

The Common Traits of Adolescent Peer Group Leaders

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Peer leadership and dynamics are a crucial aspect of adolescence; however, the topic remains understudied as most leadership research is targeted toward adults. This literature review examines peer leadership dynamics at the adolescent age range. The aim was to identify both the positive and negative attributes common among these leaders, as well as the role personality and popularity play in adolescent leadership. The study was a literature review, and used a narrative synthesis approach. The study was conducted by selecting research studies through several open access search engines. The method used key terms (ex: “adolescent leadership”) to identify relevant, peer-reviewed studies about the characteristics of peer group leaders in the adolescent age range. The literature highlighted that positive social traits (ex: being caring) that allow for communication, social skills, and creation of friendships were prevalent among leaders in this age group. On the other hand, negative traits (ex: aggression) that allow for social dominance and control were also found to be common in adolescent peer group leaders. Across several of the reviewed studies, it was indicated that different traits were correlated to likeability than were popularity. This review advances understanding of the topic by identifying which traits are most commonly associated with adolescents in a leadership role, making these individuals easier to identify and help those in this age range navigate social groups, which will help them avoid the pitfalls of negative peer influence and find the right social groups.

Keywords: Adolescent leadership, Peer leadership, Personality traits, Leadership dynamics, Peer influence, Popularity, and Likeability.

Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial time in a child’s development, and the traits and habits one exhibits and develops during adolescence can persist for the rest of their lives¹. Peer groups control numerous factors in the lives of adolescents, and their influence can go as far as to shape aspects of their personalities². In this literature review, specific traits associated with the leaders of these peer groups will be examined alongside peer influence. Character traits vary from peer to peer, however, those who possess attributes known as character strengths (positive traits) are able to thrive individually and influence others positively³. On the other hand, those who possess negative personality traits have often been influenced by negative environmental factors (ex: family life, parental mental health), and are more likely to influence others negatively⁴. While extensive research has been conducted on adult leadership and the concept of adolescent leadership, few studies isolate the specific traits that can define an adolescent peer group leader and their influence. The traits most often found in peer group leaders deviate from those found in kids that are only popular or only friends. It is important to understand the traits that define group leaders so adolescents can better distinguish whether following a group leader will lead to positive or negative outcomes. In ad-

dition, according to the Social Learning Theory, peer group leaders often shape the behavior of others in the group, so it is important to understand what determines the behavior of these leaders as it affects other adolescents⁵. Understanding these differences matters as some group leaders employ tactics such as aggression, domination, or peer pressure, which are social influence processes that could potentially cause developmental or mental health consequences down the road, which can be explained using the Social Dominance Theory². The objective of this paper is to identify which personal attributes are most prevalent amongst those that emerge as leaders of adolescent peer groups. In addition, the objective is to identify which positive and negative traits are most likely to predict whether a child will emerge as a peer with social likeability or popularity or one that can lead groups with intention to meet group goals. This paper also seeks to examine certain behavioral frameworks, such as the HEXACO personality framework and Dark Triad Traits, which will help to identify traits associated with adolescent peer group leaders. It will explore the role of and distinction between personality and popularity in social influence and aims to fill the gap in research regarding leadership in adolescents. This literature review uses a narrative synthesis approach to examining articles regarding positive and negative traits, popularity and personality factors, and peer influence. It will examine only the adolescent age

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range, and has no geographical limitations.

Methods

This is a narrative literature review with the aim of identifying the common traits of adolescent peer group leaders, as well as discussing the relationship between these traits and peer group dynamics and social influence.

As a narrative literature review, the search, selection, and review process consisted of finding articles that contributed to the narrative of the traits, influence, and effects of adolescent peer group leaders. The search strategy included using retrieval tools, such as PubMed and Research Gate, to find peer reviewed journal articles. Some of the peer reviewed journals that were utilized were *Frontiers in Psychology*, *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *The Journal of Adolescent Research*. Key search terms included: “adolescent leaders”, “adolescent peer group leaders”, “adolescents + social influence”, “personality traits + peer influence”, “popularity + personality”, “negative peer influence”, and “positive peer influence”. The studies included peer reviewed research articles published in the English language, between 2000-2025. The research ranged from works of early researchers that investigated adolescence and personality in relation to positive and negative social influence to more recent research studies that investigated the role of social media. Exclusion criteria were studies investigating adult leaders, adult participants (e.g. teachers, parents) providing perspectives on peer group leaders, or any studies that had no relation to popularity and likeability, peer influence, or peer group leadership and dynamics. Reliability of the sources used was determined by publication as a peer reviewed journal article, which ultimately ended up excluding several blogs, webpages, and other forms of non-peer reviewed sources. A screening performed by the researcher and mentor identified peer-reviewed journal articles and systematic reviews focused on adolescents and teens alone, which produced 641,869 results. A second screening also performed by the researcher and mentor searched ‘adolescents, teens, and youth’ with ‘characteristics, traits, attributes’, which resulted in 279 studies, narrowing down the original 641,869 by 641,590. Among these peer reviewed journal articles and others that were specifically searched by the researcher based on gaps in the literature review, 26 were selected that related to adolescent peer group leadership, peer group dynamics, positive and negative traits, peer influence, and popularity and likeability. This narrowed down the search result of 279 studies by 253 studies. The selections were justified by relevance to adolescent peer group leadership, popularity and likeability, peer influence, or peer group dynamics, as these were the main topics discussed in the literature review. The studies were then reviewed, and the main findings and ideas for each one was found by reading the

