THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

EDUCATION

THESIS TITLE Peer Pressure at an Alternative High School: Implications for Teaching Effective Adolescent Decision-making

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DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: December 8, 2003

THE THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

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Peer Pressure at an Alternative High School

Implications for Teaching Effective Adolescent Decision-Making

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Acknowledgement

To my partner in life, my husband Floyd, I am grateful for your unwavering support, love and understanding. To our daughter, Cara, and our son, Steven, thank you for always being there to listen, empathize, and help me through hectic days. And, to my parents, Albert and Grace Singleton, thank you for teaching me that I can do anything I set my mind to.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the assistant principal and teacher at the alternative high school in this study. Your enthusiasm for this project was key in my motivation, and your dedication to your students in not only their education but also their lives serves as a model for all teachers and all schools.

I would like to thank the following people in the college of Education at California State University San Marcos for offering a rich challenging environment, and especially to:

Dr. Juan Necochea, my thesis chair, in sincere appreciation for your encouragement, help and guidance.

Dr. Robin Marion, providing me with the tools to uncover deeper levels of understanding, and pushing me beyond my comfort zone.

Finally, to “Heather”, the inspiration for my inquiry.
Abstract

Peer pressure has been shown to be a prominent component in adolescent decision-making (Iannotti, Bush, & Weinfurt, 1996; Kobus, 1998; Giancola, 2000). Children are increasingly exposed to high-risk situations in which there is little, if any, adult supervision. Their decisions stemming from peer pressure, either overt or perceived, have the potential for irreversible consequences. Benthin, Slovic, and Severson (1993) listed risky driving, consumption of alcohol, drugs, and/or tobacco, and sexual behavior as among those activities that potentially do the greatest harm to our youth. In addition to these factors, Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke (Eds.) (1999) discussed violence among adolescents as contributing to one of the leading causes of death in young people. This study provides illumination into how at-risk youth in a Southern California alternative high school view peer pressure, overt or perceived, and some of the motives and reasons behind why they respond positively/negatively to those pressures.

The researcher found, through qualitative methods, that students listed exposure to the media and the friends they associate with, coupled with their lack of experience in decision-making, ignorance of risks, and desire to be accepted (e.g., liked, looked up to, attractive, cool, popular) as aspects of peer pressure.

This study should help administrators and educators understand peer pressure from a student perspective, and offer recommendations for helping students cope in their pressured lives.
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As a health teacher in middle school, and later high school, when I would ask my students why they would participate in an activity, known to be risky or dangerous, one of the first responses was always, “peer pressure”. Yet, especially among high school students, when I would ask, “In what cases, would you let someone talk you into doing something you really don’t want to do,” the answer was usually, “I do what I want. I make up my own mind”. I remember one fifteen-year-old girl, Heather, who admittedly never felt that smoking cigarettes was healthy or desirable, but started smoking anyway. “It was my own idea, no one talked me into it,” she cried defensively. Heather was an incoming freshman, who was beginning to form a new peer group with girls who smoked. Apparent to me, Heather responded to perceived peer pressure, but did not recognize it as such. In other words, Heather felt that she made a decision based solely on what she wanted to do. She did not acknowledge that the behavior of her peers had anything to do with her decision. How was I going to teach students to recognize perceived peer pressure for what it is?

Children in our Western culture are increasingly exposed to high-risk situations in which there is little, if any, adult supervision. Decisions that an individual makes have the potential for irreversible consequences. Benthin, Slovic, and Severson (1993) listed risky driving, consumption of alcohol, drugs, and/or tobacco, and sexual behavior as among those activities that potentially do the greatest harm to our youth (p. 153). In addition to these, Fischoff, Crowell and
Kipke (Eds.) (1999) discussed violence among adolescents as contributing to one of the leading causes of death in young people. The serious ramifications of the above activities have been the justification for the implementation of health promoting programs in our schools.

Teaching effective decision-making is vital, especially at the middle school level. Many special programs, already a part of the middle school curriculum, help to teach good decision-making practice (e.g., Family Life, Education Now Babies Later [ENABL], Healthy Transitions, and Resolving Conflict Creatively Program [RCCP]). However, in order for them to be more effective, they need to address issues that students feel are realistic and relevant for their own lives. Since peer pressure has such a sizable role in the decision-making process, educators need to have a greater understanding of the circumstances that precipitate it.

Purpose

The question pursued in this study concerns youth in a Southern California alternative education high school. Examining how students view peer pressure, overt or perceived, and the motives and reasons behind why they respond positively/negatively to those pressures is the purpose of this study.

Through grounded theory analysis, I will examine assigned student writing. I will collect self-reflecting views on peer pressure, both obvious and perceived, and I will look for emerging themes in the student writing. I will also examine what current literature tells us about peer pressure as well as components that are present in successful decision-making lessons.
**Definition of Terms**

*Effective decision-making.*

For the purposes of this study, *effective decision-making* is defined as the act of weighing both “positive” and “negative” consequences of a behavior before taking personal action, and that action has a “positive” probability toward the future health and happiness of the individual compared to other options. I am going to explore how school practices designed to help students develop selected personal principles, enhance the quality of, and reduce the time required to make, effective decisions.

*Peer pressure.*

*Peer pressure* will be defined as, the conflicting emotions a child feels during the decision-making process, which the child feels, overtly or covertly, originate from expectations of valued peers. These emotions have the potential of making the child feel pressure to do things that are contrary to what the child feels he or she should do.

**Assumptions**

Based on my training and previous experience, I am acting on the belief that the human act of “stopping to think” before taking certain actions, is learned rather than being an “instinctive behavior”, however, I do feel that certain physiological factors play a strong role in decision-making. When teenagers experience extreme emotions, it hinders the effectiveness of the decision-making practice. Students need to recognize that “going along with others” is an active decision.
Students who learn decision-making skills through active involvement (writing, participation in groups, role-play) are more likely to transfer, use and retain the skills in real-life situations.
Peer Culture

William Corsaro (1992) is a sociologist who has struggled with the various, and sometimes, conflicting theories (behaviorist, constructivist, individualism, interpretive, and dramaturgical) regarding how children develop a peer culture. He found many of them to be too simplistic or incomplete. To examine these theories, he took field notes while observing nursery school children who, presumably, are first developing peer cultures.

Corsaro defines peer culture as “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (Corsaro, 1992, p. 162). He argues that culture is not simply learned, but is produced through a creative process of public negotiation, and then reproduction (replaying the scene) (Corsaro, 1992, p. 164). This transformation occurs through three key elements, framing (using the working knowledge of cultural routines), contextualization (sizing up a situation, while aware of cognitive and behavioral elements), and embellishment (exaggeration and elaboration of previous acts) (Corsaro, 1992, p. 167-168).

I would agree that peer culture is a creative process. Teachers see it happening when students make the transition from elementary school to middle school, and again from middle school to high school; students modify, and sometimes totally change, their chosen peer group. Using Corsaro’s (1992) theory, students at
first look to those peers whom they have always felt comfortable with (framing). They gradually “size up” others as well, and practice negotiations with a wider variety of students from diverse backgrounds (contextualization). In the classroom, middle school teachers notice how individual students may “try on” different personalities (embellishment) on a daily basis. Knowing how children create peer culture is an important step in learning how to have an understanding of what peer pressure is and how we, as teachers, can have any impact in helping students to surround themselves with positive peer influences.

*Adolescent Egocentrism*

Peer pressure is believed to be a component of adolescent egocentrism (Elkind, 1967), which is the tendency of adolescents to be focused primarily on themselves.

Benthin et al. (1993) conducted a study using 25 male and 15 female (41 total) high school students in Eugene, Oregon who self-report perceived risks and perceived benefits of health-risky behaviors (e.g., sun-bathing, riding a skateboard, having sex, abusing addictive drugs). Characteristics (e.g., fear, personal risk, risk to peers, personal control) of each behavior were rated on a scale.

The study found that the teenagers who participated in a health-risky behavior felt that they had greater knowledge of the risks and more personal control over the risks than others. They also perceived that the participation rate was higher than the actual (total) rate that was reported. In addition, they felt that they had less ability to avoid the activity (Benthin et al., 1993, p. 165).
It may be a case where those who repeatedly engage in an activity feel that they know more about it due to their familiarity, and as the activity becomes increasingly more common to their experiences, they perceive it to be a more common practice among their peers. By extension, if so many people are perceived to be involved in the behavior, the risks are perceived as either being controlled by the participant or not as great.

The above explanation would point to Elkind's (1967) theory of adolescent egocentrism, which describes personal fable as an ideation pattern where adolescents feel unique, omnipotent and invulnerable.

It is interesting that Benthin et al. (1993) found that those participants, who felt that they had more control over risks, also felt that they had little control over their own engagement in a behavior. The reasoning may point to the construct of imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967), which refers to adolescents’ perceived view that others are continually scrutinizing their behavior. The adolescent may feel that others expect participation (perceived peer pressure).

Based on previous research (Elkind, 1967; Lapsley, 1993), Vartanian (2000) defines the imaginary audience (IA) as “adolescents’ tendency to believe that others are always watching and evaluating them; the personal fable (PF) refers to the belief that the self is unique, invulnerable and omnipotent” (p. 639). Vartanian (2000) states that both IA and PF indicate that adolescents use biased information in social decision-making (p. 655). The author, through comparative analysis of previous research, looked into current thought surrounding IA and PF, which were first
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identified as resulting from the process of cognitive development (Elkind, 1967). Although IA and PF are now included in academic textbooks on adolescent egocentrism, Vartanian (2000) felt that both ideations have been overemphasized and lack consistent empirical validation. She argues, “...if one is able to think logically, abstractly, and hypothetically, how can imaginary audience and personal fable be possible?” (p. 643). She cites research done by Lapsley and others (Lapsley, 1993; Lapsley, FitzGerald, Rice, & Jackson, 1989; Lapsley & Rice, 1988 as cited in Vartanian, 2000) that offers an alternative viewpoint: rather than being signs of faulty judgment, imaginary audience and personal fable constructs are grounded in the adolescent’s psychological separation from their parent(s), a natural and necessary progression toward individuation in social cognitive development. Restated, whereas Elkind’s (1967) view is that imaginary audience and personal fable are both regrettable aspects of adolescent development that result from faulty perception, Lapsley (1993) views them as necessary steps in cognitive maturation.

