;— Definitely do what my friends want&lt;br&gt;— Probably do what my friends want&lt;br&gt;— Probably finish what I'm making&lt;br&gt;— Definitely finish what I'm making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I'm getting together with a couple of my friends from class tonight, and I'm going to go get something to eat. My friends all want to go to one place, but I feel like going to the place next door. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>Choose one:&lt;br&gt;— Definitely go with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably go with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably go next door &amp; meet my friends later&lt;br&gt;— Definitely go next door &amp; meet my friends later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) During gym one day, the teacher gives me free time. I want to jump on the trampoline. A couple of my friends from class are going outside to play volleyball and they want me to join them. What would I REALLY do?</td>
<td>Choose one:&lt;br&gt;— Definitely go out &amp; play volleyball with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably go out &amp; play volleyball with my friends&lt;br&gt;— Probably use the trampoline&lt;br&gt;— Definitely use the trampoline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>WHAT WOULD YOU DO?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 11) I go for a walk around a lake with a couple of my friends from class and see a boat on the shore. It isn't tied, and no one is around. My friends all agree to take it out on the lake for a ride. I don't think I should, but they tell me to get in or they'll leave me. What would I REALLY do? | Choose one:  
| --- | | Definitely go for a ride with my friends  
| Probably go for a ride with my friends  
| Probably not go for a ride with them  
| Definitely not go for a ride with them |
| 12) On the way home from school, me and a couple of my friends from class stop at the store to get something to eat. I notice an open bag of candy. My friends all take a piece, but I don't like the idea. They tell me to go ahead and take one. What would I REALLY do? | Choose one:  
| --- | | Definitely take a piece of candy  
| Probably take a piece of candy  
| Probably refuse to take any candy  
| Definitely refuse to take any candy |
| 13) I'm going to play a game at school and I'm captain of the team. A kid I don't know wants to play. I feel that anyone who wants to play should be able to. My friends from class tell me not to let the kid play because no one knows the kid. What would I REALLY do? | Choose one:  
| --- | | Definitely not let the kid play  
| Probably not let the kid play  
| Probably let the kid play  
| Definitely let the kid play |
| 14) Me and a couple of my friends from class find a sheet of paper that a teacher lost. On the paper are the answers to a test that I am going to have tomorrow. My friends all plan to study from it, and they want me to go along with them. I don't think I should, but they all say to do it anyway. What would I REALLY do? | Choose one:  
| --- | | Definitely study from the paper  
| Probably study from the paper  
| Probably not study from the paper  
| Definitely not study from the paper |
| 15) Me and a couple of my friends from class are fooling around in an empty lot next to a house and accidentally break one of the windows of the house. My friends want to take off and not tell anybody in the house, and I don't think that's right, but they tell me to hurry up and come. What would I REALLY do? | Choose one:  
| --- | | Definitely go away with my friends  
| Probably go away with my friends  
| Probably tell someone in the house  
| Definitely tell someone in the house |
Appendix F: Belonging Measure

My Relationship with Other Kids My Age

Read each sentence and decide whether it is true or not true about you
Circle the big “NO” if the sentence is really not true about you
Circle the little “no” if the sentence is kind of not true about you
Circle “sometimes” if the sentence is true about you some of the time
Circle the little “yes” if the sentence is kind of true about you
Circle the big “YES” if the sentence is really true about you

EXAMPLES:
Circle the one you think best describes how true each sentence is for you

A. I like eating caterpillars
   NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES

B. I like doing homework
   NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES

There are no right or wrong answers
Please be honest
Your name will not appear anywhere on this form

1) At school, I feel like part of a group of kids NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   my age that do things together

2) I have a lot in common with other kids in NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   my class

3) I feel in tune (in sync) with other kids in NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   my class

4) I am outgoing and friendly with the kids in NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   my class

5) I feel that I usually fit in with the kids in my NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   class

6) When I am with other kids in my class, I NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   feel like I belong

7) When I want to do something fun, I can NO  no  sometimes  yes  YES
   usually find classmates to join me

☑ Please check that you have answered all of the questions and that you have marked only 1 answer for each question

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