abstract and discussion sections. Studies were then grouped into the ‘positive traits,’ ‘negative traits,’ or introduction sections based on relevance. Ultimately, 2 were used in the introduction section, and the other 22 were sectioned into either the ‘positive traits’ or ‘negative traits’ section of the literature review, and further separated into subsections of these two categories. For the positive traits section, subsections included prosocial traits, communication & social skills, and contextual factors. For the negative traits section, subsections included peer pressure; dominance, aggression, & susceptibility; and contextual factors.

Result

In this review of literature, studies centered around the positive and negative characteristics commonly found in adolescent peer leaders were explored. Since both positive and negative traits can lead to social influence, which can have preferred or avoided outcomes, both are crucial to investigate and understand.

Positive Peer Characteristics

Prosocial Traits

A study by Loke, Mak, and Wu⁶ explored positive characteristics of influential peers identified by schoolmates, and the mechanism by which they exercise this influence onto their peers. To investigate this topic, Year 3 students (aged 13-15) from six different schools across Hong Kong were asked to nominate peers they considered to be influential, as well as state which characteristics gave the nominated peers their influence. Then, the nominated adolescents from three of the six schools were interviewed and questioned about their personal attributes, social influence, and how peers viewed them. Through this process, researchers found that being caring, being a ‘buddy’, and humor were the top three traits of influential adolescents from the perspective of the nominators. It was also found that influential peers were thought to have characteristics of trustworthiness, ability to communicate, and possessed characteristics of a leader that gave them their influence. Based on the survey and interviews, being caring and humorous are two positive characteristics often exhibited by influential adolescents in peer groups, as both groups identified these traits. A study by Laursen, Altman, Bukowski, and Wei⁷ examined if being liked and being popular resulted from being fun. The participants of their study consisted of 611 primary school students, ranging from grades 4-6, who were asked to fill out questionnaires regarding the personalities of peers through peer nomination. On the questionnaires, students were asked to write the names of peers who matched a given description: for example, “Someone who is liked by a lot of people”. Fun, likeability, and popularity were measured through these peer nominations, and other traits, such as ath-

leticism, justice, and prosocial behavior, were also measured and analyzed in relation to these attributes. Some negative traits, such as aggression, were also included. Based on the results, researchers found that being fun was positively correlated to likeability and popularity, and it was also shown to induce shifts in the likeability and popularity of an individual. Given that personality features emerge from childhood, this study showed that both children and adolescents are attracted to the same characteristics and youth that are considered popular, well-liked, or both. Because being fun is positively correlated to both of these traits, the results indicate that being fun could be a common trait among adolescent peer leaders because popularity and likeability are often indicators of a peer leader. With the aim of exploring the differences between positive and negative adolescent peer leadership, Hong, Huitsing, and Veenstra⁸ surveyed Dutch students in grades 5-8, and found that positively associated leaders tended to have more friendships than negatively associated leaders. The researchers' finding aligns with the results from the study by Loke, Mak, & Wu⁶, as both highlight the role friendship plays in adolescent leadership.