Vartanian (2000) felt that there was a need to reevaluate these IA and PF with more empirical evidence (p. 655). So later, she conducted research into the validity of the ideation of imaginary audience (Vartanian, 2001). Her research explored IA by examining students’ (children, early adolescents, middle adolescents, late adolescents and young adults) opinions and feelings concerning social groups by having them provide written responses to questionnaires regarding audio taped peer conversations or a transcript of a hypothetical conversations between male and
female peers. Vartanian (2001) concluded that none of the research she conducted, supported the construct of imaginary audience, however, she did not dismiss this theory altogether. She found early adolescents more focused on admiration from others (Vartanian, 2001, p. 374) and that imaginary audience was simply overstated, but may also have played a positive role in indicating social cognitive growth.

Having a greater understanding of the aforementioned ideation patterns (stages) has direct bearing on the potential to improve the relevance and impact of health education programs through a better appreciation of the cognitive stages of adolescent development.

*Peer Pressure, Perceived Peer Pressure, Peer Influence*

Peer pressure was the focus of a workshop, in January 1998 entitled, *Adolescent Decision Making: Implications for Prevention Programs* (Fischoff et al., 1999). It is also a subject which I personally have revisited innumerable times in an effort to understand how, in my professional life as a teacher, I could best help my students understand and better cope with its ramifications. I agree with Kathryn Urberg (Fischoff et al., 1999), associate professor of psychology at Wayne State University, one of the presenters at the workshop, who reported “the popular notion of the reluctant teenager being pressured into trying a risky behavior by friends may be overly simplistic…” (p. 8). She went on to state that a teenager will choose friends according to their own interests, and that if a teenager does not participate in a certain risky behavior, that same individual will not choose friends who do. I would take this a step further. If a teenager’s close friend(s) begin participating in a risky behavior,
with no outward persuading from these same friends, the teenager may “decide” to participate due to “perceived expectations” as well as a desire to “fit in”. In other words, the peer pressure is *internal* rather than *external*. Internal pressure, or perceived peer pressure, involves only the thought processes taking place inside of the child’s mind, whereas external pressure can be tangibly seen and heard by the child. James Jaccard (Fischoff et al., 1999), professor of psychology at the University of Albany State University of New York affirmed, “Young people may be influenced as much by what they think their peers are doing as by what they really are doing” (p. 9).

In the quest to dissect aspects of peer pressure within peer groups, the following two studies examine features and qualities of friendships.

*Qualities of friendships.*

Berndt and Keefe (1995) found that friends tend to become more similar as they continually influence each other. The authors had 7th and 8th grade students complete questionnaires about their own behavior in school, and that of their friends’. The students were also asked to report on the features of their best friendships. Initially, they tended to select friends that were more like themselves in terms of grades, the classes they were assigned to, or activities that they participated in. Continued socialization seemed to foster similar behavior (Berndt & Keefe, 1995, p. 1325). Participants who self-reported more positive features concerning their friendships tended to be more involved in school. Conversely, those who reported more negative features about their friendships, were not only less involved in school,
Emotional component of perceived peer pressure.

O'Brien and Bierman (1988) felt that utilizing quantitative methods only, such as multiple-choice questionnaires, to investigate perceptions of peer influence, did not allow participants a voice in their responses. Subjects were forced to choose among only the options available, and the relative strength of each choice was absent. Thus, the authors chose to focus on subjective impressions through interview.

O'Brien and Bierman (1988) conducted their research with a group of 12 males and 12 females from each of three grade levels (5th, 8th, and 11th grades) who were asked to reflect upon their feelings concerning group acceptance and self-esteem (p.1360). Pre-adolescents (5th graders) conveyed that they relied on the peer group for acceptance, friendship and support; adolescents (8th graders) indicated that they wanted to not only feel acceptance, but to be needed, whereas older (11th grade) adolescents voiced more fear of rejection (O'Brien & Bierman, 1988, p. 1364). Lashbrook (2000) later observed that fear of rejection was among the negative internal emotions (e.g., ashamed, isolated, inadequate, confused) adolescent subjects experienced before conforming in their actions.

In examining previous research into peer pressure, Lashbrook (2000) felt that the question of why adolescents conform to peer expectations, perceived or overt, remains wanting. Coupled with quantitative data analysis, the adolescent individual’s voice is often muffled. Lashbrook (2000) felt that in the quest to explore quantitative aspects of peer pressure the individuals were cast into a passive role.
Therefore, the author’s aim was to examine perceived peer pressure more closely and the motivation of the individual to conform to those perceived expectations through a qualitative method.

The author conducted a study based on interviews of twelve students attending a small rural college who responded to questions on when they had acted upon perceived peer pressure in the past, and why they felt they acted in the way that they did. Through grounded theory analysis, Lashbrook (2000) found that most respondents reported that they experienced negative internal emotions (e.g., abandoned, intimidated, insecure, nervous) before conforming in their actions. Also, of those emotions, shame emerged as the most salient. The author included several descriptions of emotions in the shame category (e.g., fear of being ridiculed, isolated, or rejected). Lashbrook (2000) also noted, that students who reported having withstood perceived peer pressure attributed their response to “pride, shame’s conceptual opposite” (2000, p. 754), and that, “the influence of peers increases relative to other sources (e.g., parents) from childhood to adolescence, and appears to peak, at least for antisocial behavior, in the ninth grade” (Berndt, 1979 as cited in Lashbrook, 2000, p. 748). Since the subjects in Lashbrook’s (2000) study viewed perceived peer pressure through 19-23 year old eyes, a question remains; do adolescents recognize perceived peer pressure as an inner pressure, which may or may not have realistic validity?

Lashbrook’s study does not state the socioeconomic level of the participants, but they were predominantly females, attending a four-year college.
Therefore, generalizing the results of this study to at-risk youth is problematic. The subsequent studies are regarding peer pressure associated with high-risk behavior, some of which focus more directly on at-risk youth

*High-risk behavior associated with peer pressure.*

The following two studies examined smoking in efforts to find a cause-effect relationship. Peer pressure, perceived peer pressure, peer influence and peer affiliation ranked high in precipitating factors.

Kobus (1998) examined empirical research that identified peer relationships as a primary factor involved in adolescent cigarette smoking. By summarizing five social theories (social learning theory, primary socialization theory, social identity theory and social network theory) and applying them to previous research findings, Kobus (1998) concludes that “the mechanisms of peer influence appear to be more covert and subtle than is thought commonly” (p. 50), echoing observations from my own teaching. The participants’ smoking behavior reflected their own perceived ideas that smoking would help them to fit in socially, enhance their popularity, and demonstrate autonomy.

Fergusson, Lynskey, and Horwood (1995) used data, collected from a 16-year longitudinal study, to find predictors/determinants of cigarette smoking. They found, through self-reporting at age 15, that peer influences played a significant role in smoking behavior, whether their friends smoked (most, some, none), and to what extent their friends had encouraged them to smoke (a great deal, a little, not at all)
Fergusson et al. (1995, p.649). However, peer affiliation had a higher correlation than peer pressure; although making the distinction between peer affiliation and peer pressure is problematic: the former by its very nature involves perceived peer pressure. Fergusson et al. (1995) also found that there was a positive correlation of, cigarette smoking parents with both early cigarette smoking and cigarette smoking peer association during adolescence (p. 658). Conversely, this study also points out the positive influences of non-smoking parents, and non-smoking peers.

Ionnotti, et al. (1996) examined smoking and other health-risky behaviors in order to associate attitudes, and use (abuse) of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, with perceptions of the attitudes of family and friends and perceptions of their use (Iannotti et al., 1996, p. 617). The authors used a longitudinal sample of 1,802 predominantly African-American students who completed a survey, and sociometric questionnaires in each of 4 school years (4th to 8th grade).

Surprisingly, the modeling of substance abuse by peers in the past did not appear to be a strong predictor to students' substance use (Iannotti et al., 1996, p. 623). Perceived friends' use and perceived family use had much stronger correlations with past use among adolescents and pre-adolescents (for both use and non-use). In addition, in almost all instances, perceived friends' use was reported to be significantly higher than was self-reported, showing a discrepancy between perceived vs. actual occurrence. In essence, the concept of “everyone is doing it” is a self-deception that affects participation in high-risk behaviors.
As a result of their work, Iannotti et al. (1996) draw some implications for school-based intervention programs. They state,

The behavior of adolescents’ immediate friends might not be as important as the behavior of their classmates and the school environment. Social-influence skills interventions need to teach adolescents how to cope with an environment in which they correctly or incorrectly perceive family, friends, and their classmates to be using or accepting the use of abusable substances.

(Iannotti et al., 1996, p. 629)

I agree that better coping skills are needed to help adolescents contend with their environments, however, I also believe that one of the many roles of education is to foster awareness of the distinction between reality and perception: just because the attitudes of peers are perceived (peer pressure) does not mean that in reality those same peers all share those feelings.

The following study did not center on health-risky behaviors in general, but instead, focused on misbehavior in school.

Giancola (2000) examined what factor(s) most highly precipitate student misbehavior. “Misbehavior is any activity, overt or covert, that interferes with teaching and learning…misbehavior is also any activity that hinders the misbehaving student’s ability to learn” (Giancola, 2000, p. 6). Four themes (most common factors) emerged from the data, peer influence, self-concept, parent involvement, and school climate. Of these, negative peer influence was the most important risk factor.
attributed to 10th grade misbehavior. Students with a positive peer influence were found to be 80% less likely to misbehave in the 10th grade.