Communication & Social skills

To better understand social, academic, and psychological characteristics in the context of a dynamic, hierarchical social setting, as well as their correlation to peer group leadership, researchers performed a peer nomination study on Chinese adolescents⁹. The participants in the study were early adolescents, most of them being fifth graders. To begin the study, participants were asked to identify their peer groups as well as the leaders of said groups. In addition, several methods, such as a peer nomination matrix, teacher-student assessment, and self-report were used to assess relationships, leadership roles, shyness, social competence, aggression, loneliness, and academic performance of the participants. The researchers used these answers as well as the Simulation Investigation for Empirical Network Analysis (SIENA) to draw conclusions about characteristics in relation to leadership roles between the peer nominations and peer assessments. It was found from the responses that peer group leadership is dynamic, and leadership roles can shift in a hierarchical setting. The findings also demonstrated that adolescents with higher social competence, aggression, and lower shyness were more likely to become peer leaders, while academic performance and loneliness did not positively correlate to group leadership. Stemming from the results of this study, the data suggested that social competence is a common trait amidst those that lead adolescent peer and friendship groups. A study by Schick¹⁰ aimed to examine the associations between peer leadership, coolness, aggression, and social goals and gender. In order to examine these qualities, 347 sixth-grade students were asked to fill out grade-based peer nominations to assess leadership and peer status.

The "Social Goals Questionnaire" assessed social goals. Crick and Grotpeter's peer nomination was used to assess aggression. To further explore how leadership status, aggression, social goals, and coolness among adolescents can change over time, the participants were asked to fill out the nominations twice, once in the fall and once in spring of their school year. The study found that peers deemed as leaders were more likely to be associated with higher levels of coolness. Coolness is complex to define but, according to the study, can include characteristics of extroversion, adventurous, openness and autonomous or authentic, as well as levels of overt and covert aggression. In addition, it was also found that the gender and social goals of a student influenced how their aggression levels related to coolness and leadership. Because coolness can be associated with aggression, this result reiterates the finding from Zhou et al.⁹, which stated that high levels of aggression can be correlated to adolescent group leaders. Schick's¹⁰ findings demonstrated that adolescent peer group leadership can be achieved through many different tactics, some choosing to use aggression and dominance, while others relying on coolness in terms of being unique and social. The concept detailed in Schick's study that adolescent peer leaders may rely on being social as a means of achieving leadership aligns with the findings from Loke, Mak, & Wu⁶, who found that traits such as ability to communicate, trustworthiness, and being a 'buddy' often defined a peer as influential and prone to leadership roles. Ultimately, Schick's¹⁰ study indicates that coolness could be a trait common among adolescent group leaders and highlights that aggression is only linked to adolescent peer leadership in specific settings. Another study conducted by Wolters, Knoors, Cillessen, and Verhoeven¹¹ aimed to explore the behavioral, personality, and communicative predictors of acceptance and popularity in adolescents. In order to examine this topic, 608 students from the Netherlands, as well as their parents and teachers, completed different forms of sociometric ratings to evaluate for several traits, such as acceptance, popularity, social behavior, pragmatic skills, extrovertedness, and agreeability. To contextualize the data provided by the questionnaires, the researchers created hierarchical regressions to demonstrate how levels of acceptance and popularity would emerge from different social behaviors, communicative behaviors, and extrovertedness. Through this method, it was found that peers that exhibited low levels of antisocial behavior were more likely to be accepted. Likewise Schick's¹⁰ study, this finding aligns with the results of Loke, Mak, & Wu⁶, who found that traits often associated with being social often defined influential peers, and subsequently leaders. However, for popularity, it was shown that antisocial and prosocial behavior contributed positively to the popularity of an adolescent, with withdrawn behavior being a negative contributor. This result contrasted the researchers' finding about accepted peers, highlighting that there is a difference between

popular and accepted peers. The study also showed that high levels of extraversion and pragmatic skills predicted high levels of popularity for adolescents exhibiting prosocial or antisocial behaviors, but lower levels of popularity for those with lower levels of extraversion and pragmatic skills. The study provides evidence that adolescents that emerge as more well-liked and influential among their peers exhibit high levels of social behavior along with extraversion and pragmatic skills. Because adolescent peer leaders are often both popular and accepted, it can be inferred that common traits of adolescent peer leaders are extraversion and pragmatic skills combined with social behavior. This is also shown in Schick's¹⁰ findings, as coolness is partially defined as extroversion. Commonly used throughout personality studies is the framework HEXACO, an abbreviation for honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience¹². With the aim of examining relations between likeability, popularity, and how the six HEXACO traits were associated, De Vries et al.,¹² conducted a study on 552 students from across 29 Dutch seventh and eighth grade classes. To obtain data regarding likeability and popularity, students were asked to fill out a peer nomination questionnaire regarding the most popular, least popular, most well-liked, and least well-liked peers, as well as nominations of friends. In addition, participants were asked to fill out the HEXACO Simplified Personality Inventory (HEXACO-SPI), a simple questionnaire that was easy for students to comprehend. Using hierarchical regression to interpret the questionnaire's results, researchers found that different traits predicted likeability and popularity. The findings demonstrated that emotionality and agreeableness were positively correlated with likeability; whereas extraversion was the only trait found to be positively correlated with popularity. Group leaders of adolescent peer groups tend to be either popular, well-liked, or both, so the findings of the study suggest that extraversion, agreeableness, and emotionality are traits that could be commonly found among adolescent peer group leaders, which aligns with the findings from Schick¹⁰ and Wolters et al.¹¹. A study by Qin et al.¹³ explored different traits in early adolescents that were often referred to as character strengths, and those that did not prove as predictors of negative behaviors down the road. The researchers assessed character traits in 590 Chinese adolescents (from 3rd-5th grade) using the VIA-Youth scale, which is a compilation of generally positive traits. In addition, the Conners Parent Symptom Questionnaire was used to assess negative traits in the youth, and the results of both methods were computed and assessed using a hierarchical regression. The findings indicated that character strengths such as self-regulation, humility, zest, perseverance, etc. were negatively associated with negative behaviors. Positive adolescent peer group leaders have a positive influence over their peers, which suggests they do not exhibit many of these negative behaviors. Furthermore,