While the sample participants in the study did not represent the racial or socioeconomic composition of the population at the time, thus making generalizations problematic, the results are powerful nevertheless, alerting teachers to be concerned with peer influence. Negative peer influence not only affects the behavior of the individuals in that peer group, but also the school climate in general. Giancola (2000) concludes that research should be “used to design appropriate treatment and prevention programs for adolescents...” and to “investigate how peer groups can be targeted to control and improve problem behavior” (p.35) by developing methods to promote interaction, negotiation, and socialization among a variety of peers.

Peer pressure and decision-making.

A review of earlier studies indicated that effective decision-making skills are a strong part of the core of a “successful” student, worker, family member, friend and/or citizen. How children handle the day-in and day-out problems they face, which require decisive actions, play a major role in not only shaping their lives, but also in determining their level of happiness. The following studies show how peer pressure plays a role in the decision-making process.

In schools, adolescent violent crime statistics, recent gun violence and victimization is on the rise as compared with 20 years ago. The purpose of the study conducted by Haynie, Alexander and Walters (1997) was to examine the decision-making skills of 78 inner city 6th and 7th grade students in order to draw together
some suggestions for violence prevention programs. The participants were interviewed and asked to offer responses (possible outcomes) of three scenarios. Of those responses, they were asked to select one option that they might actually have done in that situation. Categories were used to group the chosen options as aggressive, communication with adults, communication with peers, avoidance, and other (Haynie et al., 1997, p. 167). The subjects were also asked to discuss what the consequences of their decisions might be.

Most of the subjects chose to work out their problems in conjunction with their peers (62%), not with the aid of adults. Haynie et al. (1997) categorized solutions as “aggressive, communication with adults, communication with peers, avoidance, and other” (p. 167). Thirty-two percent of the proposed solutions were aggressive, a great majority of those involving group retaliation, which tells us something about the peer culture of these inner city youth. I noticed that some of the aggressive responses involved exerting peer pressure; “Tracy could get kid back by telling friends that he is a bad person” (Haynie et al., 1997, p. 168).

The authors found that the majority of the responses were socially acceptable (non-aggressive); however, results were “reported by Hausman et al.⁵ that most teens choose pro-social responses to hypothetical situations, although most of their sample chose to fight in their last real-life confrontation” (Haynie et al., 1997, p.168). This previous statement supports the conundrum in both Duryea’s (1984) and Ganzel’s (1999) studies: it is extremely difficult for participants to feel the depth of emotion,
while making alternative choices in an artificial situation, that they would if they were
involved in that situation in real life. However, the authors make a valid point:
providing an ideal response demonstrates the adolescents’ understanding and morality
in the context of the situations presented in the scenarios. The findings still provide
direction for violence prevention programs in that they could scaffold from those
basic perceptions.

The authors also noted that some subjects provided, what the researchers
viewed as positive (reputation building, self-pride, and self-protection), consequences
to fighting that would probably be at odds with the goals of school administration
(Haynie et al., 1997, p. 168). This supports the findings of Furby and Beyth-Maron
(1990) in that adolescents may view the consequences of risky behavior as serving a
purpose in their lives, such as convincing others of self-worth, and low-risk behavior,
such as walking away, as either taking a cowardly stance, or merely postponing the
problem. When teaching decision-making, we ask students to weigh the
consequences of proposed actions. By being cognizant of what some students may
view as positive or negative consequences, we may increase the relevance of those
programs, thus increasing their impact.

Furby and Beyth-Maron (1990) define risky behavior as action (or inaction)
that involves a chance of loss, which may or may not be deliberate. They define
decision-making as “the process of making choices among competing courses of
action” (Raiffa, 1968; von Winterfeldt & Edwards, 1986 as cited in Furby & Beyth-
Maron, 1990, p. 67). The authors examined the adolescents’ and adults’ viewpoints
in the process of making decisions. They found that both adolescents and adults consider various options and weigh them by taking into account various consequences, however, adolescents weigh the risk of peer rejection much more heavily than do adults. Therefore, a decision that adults may view as not well thought out, might be a rational choice based on how the adolescent evaluates the situation. The act of risk taking may even be advantageous developmentally, as was later pointed out in Ungar’s (2000) study.

Ungar (2000) studied 41 high-risk adolescents, half (21) of which were participating in a subsidized mental health therapy program. The other half (20) were residents of a closed-custody facility, and all of the participants were from the author’s clinical practice. High-risk was defined as having three or more “biopsychosocial” factors: poverty, mental illness of at least one parent, mental disorder, physical and/or sexual abuse, family violence, neglect, intellectual and/or physical challenges, and addiction (Ungar, 2000, p. 170).

Ungar (2000) found, through grounded theory analysis, that high-risk youth gave pro-social justifications for conforming to peer expectations, thus providing a constructive resolution to the dilemma,

By exploiting opportunities available to them through the peer group, high-risk youths challenge the stigmatizing labels assigned to them by their families and community. As they participate with peers in the creation of self-definitions, they move from feelings of worthlessness and disempowerment to confidence and well-being.
In sum, peer pressure was revealed to be a myth that enables adults to explain youths' troubling behaviors. Rather, the high-risk adolescents in the present study indicated that adoption of the behavior and appearance of peers was a consciously employed strategy to enhance personal and social power. (Ungar, 2000, p. 176)

It then becomes increasingly difficult to deter those students from their peer involvement due to the positive aspects of the individuals continued rebellion.

Ungar (2000) identified three developmental stages that adolescents gradually evolve toward "increased power and self-expression in their interactions with peers, family members and others in the community" (p. 172). The first stage is gaining a stigmatizing label due to association with a particular peer group. The second stage involves the ability to act appropriately in the context of the varying groups of people they interrelate with (e.g., peers, their religious group, adults). Typically they "act out" more at home. The third stage is reached as they gain the confidence to begin defining themselves (as opposed to succumbing to perceived expectations of others), which is accepted by peers, family, and others in the community (Ungar, 2000, p. 173).

This is one of the few studies I found that documents the "positive" aspects of peer pressure associated with high-risk behavior. Although the general public might not view some of the participants' responses to peer pressure as positive, the peer group satisfies social needs for those individuals. The educational implications of this study support schools networking with community agencies and organizations,
which involve at-risk youth in positive associations with peers, to fulfill voids that are present in their lives.

Peer pressure has been found to evoke negative internal emotions (Lashbrook, 2000) and previous research has shown that emotions play an important role in processes of judgment and decision-making (Forgas, 1991a). The following two inquiries focus on how emotions affect decision-making.

Duryea’s (1984) study included 43 ninth graders from Montana and New York (no demographic information) who filled out questionnaires after reading a short scenario involving drinking and driving. The participants were timed to find out how long it would take to make their decision. Regionally, Duryea found no significant differences between the types of choices the two groups of adolescents made.

Those students who made a low risk, health-promoting decision took less time to do so than did those who chose risky choices. These findings are interesting. Adolescents who make risky choices are often viewed as being dangerously impulsive. Perhaps the adolescents who chose health-promoting options made their decisions in less time due to participants having previously thought or talked about a situation, which was similar to the scenario they were presented with in the study. The students were then asked if they would make the same decision under stress. Thirty-six percent of the students who originally made a health-promoting decision indicated that they would probably have made a more risky decision under stress (Duryea, 1984, p. 10). I am very skeptical about the validity of those results as it
would be difficult for anyone to be certain about what they would do in a hypothetical situation. However, the results implicate the benefits of discussing high-risk behaviors with adolescents and encouraging a reflective approach for students in health education.

Ganzel (1999), like O’Brien and Bierman (1988), felt that there needed to be empirical evidence with adolescent participants. He conducted his study using 7th through 12th graders and adults. The subjects completed decision tasks on a computer after viewing short video clips to manipulate their mood.

Ganzel found that females in negative moods took more time to make decisions than females in good moods. There was no significant difference in the time it took males to make a decision, regardless of their mood. This may be due to the fact that the videotapes selected had more effect on females than on males (Ganzel, 1999, p. 305). However, it makes me question the validity of quantitative methods in past studies, measuring characteristics like emotions that are unobservable and difficult to quantify. It is extremely difficult to trigger negative internal emotions during the collecting of quantitative data in order to measure effectiveness of decision-making in the presence of peer pressure. Although, many of the variables looked at in this study bore out evidence that was inconclusive, nevertheless, Ganzel (1999) did find that at least among adolescent females mood does play a role. This information is pertinent to my own study, as perceived peer pressure can evoke strong emotions and alter subjects’ moods, thus potentially hindering effective decision-making.
Teaching Adolescent Decision-Making

The Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine conducted a workshop in January 1998 entitled, Adolescent Decision Making: Implications for Prevention Programs (Fischhoff et al., 1999). The workshop brought together professionals who were actively involved in adolescent decision making as researchers, policy makers and service providers in an effort to:

(1) identify and discuss the major findings from the last decade of research on adolescent decision making, particularly as they relate to high-risk behavior among adolescents; (2) discuss research on efforts to intervene in adolescent high-risk behaviors; and (3) highlight the implications of this research for interventions to reduce high-risk behavior among the nation's youth, particularly in the areas of substance abuse and sexuality. (Fischhoff et al., p. 2)

In the summary of this workshop, the consensus was that there is still a lot of need for continued research; however, some valuable insights were gleaned from the proceedings. First, there is a difference between what I call "cognitive decision making" involving a problem that at teenager can work out relatively dispassionately ("What shall I wear today?" may cause the wearer to evaluate the weather, what color the individual prefers to wear, what someone else may wear, or when the last time and/or place was that a particular item was worn), and "decision making under
duress”, navigating through emotionally charged social situations where mood swings, peer pressure, perceived expectations and lack of previous experience color the decision. “During adolescence, there is an increasing capacity for abstract reasoning, …systematic reasoning, and a growing capacity for probabilistic reasoning.” (Fischoff et al., 1999, p. 6), thus teenagers have the mental capacity to learn effective decision making skills. Adolescents are more likely than adults to experience “frequent, strong emotions” (Fischoff et al., 1999, p.14), which are a hindrance to effective decision-making.

Reed Larson (Fischoff et al., 1999), professor of human and community development and psychology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, noted during the Board on Children, Youth, and Families workshop, “Adolescents would be taught about the ways in which emotions can affect their thinking and therefore, their behavior. Learning to recognize the effects of emotion might help some young people make better decisions” (p.14).

Sullivan (1998) examined the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992; Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 1997, as cited in Sullivan, 1998), which described the progression of five stages (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance) necessary to alter ones behavior. The author related and applied the model to the field of health education. Sullivan (1998) believes that if students are taught to understand the stages of behavior change, they will be better prepared for the challenges and perseverance that it takes to succeed in
altering their behavior. Understanding that behavior is a learned response to “triggers” (many of which involve perceived peer pressure) and that change will occur only through active problem solving and planning helps students to “avoid two common problems: rushing to premature action or indefinitely substituting thinking, talking, and learning about a problem for acting to change a problem” (Sullivan, 1998, p. 4). She believes that the best time to target and also teach behavior change is in junior high school, as this is a time when students are given more liberty to make their own choices and also are becoming increasingly exposed to behaviors, which may be health-risky. Sullivan (1998) acknowledges that only a small percentage of any group is ready for change at a given time, and that is why educators need to be prepared to use a variety of methods that modify cognition, feeling, and actions (Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994, as cited in Sullivan, 1998, p. 25).

I believe that Sullivan (1998) contributes some thought-provoking concepts to the field of health education in that many health-promoting programs stop short after teaching decision-making. In essence, if we teach students to make good decisions for themselves, our work is done. This is shortsighted, especially in terms of at-risk students, who may already have developed unhealthy coping mechanisms, both individually and in conjunction with peers. Sullivan lists self-monitoring, effective goal setting, relapse prevention skills, assertiveness skills, and counterconditioning (Sullivan, 1998, p. 4) as additional components to be considered.

Considerable evidence supported the view that children can acquire effective decision-making skills through classroom-based, purposeful interactions. Elias and
Kress (1994) broke decision-making skills down into three areas: using self-control skills; using social awareness and group participation skills; and using critical thinking skills for decision-making and problem-solving. They also felt that since decision-making is such a strong component in the “educated” person, it should be taught “across the curriculum” during the middle school years rather than being treated as a separate entity. In their opinion, “Children are unlikely to retain and use information conveyed solely through formal lessons. They need opportunities for reinforcement and practice” (Elias & Kress, 1994, p. 63). Therefore, it is not enough just to teach the necessary skills, but to also have the students actively engaged utilizing those skills among their peers.

Elias and Kress (1994) believe that we, as teachers, should take the middle school standards concerning developing critical thinking skills, a step further, to include developing decision-making capabilities. Traditionally, the teaching of decision-making has been left up to the health educator, if at all. The authors’ rationale is that students “need to become skilled at reasoned disagreement, negotiation, and compromise as methods of solving problems when their own needs or interests conflict with those of others...such qualities are essential to our survival.” (Battistich et al., 1992 as cited in Elias & Kress, 1994, p. 62)

In the article, Elias and Kress (1994) advocate a three-part framework for structuring the teaching of decision-making: 1) using self-control skills; 2) using social awareness and group participation skills; and 3) using critical thinking skills for decision-making and problem solving (Fig. 1, p. 63). They cited previous
Peer Pressure at an Alternative High School

empirical research that supported their view (Elias & Clabby, 1989 as cited in Elias & Kress, 1994). The research showed that children who were exposed to programs of social decision-making approaches,

were more sensitive to others' feelings, had a better understanding of the consequences of their behavior, were seen by their teachers as displaying more positive prosocial behavior, (and) displayed lower that expected levels of antisocial, self-destructive, and socially disordered behavior. (Elias & Kress, 1994, p. 65)

Being a professional who has taught decision-making for a number of years, I wholeheartedly agree with Elias and Kress (1994). Middle school students are increasingly exposed to and confronted with situations that require more mature decision-making practice in America today. These decisions have the potential of propelling them into irreversible consequences that, had they had better decision-making tools ahead of time, they might have avoided. The point that was made concerning generalizations of skills through application in academic subjects was well taken. I believe decision-making to be a valuable tool in all subject areas. Indeed, our democratic society depends upon a well educated population who understand the benefits and limits of freedom (pros, cons, respecting differing viewpoints, etc.) If we look at recent trends in teaching best practice methods, we find the focus shifting toward the student taking more and more responsibility for their own education. I think it would be difficult to utilize best practice methods
without promoting good decision-making skills at the same time. In that sense, I do not believe we need to make radical changes in the present way we conduct our classes, but it does require actively keeping decision-making skills and peer grouping in mind as we design our lessons.

The authors advocate the need for parents to reinforce the decision-making practices that are being learned at school. “At home, social decision-making is carried out by parents as part of their everyday parenting responsibilities…” (Elias & Kress, 1994, p. 63). I found this to be the most difficult challenge outlined in the article because every parent has a different attitude about the level of autonomy they are willing to give their child. Also, many parental attitudes are based on religious and cultural values. However, I do find the idea of offering parenting workshops free to the students’ families a great opportunity for schools to increase parental support, build a stronger sense of “community”, and improve understanding of expectations between school and parents.

Lastly, I was disappointed to find so little written about valuing the students’ ideas and viewpoints. In my opinion, in order for a decision-making lesson to have relevance for the students, they need to feel that it is indeed up to them to decide. I believe many teachers (and parents) fear taking this approach because adults are afraid of the decisions that teenagers are capable of making! However, if teachers shy away from this aspect of the decision-making lesson, I feel that many students will not fully grasp the concept of the responsibility or gravity of their decisions. Restated, if we are only going to find “acceptable” decisions to be acknowledged in
class, then the students really are not leaning how to make decisions; they are learning to “spout out” acceptable answers.
Methodology

Design

Although there is a considerable body of empirical research that has identified adolescent peer relationships as a primary factor involved in high-risk adolescent behavior, I found that only a low percentage of them conducted studies using at-risk participants. Students in an alternative high school setting have fallen outside the norm of the school system expectations for student behavior and/or performance, and pose a number of challenges for the school system. The positive aspect of their presence is that they are within the school system. This is the 11th hour for most students who basically have three options: 1) use this opportunity to get back on track so that they can eventually receive a high school diploma; 2) continue previous patterns of behavior and performance which will lead to one of two options, dropping out and/or 3) facing legal consequences for past behavior. This particular alternative high school is designed in order to enhance the potential for students to adopt the first option.

This study concerns youth in a Southern California alternative high school. The purpose of this study is to examine how students view peer pressure, overt or perceived, and the motives and reasons behind why they respond positively/negatively to those pressures.

Through grounded theory analysis, I will examine assigned student writing, collect self-reflecting views on peer pressure, both obvious and perceived, and look
for emerging themes in the student writing. I will also examine what current
literature tells us about peer pressure as well as components that are present in
successful decision-making lessons.

The high school setting.

The school site is 28 miles outside of the downtown area of San Diego,
California, in a community with a population of approximately 350,000 residents.
The mission of the school is to prepare students for high school graduation (through
individualized learning plans combined with work experience), and to help them to
become responsible caring and contributing members of the community. The school
enrolls approximately 4% of the high school students in the district (340 students).
The majority of students come from middle to lower middle class families, whereas
the majority of students in the comprehensive high schools in the district are from
middle to upper middle class families. Nationalities/races represented at the
alternative high school are as follows (percentages for the entire district are in
parenthesis): 70% (70%) of the students are Caucasian, 15% (7.6%) Latino, 4.5%
(7.6%) Filipino, 3.6% (3.3%) African-American, 3% (10%) Asian, 1.2% Native
American, .9% Pacific Islander, and 1.5% (1.7% includes Native American and
Pacific Islander) other. Seventy percent of the school population is male, 30%
female.

The classroom teacher in this study has a Masters of Education degree with
eight years of teaching experience at the middle school level, and this is his seventh
year at this high school teaching English. This teacher will be henceforth referred to
as “Mr. Wright”. The students at this high school have already attended a traditional middle school and/or high school, but have not been successful academically and/or behaviorally. During an interview, Mr. Wright told me, “One of the things I find about so many of the kids once they get here, they’ve been through support groups; they’ve been through peer mediation; they’ve been through counseling and they’re so savvy to that, when we offer those things here, they really don’t want to take advantage of them because they’ve been through it before.” The past interventions have been documented in the cum file that came with them from their previous school. To remove them and place them in similar alternate situation is not the answer. Removing them from an environment that may have triggered certain behaviors may indeed help. However, if the past traditional support systems failed, then more functional support systems need to be designed that are better able to serve the needs of at-risk youth.

Students report to homeroom at the beginning of the school day for one hour. Each homeroom teacher also acts as their guidance counselor and has 15 to 20 students. During homeroom the students have an opportunity to work on homework, get extra help in subjects that they are experiencing difficulty, and discuss problems/challenges they face day to day. After homeroom, as each student moves from class to class, each teacher initials a record book signifying that the student has met performance and behavior expectations. All students are dismissed from school one-half hour early if they have met these expectations in every class. If they have not, they return to homeroom for the last half hour to receive more help in subject
areas that they are experiencing difficulty, and/or to discuss their behavior and any related problems with their homeroom teacher (also acting as counselor). The aim is not only to keep students in check, but also to help students to adopt habits of self-reflection. That is why I chose this particular alternative high school. I felt that not only were these students at-risk, but they also might be better able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about peer pressure due to being encouraged to verbalize about themselves personally on a daily basis.