this evidence indicates that the VIA-Youth positive character strengths, some of the most prominent being humility, zest, and self-regulation, could be prominent in positive adolescent peer group leaders.

Contextual Factors

A study by Bell¹⁴ explored the effects adolescent peer leaders felt their leadership impacted them. The study was conducted by asking older-aged adolescents to rate their experience as a peer group leader. Bell¹⁴ found that most leaders rated their experience quite highly. The leadership experience led to positive changes in many of the adolescents, as well as increased confidence and ability to navigate social situations. The researcher's finding suggests that, in addition to having positive impacts on others, positive adolescent peer leadership can positively influence the leaders themselves as well. This result suggests that, by leading other peers positively, an adolescent peer group leader may be able to develop more positive traits through the experience. The studies above indicate several traits and qualities that adolescent peer group leaders could possess: such as being caring, humorous, fun, having high levels of social competence, aggression, extraversion, etc. However, there are limitations that could hinder the correlation between the findings. Loke, Mak, Wu's⁶ study was conducted on adolescents from Hong Kong, Zhou et al.'s⁹ study was conducted on adolescents from China, and both De Vries et al.¹² and Wolters et al.'s¹¹ studies were conducted on adolescents from the Netherlands. The other two studies did not indicate the country in which they were conducted. The imbalance in cultural settings could have functioned as a limitation in the assessment of this literature, as cultural norms could play a role in what adolescents look up to or admire in a peer. While several of the studies surveyed a similar number of participants, the adolescents surveyed in each study differed in age, which also could have provided a shortcoming to the literature review because at different ages, adolescents hold different values, and different traits could act as influential at different stages. In addition, several studies used different methods of surveying the participants, which could have made for subjective results in some cases (ex: an adolescent may be unwilling to be completely truthful in a self-survey).

Negative Peer Characteristics

Peer Pressure

To delve into exploration of the negative aspects of adolescent peer group leadership, a study by Porter and McFarland¹⁵ examined whether susceptibility to peer pressure within close friendships foreshadows later involvement in negative peer-influenced behavior. The participants in this study were 177 seventh and eighth grade students, each of whom was asked to nominate one close friend as well as a friend from their