In addition to the above, there are several programs in place to provide supplemental support educationally and personally.

*Role models.*

I asked the English teacher about the families of his students. "Well for the most part they are from family situations where they do not have positive role models, and therefore, they make decisions based on what they see going on around them." I found his statement concerning decision-making to be true in the two following studies, which found positive relationships between the health behavior of parents and those of their children.

Fergusson et al. (1995) found that there was a positive correlation of cigarette smoking parents with both early cigarette smoking and cigarette smoking peer association during adolescence (p. 658). Conversely, this study also pointed out the positive influences of non-smoking parents, and non-smoking peers.

In a similar investigation conducted by Iannotti et al. (1996), the purpose was to associate attitudes, and use (abuse) of alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana, with
perceptions of the attitudes of family and friends and perceptions of their use. They found strong correlations between perceived family use and past use among adolescents and pre-adolescents (for both use and non-use).

Both studies indicate a need for role models who practice health-promoting and socially acceptable behaviors. In efforts to provide students with additional positive role models, this alternative high school provides some of its students with mentors from the community. The English teacher informed me, “Volunteers from the community get a student, either a junior or sophomore, and they stay with that student, hopefully, until they graduate. They are there for emotional and educational support. They come once every week for an hour and work with only their student. It may be during homeroom, but they may pull a student out of a class if it’s more conducive to the mentor’s schedule. It’s just another adult to develop a positive relationship with, who can help guide them.”

Support groups.

Mr. Wright mentioned the presence of support groups on campus as another avenue for students to work out their problems. The presence of support groups is supported by a study conducted by Haynie et al. (1997) who examined the decision-making skills of 78 inner city 6th and 7th grade students in order to draw together some suggestions for violence prevention programs. Likewise, most of the subjects chose to work out their problems in conjunction with their peers (62%), not with the aid of adults (p. 168). The support groups on campus provide students with a healthy
format in which to practice problem solving and conflict resolution among their peers.

Participants

Seven participants, four males and three females, were included in the study. They were students from San Diego County who attended an alternative education high school ranging in age from 17 to 18 years old. The participants came from families that ranged from low to middle class. One participant was Filipino, one Armenian, and five were Caucasian. The participants were selected on the basis of accessibility, convenience and willingness to participate in the study. The adult participant, Mr. Wright, was the regular classroom teacher for the English classes chosen.

Materials

As part of a qualitative inquiry, the student participants were assigned to respond to two questions on peer pressure. Question 1 (What is peer pressure, and how does it affect you/your peers?) was assigned on October 24, 2003, and Question 2 (After looking at the responses to Question 1, it was noticed that several students responded that they were not now, or they have never been susceptible to peer pressure. Is this possible?), was assigned on November 12, 2003. Extant data from cumulative folders were also used to gather important information for this study.

Procedure

Previous research (O'Brien & Bierman, 1988; Lashbrook, 2000; Giancola, 2000; Haynie et al., 1997) has been conducted in relatively similar formats to my own.
plan that I used and built upon to formulate my study. I used qualitative research
techniques to collect data (assigned writings and extant data), and information from
two interviews (one with the assistant principal, and one with the English teacher at
the alternative high school, grades 9 through 12) in San Diego County to discover
which class curricula addressed peer pressure and decision-making.

Parent permission slips were sent home with the students three weeks before
the data were collected (Appendix B). Participants included those students with
signed permission slips who had completed the assignment from Mr. Wright’s two
English classrooms. All students from the two classes (38) were assigned to write
about the topic of peer pressure (A second assignment was given after reviewing
results from the first assignment to provide clarification). The assignment was an
open-ended question concerning students’ views on peer pressure (What is peer
pressure, and how does it affect you/your peers?). On average it took 30 minutes to
complete the written assignment. Names were cut off and Mr. Wright wrote
corresponding numbers on the back of each participant’s paper before being turned
over to the researcher/author. The researcher/author then assigned fictitious names to
each of the papers (responses).

The students were asked to freely express their ideas and were told that there
were no right or wrong answers. Data was collected during the months of October
and November 2003. During the two-month period, the author employed a teacher
action research methodology, acting as the researcher; the “teacher” was the present
English classroom teacher, Mr. Wright, at the alternative high school selected for this
study. Analysis of the data was guided by grounded theory in which emerging themes were identified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This research cannot be generalized to other settings, as it was done at one alternative education high school, but its information could serve to inform researchers, to stimulate more studies, and as a heuristic tool for future studies.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from student responses to two questions/prompts concerning peer pressure (Question 1: What is peer pressure and how does it affect you/your peers? Question 2: After looking at the responses to Question 1, it was noticed that several students responded that they were not now, or they have never been susceptible to peer pressure. Is this possible?).

The written student responses were evaluated using a qualitative approach. The writings were cut apart to separate topics, patterns or themes that indicated students' attitudes and understanding of peer pressure. This data was “massaged” by looking for categories and properties (Dick, 2002) in which they could be grouped. The topics, patterns or themes emerged from the data grouping activity.

Therefore, data analysis was conducted using the comparative/contrastive procedures, which started with what was available in current literature and practice, treated it as data, then adjusted theories, models and ideations as new data was collected and analyzed. This approach helped to develop grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that built upon and expanded previous ideations and hypotheses.
Question 1

Data were collected from an open-ended question to investigate how adolescents view peer pressure (Question 1 (10/24/03): What is peer pressure, and how does it affect you/your peers?). Nine themes emerged from "massaging" the data using the comparative/contrastive analysis procedure: (1) exposure to the media (TV, fashion, music, and advertising); (2) inexperience or ignorance combined with being exposed to so much (cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, and sex); (3) trying to "find themselves"; (4) wanting to fit in; (5) wanting to be "cool"; (6) and association with friends. In contrary responses, some students thought that they were (7) not susceptible to peer pressure, while others acknowledged that peer pressure is present during the entire lifetime. It was also expressed that (8) "positive" peer pressure is a good thing, and (9) looking up to others (having a role model/anti-model) helps to reinforce positive peer pressure (Appendix A). Therefore, peer pressure is not limited to pressure, overt or perceived, from the adolescent’s peer group. Instead, it involves any influence that has the potential of affecting the adolescent’s view of peer expectations. Lashbrook (2000) defined peer pressure as, "a specific instance of social influence, which typically produces conformity to a particular way of acting or thinking" (p. 748). The first six themes above illustrate what peer pressure is according to the participants in this inquiry. The names of the participants are fictitious.
Exposure to media.

As children grow up in our Western culture, they are increasingly confronted with messages on how they should act and what they should be doing. Television, the music and fashion industries, and advertising in all forms, provide a very superficial and unrealistic view of the world. Since the primary purpose of media is commerce, young minds are bombarded with the idea that their personal “image” can be purchased, and that image will be the answer to their problems (Worsnop, 1999).

One of the participants, Amber, linked peer pressure to the increasing barrage of media messages. I sensed her feeling of being unprepared and overwhelmed:

Peer pressure plays a big role in young peoples lives. I see that peer pressure affects middle school students and high school students the most. Once students enter high school, the peer pressure expands and gets worse. In high school the list of things that you are peer pressured into gets bigger. On campus, clothes, music, situations-TV and MTV, and our youth is what peer pressure mostly consists of. Away from school the peer pressure turns into sex, drugs, and alcohol.

Amber felt that being exposed to fashions, music, and television affected her perception of peer expectations. Pleydon (2001) found that “delinquents experience higher levels of perceived peer pressure and slightly less communication in their peer groups when compared to non-delinquents” (p.194). The delinquents in her study were females from a secure youth custody facility, and although the level of
misbehavior among her participants was much higher than in my own inquiry, the findings can shed some light on these results. During a preliminary interview with Mr. Wright, he acknowledged that many of his students were “from family situations where they do not have positive role models, and therefore, they make decisions based on what they see going on around them”. If a student’s feelings, ethics, and customs are not being addressed or supported by their environment, misbehavior is more likely to occur (Giancola, 2000). This research offers insight as to why at-risk youth are more likely to engage in high-risk behavior than other students.

In addition, for Amber, peer pressure increased in high school. John, however, felt that peer pressure actually decreased:

_Younger people are a lot more susceptible to peer pressure because they really aren’t old enough compared to someone in high school than in late elementary or early middle school to know exactly what the negative side affects of the drug is on their life, their family, or their health._

Berndt (1979) established that, “the influence of peers increases relative to other sources (e.g., parents) from childhood to adolescence, and appears to peak, at least for antisocial behavior, in the ninth grade” (as cited in Lashbrook, 2000, p. 748).

It can be inferred from John’s statement that greater knowledge of the consequences of high-risk behavior made it easier to ignore peer pressure.
(2) Inexperience or ignorance.

Several students commented on how inexperience and/or ignorance affected their sensitivity to peer pressure. The participants’ writings pointed out two components of inexperience: being unfamiliar with the circumstances, and being unaccustomed to internal emotions concerning those circumstances. Ignorance referred to not being aware of the risks involved, or not believing that risks are likely.

John’s statement provided support for addressing the consequences of high-risk behaviors in middle school. Elias and Kress (1994) targeted the middle school level for teaching social decision-making, including health risks. The authors deemed the middle school years to be a pivotal time period for children. During early adolescence, children are gradually allowed to practice greater autonomy by making decisions concerning peers, school, and health. However they do not have the maturity to appreciate the magnitude of those decisions (p. 64). Maria echoed this sentiment by alluding to the need for greater awareness:

*Young people are easily influenced because they are not old enough to think for themselves. They are not mature enough and they are not experienced well. They have barely gone through problems so they pretty much don't know what is going on.*

Amber felt that the combination of the students’ environment and lack of experience caused them to be more prone to peer pressure:

*Peer pressure is what society has brought us to and ignorance is the key that opens the door to peer pressure.*
(3) *Trying to “find themselves”.*

Two students spoke of the struggle to “find themselves”: to decide which peer groups they wanted to identify with (e.g., preps, jocks, skaters, gang bangers) and would accept them, and to form attitudes, and personality traits that they themselves are comfortable with.

In terms of the individual, Ungar (2000) states that there are three stages in the process of identity construction among at-risk youth. The first stage is gaining a stigmatizing label due to association with a particular peer group. The second stage involves the ability to act appropriately in the context of the varying groups of people they interrelate with (e.g., peers, their religious group, adults) throughout the day. Their personality traits, roles, and even language adapt to each situation. However, in each situation, the full spectrum of their behavior remains hidden. Typically, they “act out” more at home, exhibiting violence toward themselves or others. The third stage is reached as they gain the confidence to begin defining themselves (as opposed to succumbing to perceived expectations of others), which is accepted by peers, family, and others in the community (Ungar, 2000, p. 173).

Nicole wrote of adolescents trying to “find themselves” from outside influences rather than from within:

*Adolescents are more prone to peer pressure because they are young and highly impressionable and have not yet found themselves, therefore their peers rather than their individuality easily mold them.*
Amber’s comments correspond with Corsaro’s (1992) theory of interpretive reproduction, which states that the peer culture is produced through a creative process of framing, contextualization and embellishment (pp. 167-168). In other words, children use the working knowledge of cultural routines, size up a situation, while aware of cognitive and behavioral elements, and exaggerate and elaborate previous actions:

\[ I \text{ believe that high school students are more susceptible to peer pressure because it's a time in our lives that we are trying to find ourselves and figure out who we are, and what we see, is what we want to be, especially if we like what we see. } \]

These statements support the need for positive role models. Looking up to others, as an aspect of peer pressure is presented later in this chapter.

\[ (4) \text{ Wanting to fit in. } \]

O’Brien and Bierman (1998) found that older adolescents’ who voiced their thoughts concerning peer acceptance (fitting in with peers) indicated their fear of rejection. Lashbrook (2000) later observed that fear of rejection was among the negative internal emotions (e.g., ashamed, isolated, inadequate, confused) adolescent subjects experienced before conforming in their actions. Furby and Beyth-Maron (1990) established that adolescents weigh the risk of peer rejection much more heavily than do adults. Some of the teenage participants in Pleydon’s (2001) study agreed with the statement, “I sometimes do things because my close friends are doing
them” (p. 198), indicating their desire to blend in and be accepted by their peers. In my own study, John wrote:

Most of the youth are just worried about fitting in so they can be accepted.

Nicole agreed:

They see what their friends are doing and they think that they should do the same to better fit in.

Their observations support Kobus’ (1998) findings concerning peers and adolescent smoking. The participants’ smoking behavior reflected their own perceived ideas that smoking would help them to fit in socially and enhance their popularity.

(5) Wanting to be “cool”.

Wanting to be “cool” refers to desiring to look and/or act in a manner that will be viewed as favorable by those peers that the adolescent wishes to impress. Jeremy wrote:

There are some times when I see a band or something wearing something cool I will get it, not because they are wearing it, just because I think its cool.

Jeremy noted that he purchased items to wear because of his own opinion, but did not admit that exposure to the media had any influence on how he defined “cool”. Kobus (1998) stated that, “the mechanisms of peer influence appear to be more covert and subtle than is thought commonly” (p. 50). Much of the time, adolescents do not even realize how peer pressure plays a role, unconsciously, in their every day decision-making practice. Therefore Jeremy is affected by outside influences
concerning his style of dress, but does not make the connection that those influences are responsible at least in part, for his attitudes.

The two previous themes, wanting to fit in and wanting to be “cool” seem to support Elkind’s (1967) view of imaginary audience in that the students perceived that others were constantly watching and evaluating their behavior; however, the very presence of imaginary audience may signal a developmental stage in the students’ cognitive development (Lapsley, 1993). If this is true, further research needs to be conducted on how adolescents move through this stage toward gaining a more realistic perspective.

(6) Association with friends.

Association with friends includes the peers that an individual interacts with that serve as a model for their behavior, and attitudes (Kandel & Andrews, 1987 as cited in Berndt, 1995), or that enhances the individual’s self esteem and social understanding (Sullivan, 1953 as cited in Berndt, 1995). Regardless of whether or not adolescents consciously realize that peer pressure due to association with friends plays a role in their own lives, they are aware of how it affects others. Amber acknowledged that everyone, through the act of socializing with others, feels peer pressure:

*I am not saying that teens are the only ones that deal with peer pressure, older citizens also find their own peer pressure issues.*
Nicole communicated her observations on negative features of peer pressure:

*Many others are very much pressured by their peers in a variety of ways.*

*Their friends will influence them to do drugs have sex, break the law, or a number of other bad decisions.*

She recognized that this was due in some way to the influence of friends.

Maria, however, consciously realized that she was susceptible to being swayed by her friends’ behavior:

*I try not to hang around the wrong crowd because they might try and influence me in some way. I only let good and successful people influence me.*

Due to Maria’s clarity concerning outside influences, she also understood how to avoid being swayed, and that it was her own choice.

*(7) Not susceptible to peer pressure.*

I found it intriguing that although every participant agreed that peer pressure plays a role in adolescence, some students asserted that it never/no longer applied to them. Ungar (2000) explained that each member of the peer group has personal power and casual observers do not notice the subtle individual differences. Outsiders center their attention on the group’s conformity whereas insiders focus on each member’s individuality (p. 172). This explains why some students were apparently blind to how peer pressure or peer influence affected them.

Maria wrote:

*Peer pressure hasn’t always been a problem for me. I think for myself and do not let others run my life.*
Maria recognized that she had experienced peer pressure in the past, but has come to realize that how she responds to perceived pressure is her decision.

Jeremy provided a similar statement:

*Peer pressure hasn’t really affected me all that much. I like to make my own choices and follow my own rules.*

O’Brien & Bierman (1988) found that the peer group provided preadolescents and adolescents with companionship, stimulation, and support. I would hypothesize that these needs are being met in Jeremy’ life, thus he feels freer to exercise more independence. This hypothesis is supported by Ungar’s (2000) process of identity construction discussed earlier. The third and final stage is reached as the individual gains the confidence to begin defining themselves (as opposed to succumbing to perceived expectations of others), which is accepted by peers, family, and others in the community (Ungar, 2000, p. 173).

Nicole expressed a comparable sentiment, however, she commented:

*Peer pressure has never really played a huge role in my life. I feel that I have a good head on my shoulders so I am not susceptible to it.*

Perhaps Nicole was closer to having “found herself”, but then again, perhaps she had responded to peer pressure at times when she had not consciously realized it.

Tom not only denied that peer pressure has had any effect on him, but also wrote about having manipulated his peers:

*I don’t believe that I have ever in my life been susceptible to peer pressure. I have done a lot of bad things in my life and one of those things has landed me*
here at this school. Making bad decisions has been a big part of my life and I didn’t have friends to pressure me into it, I have pressured them.

Tom had played a rebellious role and was adamant that it had nothing to do with others’ expectations. Jessor (1975) established that adolescents who engage in high-risk behaviors perceived a high level of support from their friends (as cited in Benthin et al., 1993, p. 165). Tom may have felt that his peer group looked up to him for leadership, and by continuing to engage in high-risk behavior, the peer support would also. Haynie et al. (1997) noted that some subjects provided, what the researchers viewed as positive (reputation building, self-pride, and self-protection), consequences to fighting that would probably be at odds with the goals of school administration (p. 168). Ungar’s (2000) participants described peer groups as “forums in which to enhance personal power through the assertion of both an individual and a collective identity” (p. 172). Tom’s continued manipulation of others maintains his sense of power.

(8) “Positive” peer pressure.

“Positive” peer pressure is the process of being influenced into making choices that have a greater potential of resulting in consequences that not only the individual, but also society in general, will view as positive. Those consequences will have a greater likelihood of promoting health, financial benefits, and pride. Maria asserted:

Many people see peer pressure as a negative due to stereotypes. Drugs and alcohol come to mind when people think of peer pressure. But I myself think
only of positive peer pressure. Negative peer pressure won't get you anywhere but bring you problems.

Maria provides evidence of weighing various consequences before making a decision. Tom indicated how he has learned from past mistakes, and can act as a change agent for others by exerting peer pressure:

Now that I am a changed person I do believe that I deal with a lot of peer pressure, but the positive kind. I may have some negative now and then but for the most part I am the one who is pressuring people to make the right choices. I have told people that I have already been down that path and I don't want to see any more people lower their standards for a “quick fix.”

Like Jeremy, Tom also seems to be entering Ungar’s (2000) third stage in the process of identity construction. He has found that making the “right choices” is much more acceptable to his family and the community, and is also valued among his peers.

9) Positive/negative role models.

Although the participants were asked to write about peer pressure, they indicated how role models/anti-models had an effect on how they responded to peer pressure. Lefkowitz (1989) found that interested adults were an important factor for youths who overcame the attractions of street life and now lead successful, productive lives. The format for the mentoring program at the alternative high school in this study was based in part, on his research.
Peer Pressure at an Alternative High School

Maria expressed that because she has had a positive role model, she is more likely adopt behaviors that enhance the likelihood that her life will become comparable to that of her role model’s:

*I only let good and successful people influence me. Like my aunt for example, she is a nurse. She lives a good, happy, and stable life. One reason why I want to be like her is because her profession is pretty cool. Nurses or any profession in the medical field is in demand right now. So, anywhere I go, it won’t be hard for me to find a job. That is why I just want to be like my aunt.*

Jeremy, on the other hand, has had an anti-model. Because of the negative consequences that his anti-model has experienced, Jeremy has learned what behaviors to avoid:

*The only person I really look up too is my older brother. He has made stupid choices that have gotten him in some messy situations and set paths for me to know what not to do. He has also made me think about not falling into peer pressure because of where it has gotten him.*

In my own experience teaching decision-making, I found perception of risk to be difficult to overcome. Many students were unimpressed by mortality and morbidity statistics of high-risk behaviors. Videotapes of adolescents coping with consequences were more effective. However, students with friends or family dealing with those same consequences realized the irreversible damage that their classmates could not. Jeremy’s decisions now reflect what he has seen happen to his brother.
Question 2

Although I found studies that I could relate to the theme of *not susceptible to peer pressure*, I did not find any previous research centered on it. My inquiry on peer pressure began with the questions and reflections I experienced after my interactions with one of my students (Heather). Her cigarette smoking started soon after forming a new peer group with girls who smoked. Nevertheless, Heather felt that the behavior of her peers had not entered into her decision to smoke. In order to explore this topic further, I asked the classroom teacher to give the students in my study another writing assignment. The responses were consistent with their responses to Question 1, but provided more clarity.

Mr. Wright posed Question 2 on November 12, 2003 (*Question 2 (11/12/03)*):

*After looking at the responses to Question 1, it was noticed that several students responded that they were not now, or they have never been susceptible to peer pressure. Is this possible?*

Amber had previously acknowledged many different types of peer pressure, and that it affects everyone. Her response to Question 2 was unswerving:

*I disagree with this statement, “They were uninfluenced by peer pressure.” Everyone is or will be affected by peer pressure. There are many different kinds and ways that peer pressure takes action. I believe that everyone is affected or has been affected by peer pressure.*

Amber had pointed out in her first assignment that exposure to the media influences everyone in how they dress, talk, and act. It also affects the actions of
others, our peers. However, Ungar (2000) illustrated that as an individual matures through their social relationships, they gradually gain the confidence and support from others, to act more independently.

Jeremy, who had discussed his brother as an anti-model, indicated through both assignments that his perception of peer pressure is the traits you see in others that you try to emulate or avoid:

No, everyone whether they know it or not is influenced by peer pressure.

Whether it's by their idols, siblings, everyone has something they admire so everyone is influenced in ways.

Jeremy felt that since all people, no matter what their age, admire someone, then through emulating the role model's traits, the influence is manifested.

John, who blamed his own response to peer pressure for deciding to smoke cigarettes and marijuana, provided a thought provoking statement that was consistent with my own interpretation of conversations I had had with Heather:

Well I really can't give a yes or no to that question because some people aren't really as influenced as others. But it's hard to tell if you are even being influenced when you are.

John realized the self-deception many adolescents experience. Ungar (2000) reasoned that "insiders" in the peer group may be so focused on individual differences that they dismiss similarities. However, Kobus (1998) cautions researchers about overestimating peer influence. The desire to practice autonomy may also be a factor (p. 50).
Tom was adamant in both writings that he had never, nor ever would “fall for” peer pressure:

*Yes I do agree that I am not susceptible to peer pressure. I have often been the cause of peer pressure not the one falling for it.*

Again, Tom's continued manipulation of others maintains his sense of power. One can sense that Tom equates admission of peer influence with weakness.

I did not have a response from Eric on Question 1, however he provided a glimpse into the lives of himself and his peers at the alternative high school in his reaction to Question 2:

*When you analyze an answer, analyze who you’re asking. These are people who have lost something to not being themselves. Therefore their view of peer pressure may be much more drastic than academic distinctions.*

I believe Eric is saying that he and his peers have a different perspective from students at a standard comprehensive high school. The students at this alternative high school have already attended a traditional middle school and/or high school, but have not been successful academically and/or behaviorally. As their English teacher, Mr. Wright, stated, “Individuals at (this high school) are individuals who don’t fit into the box”. Inglesias (2002) stated in his thesis on students in alternative education that they “have experienced alienation and have resisted change, thus resulting in their referral...Many students despise the authority figures involved in their lives and hope to be free of them when they finish their education” (p. 65). For them, resisting peer pressure involved rebelling against the norm, and in order for them to have been
successful in their home school they would have had to become something other than themselves.
Amplifying students’ voices on their perceptions and attitudes about peer pressure has provided insight into their perspective. The students provided evidence of factors that help to minimize peer influence, in addition to those that magnify it.

Many of the students in the present study have had previous run-ins with authority figures and resisted change, which has brought about their transfer to the alternative high school, and feelings of isolation. This may in part explain why they have a tendency to depend more on their peer group for support and direction than the average high school student would. Pleydon (2001) found that there was less communication and more perceived peer pressure in delinquent females as compared with non-delinquent females. Exposure to the media and the friends they associate with, coupled with their lack of experience (being unfamiliar with the circumstances, and being unaccustomed to internal emotions concerning those circumstances) in decision-making, ignorance of risks (not being aware of the risks involved, or not believing that risks are likely), and desire to be accepted (e.g., liked, looked up to, attractive, cool, popular) were the aspects of peer pressure that the students in this study felt were salient. The participants acknowledged that peer pressure influenced them to make decisions concerning high-risk behavior that they would not have made independently.

Peer pressure has been shown to be a prominent component in adolescent decision-making (Ianotti et al., 1996; Kobus, 1998; Fischhoff et al., 1999; Giancola,
Decisions that an individual makes have the potential for irreversible consequences. Children are increasingly exposed to high-risk situations in which there is little, if any, adult supervision. Benthin et al. (1993) listed risky driving, consumption of alcohol, drugs, and/or tobacco, and sexual behavior as among those activities that potentially do the greatest harm to our youth (p. 153). In addition to these factors, Fischhoff et al. (1999) discussed violence among adolescents as contributing to one of the leading causes of death in young people. The serious ramifications of the above activities have been the justification for the implementation of health-promoting programs in our schools.

If children are to experience healthy relationships and occupy meaningful and productive roles in society as adults, they...need to become skilled at reasoned disagreement, negotiation, and compromise as methods of solving problems when their own needs or interests conflict with those of others...such qualities are essential to our survival. The question, then, is not whether we must enhance children’s social competencies, but rather how to accomplish this goal. (Battistich et al., 1992 as cited in Elias & Kress, 1994, p. 62).

Our schools periodically stab at counteracting the consequences of high-risk behavior such as the rise in teen pregnancy, abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and the rise of violence by initiating special short-term programs. However, from my own experience, participation is hit-and-miss. At-risk students may not necessarily attend a given special program due to not being scheduled into a class in which the
program is presented, not obtaining the required parent permission, absenteeism, or being removed from the program as a result of behavior. Therefore the very courses that were designed to target many of the problems faced by at-risk students never reach those who need them most. The participants in this study were supposed to have already had exposure to sex education, substance abuse prevention, and conflict resolution programs but still felt ill-prepared in dealing with peer pressure and decision-making.

Mr. Wright’s comment that students are more prone to peer pressure if they come from families where they do not have positive role models was evident in the literature, as well as the students’ writing. If a student’s feelings, ethics, and customs are not being addressed or supported by their environment, misbehavior is more likely to occur (Giancola, 2000). This research offers insight as to why at-risk youth are more likely to engage in high-risk behavior than other students. It also indicates a need for positive role models.

In my own experience with Heather, I discussed with her that while she was beginning to form a new peer group with girls who smoked, she was also serving as a role model for others. Shortly afterward Heather told me that she no longer smoked and I believed her because she no longer had the telltale odor. About two months later, Heather came into my class beaming and cried, “Mrs. Farley, you were right! One of my friends just told me that she admired me for having the guts to quit. She said that she’s going to quit smoking too!” Students can be empowered to be dynamic role models for each other.
Recommendations

Being a professional who has taught decision-making for a number of years, I wholeheartedly agree with Elias and Kress (1994). Middle school and high school students are increasingly exposed to and confronted with situations that require more mature decision-making practice in America today. These decisions have the potential of propelling them into irreversible consequences that, had they had better decision-making tools ahead of time, they might have avoided. The point that was made concerning generalizations of skills through application in academic subjects was well taken. I believe decision-making to be a valuable tool in all subject areas. Education in America has concentrated on teaching individual skills that students will use in the future after graduation. This leaves them with no experience in actually applying those skills, and perhaps no concrete idea of how they might utilize them. If we look at recent trends in teaching best practice methods, we find the focus shifting toward the student taking more and more responsibility for their own education. I think it would be difficult to utilize best practice methods without promoting good decision-making skills at the same time. In that sense, I do not believe we need to make radical changes in the present trend, but it does require actively keeping decision-making skills and real-life applications in mind as we design our lessons.

Lee (1999) joined students from a high school in the Oakland Unified School District as co-researchers in drawing up recommendations for school reform. I have incorporated their input into my own recommendations for helping students develop life coping skills.
First, teachers need to become better role models for at-risk youth by getting to know students on an individual level, and becoming more encouraging and helpful to all students despite their academic or behavioral history.

Second, teachers need to make greater efforts in designing lessons that require students to plan courses of action in problem solving real-life situations, which involve the skills they have learned. This application will give students everyday practice in decision-making.

Third, teachers need to allow students more creativity in their responses, written assignments, projects, and assessments. Instead of looking for the correct answer, look for what is right in the answer the student supplied, and offer constructive feedback that explains how the student might improve. This gives students tangible practice in moving toward goals.

Ungar (2000) drew educational implications through his study of high-risk youth that support schools networking with community agencies and organizations, which involve at-risk youth in positive associations with peers, to fulfill voids that are present in their lives. The schools need to build a sense of community by collaborating with school staff, parents, students, and community agencies to expand the availability of interesting academic and social opportunities to at-risk students that will potentially increase their school involvement.

Giancola (2000) stated that we need to investigate how peer groups can be targeted to control and improve problem behavior” (p.35) by developing methods to promote interaction, negotiation, and socialization among a variety of peers.
Iannotti et al. (1996) cited previous research done by Botvin (1986), Flay (1985), and Murray, Johnson, Luepker, & Mittelmark (1984), which found that there was a need to promote interaction among a variety of peers and improve social influence skills thus focusing on positive aspects of peer pressure. Through their inquiry, the authors drew some implications for school-based intervention programs.

Social-influence skills interventions need to teach adolescents how to cope with an environment in which they correctly or incorrectly perceive family, friends, and their classmates to be using or accepting the use of abusable substances. (Iannotti et al., 1996, p. 629)

Iannotti et al. (1996) found that in almost all instances, perceived friends’ use was reported to be significantly higher than was self-reported, showing a discrepancy between perceived vs. actual occurrence. In essence, the concept of “everyone is doing it” is a self-deception that affects participation in high-risk behaviors.

In my own experience at the middle school level, I was aware of students’ increasing comfort level in discussing their more positive attitudes concerning a variety of risky behaviors as they continued to realize that many of their peers had opinions more in line with their own (as opposed to what they thought their peers’ opinions were). There are two points to be aware of here. The classroom teacher should encourage discussion and interaction with peers to help students distinguish between perception and reality well as facilitate awareness that a good deal of peer pressure originates from within themselves.
Teachers should incorporate the discussion of messages in the media as they relate to their lessons in efforts to help students develop more realistic perceptions.

Lastly, in order for discussions on peer pressure and decision-making lesson to have relevance for the students, valuing the students' ideas and viewpoints is critical. Fostering open and nonjudgmental conversations about what students may view as positive consequences of high-risk behaviors (Ungar, 2000), promotes realism and relevance, increasing classroom participation. Our professional attitudes in the classroom should reflect the position that we believe all students desire, and are capable of making decisions, to be healthy. Further, if we, as teachers shy away from this aspect of the decision-making lesson, I feel that many students will not fully grasp the concept of the responsibility or gravity of their decisions. Restated, if we are only going to find “acceptable” decisions to be acknowledged in class, then the students really are not learning how to make decisions; they are learning to spout out “acceptable” responses.

Future Research

Future research needs to be conducted to further investigate the stages of cognitive development, and how that relates to peer pressure. Knowledge is power, and if we can educate students about the developmental stages they are experiencing, I believe it will help illuminate the students' perspective on life.

The students in this study linked positive role models that they could identify with as being a strong component in their achievement motivation. There is a need for continued research in this area with at-risk youth.
Also needed is action research into teaching strategies that will help students distinguish between reality and perception, and develop better life coping skills.

*Limitations to the Study*

A primary limitation of this study is that the research is non-experimental and therefore explanations for the relationship between peer pressure and decision-making is potentially misleading. In other words, it is impossible to determine unequivocally whether peer pressure causes students to engage in high-risk behavior. Also, this study was limited in that it looked at just seven students out of two classrooms in an alternative high school out of multiple classrooms, and types of schools in which at-risk students attend throughout the country. It would be recommended to look at a greater variety of settings to produce a wider scope of how at-risk students view peer pressure.
Reference List


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Original post at: http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching_backgrounders/media_literacy/conceptual_framework_worsnop.cfm?RenderForPrint=1
Appendix A

Data Source: English Class Assignment Entries

Question 1 (10/24/03): Write down your thoughts about peer pressure.

Question 2 (11/12/03): After looking at the responses to Question 1, it was noticed that

several students responded that they were not now, or they have never been susceptible to peer pressure. Is this possible?

Nicole

10/24/03

Peer pressure has never really played a huge role in my life. I feel that I have a good head on my shoulders so I am not susceptible to it. Many others are very much pressured by their peers in a variety of ways. Their friends will influence them to do drugs, have sex, break the law, or a number of other bad decisions. Adolescents are more prone to peer pressure because they are young and highly impressionable and have not yet found themselves, therefore there peers rather than their individuality easily mold them. Also they see what their friends are doing and they think that they should do the same to better fit in.

*Nicole was absent on 11/12/03*
Younger people are a lot more susceptible to peer pressure because they really aren’t old enough compared to someone in high school then in late elementary or early middle school to know exactly what the negative side affects of the drug is on their life, their family, or their health. Take me for example I was pressured to start smoking pot when I was in sixth grade. I know that in my mind if I would have never started smoking pot, I would have never gotten hooked on it or cigarettes. Most of the youth are just worried about fitting in so they can be accepted.

Well I really can’t give a yes or no to that question because some people aren’t really as influenced as others. But it’s hard to tell if you are even being influenced when you are.
Peer Pressure at an Alternative High School

Amber
10/24/03

Peer pressure plays a big role in young peoples lives. I see that peer pressure effects middle school students and high school students the most. Once students enter high school, the peer pressure expands and gets worse. In high school the list of things that you are peer pressured into gets bigger. On campus, cloths, music, situations-TV and MTV, and our youth is what peer pressure mostly consist of. Away from school the peer pressure turns into sex, drugs, and alcohol. I believe that high school students are more susceptible to peer pressure because it’s a time in our lives that we are trying to find ourselves and figure out who we are, and what we see, is what we want to be, especially if we like what we see. I am not saying that teens are the only ones that deal with peer pressure, older citizens also find their own peer pressure issues. Peer pressure is what society has brought us to and ignorance is the key that opens the door to peer pressure.

11/12/03

I disagree with this statement, “They were uninfluenced by peer pressure.” Everyone is or will be effected by peer pressure. There are many different kinds and ways that peer pressure takes action. I believe that everyone is effected or has been effected by peer pressure.
Tom

10/24/03

I don’t believe that I have ever in my life been susceptible to peer pressure. I have done a lot of bad things in my life and one of those things has landed me here at this school. Making bad decisions has been a big part of my life and I didn’t have friends to pressure me into it, I have pressured them. Now that I am a changed person I do believe that I deal with a lot of peer pressure, but the positive kind. I may here some negative now and then but for the most part I am the one who is pressuring people to make the right choices. I have told people that I have already been down that path and I don’t want to see anymore people lower their standards for a “quick fix.”

11/12/03

Yes I do agree that I am not susceptible to peer pressure. I have often been the cause of peer pressure not the one falling for it.
Maria
10/24/03

Peer pressure hasn't always been a problem for me. I think for myself and not let other run my life. I do what I want to do and take steps to achieve my goals. I try not to hang around the wrong crowd because they might try and influence me in some way. I only let good and successful people influence me. Like my aunt for example, she is nurse. She lives a good, happy, and stable life. One reason why I want to be like her is because her profession is pretty cool. Nurses or any profession in the medical field is in demand right now. So, anywhere I go, it wont be hard for me to find a job. That is why I just want to be like my aunt.

Young people are easily influenced because they are not old enough to think for themselves. They are not mature enough and they not experienced well. They have barely gone through problems so they pretty much don't know what is going on.

Many people see peer pressure as a negative due to stereotypes. Drugs and alcohol comes to mind when people think of peer pressure. But I myself think only of positive peer pressure. Negative peer pressure won't get you anywhere but bring you problems.

*Maria was absent on 11/12/03*
Jeremy

10/24/03

Young people are the more vulnerable to fall into peer pressure because they look up to certain people and they want to be like them. When older people don’t make stupid choices then younger people don’t either. Peer pressure hasn’t really affected me all that much. I like to make my own choices and follow my own rules. The only person I really look up too is my older brother. He has made stupid choices that have gotten him in some messy situations and set paths for me to know what not to do. He has also made me think about not falling into peer pressure because of where it has gotten him. There are sometimes when I see a band or something wearing something cool I will get it, not because they are wearing it, just because I think its cool.

11/12/03

No, everyone wether they know it or not is influenced by peer pressure. Weather its by there idols, siblings, everyone has something they admire so everyone is influenced in ways.

Eric

*Eric was absent on 10/24/03

11/12/03

When you analyze an answer, analyze who your asking. These are people who have lost something to not being themselves. Therefore their view of peer pressure may be much more drastic then academic destinations.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

There is current educational research that indicates that alternative educational sites provide positive experiences for their students. Alta Farley, a graduate student at California State University San Marcos (with more than 15 years of teaching experience), will be examining some of your son/daughter’s assigned writings on the topic of peer pressure from his/her regular English class. The goal is to find themes and patterns that high school students might experience concerning peer pressure. This study will be done for Alta Farley’s thesis, which is part of her Masters in Education program and will conceal the identity of all participants. Your son/daughter has been asked to participate in this study because as an English student, he/she is required to reflect and write on specified topics on a daily basis. If you choose not to let your son/daughter participate, there will be no consequences to his/her grade or academic standing. Nonetheless, he/she is still required to maintain these writings on a daily basis, whether or not he/she participates in this study.

If you (the student) agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
1) Write a few paragraphs on the specified topic (peer pressure) for that day (provided by the regular classroom teacher).
2) Be honest and give your own personal insight.

There are no risks in this experiment greater than those involved in everyday writing behavior. The benefits to your son/daughter are that he/she may discover a new love for writing about himself/herself and his/her life experiences as well as becoming a future author. Your son/daughter’s participation will also help Alta Farley to provide information to your school district to better understand experiences and perceptions about peer pressure.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If your son/daughter does not participate in this study, his/her ability to gain an “A” will not be affected in any way. The experimenter will answer any questions that you have. If you have further questions, please contact Alta Farley at 760-743-6002 or Dr. Juan Necochea at 760-750-4301. This study has been approved by the Cal State San Marcos Institutional Review Board. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Board at (760) 750-8820. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I agree to participate in this research study. The experimenter has answered any questions I had.

Participant’s Name ___________________________ Date __________
Participant’s Signature ___________________________
Parent’s Name ___________________________ Researcher’s Signature ___________________________
Parent’s Signature ___________________________