closest peer group. Using multiple methods, such as questionnaires and hypothetical situations to gain multiple perspectives (eg. From the participant, their close friend, and their parents), correlations were examined between the participant's characteristics and their susceptibility to negative peer-influence, engagement in deviant behaviors, externalizing behavior, popularity, close friendship stability, and depressive symptoms. Based on this method, the researchers found that susceptibility to negative peer influence with a close friend forecasted later responses to negative peer pressure. In addition, results showed that higher levels of drug/alcohol use, sexual activity, depressive symptoms, and externalizing behavior, as well as decreases in popularity were all associated with susceptibility to negative peer influence. While the correlation to peer leadership is inferred from these results, the findings of the study suggest that negative peer influence, especially when controlled by negative or dominant peer leaders, can take a very harsh, serious toll on many young people. Continuing with exploration of peer influence in adolescence, Laursen, Leggett-James, and Valdes¹⁶ set out to examine peer influence among pairs consisting of one well-liked peer and one less well-liked peer. By examining 310 adolescents (aged 9-12) using peer nomination and dyadic analyses, the researchers found that higher levels of aggression, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement in the more well-liked peers predicted an increase of these factors in the less well-liked peers. Laursen et. al.'s¹⁶ finding suggests that, in early adolescence, well-liked peers may have significant influence over others. This finding adds to the understanding from Porter and Mcfarland's¹⁵ study that peer influence can take a toll on adolescents, and also supports the result from Laursen, Atلمان, Bukowski, and Wei⁷ that likeability may give an adolescent significant influence over other peers. To further this analysis, a study by Nieuwenhuis and Veenema¹⁷ observed Taiwanese students in middle school using questionnaires and peer nomination. In this study, researchers found that peers less correlated to likeability were more susceptible to peer influence. This result couples with the finding from Laursen et al.¹⁶, indicating that less liked peers are more susceptible to the peer influence that more well-liked peers have over them. Because likeability and peer influence are often associated with adolescent peer group leaders, it is indicated that, in early adolescence, well-liked peers are often those with significant influence, and therefore those more likely to become a peer group leader. Although peer influence is present during all stages of adolescence, Brown and Anistranski Jr.¹⁸ sought to understand if peer influence held more prominence at certain ages than others. Their evidence suggested that, as adolescents approach adulthood, peer influence becomes less prominent. The result indicates that, as adolescent peers grow, they are less susceptible to peer influence. However, the result also indicates that in early adolescence, peers are espe-

cially susceptible to peer influence, making the influence of a negative peer leader even stronger. This extends the understanding from Porter and Mcfarland's¹⁵ findings, as it classifies the age range in which peer influence is most likely to take a negative toll on an adolescent. Sumter et al.¹⁹ also sought to explore the age at which peer influence began to minimize, and conducted a study on the general resistance to peer influence of 10-18 year olds using a Resistance to Peer Influence Scale (RPI). Similarly Brown and Anistranski Jr.¹⁸, Sumter et al.¹⁹ found that as peers progress into later adolescence, peer influence susceptibility fades. However, Sumter et al.¹⁹ also found that, during mid-adolescence, when peer influence susceptibility reached a maximum, boys were more susceptible than girls. With the results from Brown and Anistranski Jr.'s¹⁸ study, Sumter et al.'s¹⁹ findings indicate that boys in mid-adolescence could be most susceptible to peer influence.

Dominance, Aggression, Popularity

To explore some of the specific negative characteristics that can be associated with adolescent peer groups, Szabó, Orosz, Gulyás, and Lang²⁰ aimed to understand the relationships between self-reported Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, subclinical psychopathy, and subclinical narcissism) with likeability and popularity, two qualities that are often linked to peer group leaders. To explore this topic, 184 secondary school students were asked to fill out a self-report assessment that analyzed connection to the Dark Triad traits with questions such as: "People who mess with me always regret it" (subclinical psychopathy) and "People see me as a natural leader" (subclinical narcissism). Along with the self-report, the students were asked to fill out a peer nomination questionnaire to evaluate likeability and a nomination regarding popularity. For the popularity assessment, a direct evaluation (questions about popularity) and an indirect evaluation (questions about leadership) were asked. Using the results of these assessments, the researchers found that narcissism was the only Dark Triad trait significantly associated with likeability and popularity, while Machiavellianism and psychopathy had limited correlations. The results connection to peer leadership is inferred in this case because adolescent group leaders are often very well-liked as well as popular. The findings of this study suggest that narcissism, which projects confidence and social influence, can be an attractive trait for peers but can have negative outcomes if teens follow the behaviors of narcissistic teen peer leaders, as the motivation of narcissists is more about meeting their own needs and less about meeting the needs of others. This finding connects with the results from Porter and Mcfarland's¹⁵ study, as narcissism is a trait that can lead to controlling and dominant peer leadership dynamics. To assess the role popularity plays in negative adolescent peer group leadership, 182 Dutch adolescent students were examined using peer reports as well as direct observations²¹.

Researchers discovered that peers who wanted to achieve popularity displayed high levels of aggression, and that adolescents who were already popular also exhibited some amounts of aggression as well. Since popularity is very frequently correlated to leadership, it is inferred in this sense. Based on the results, it is suggested that adolescent peer group leaders, or those who want to become one, may exhibit higher levels of aggression than other peers. Because narcissism can be associated with aggression, the traits found by Szabó et al.²⁰ may be applicable in this sense as well. With the interesting hypothesis that popularity in adolescents has a twofold role, Allen, Porter, McFarland, McElhaney, and Marsh²², explored how popularity could positively or negatively affect the futures of popular adolescents in a group of 185 seventh and eighth graders. To assess popularity among the participants, each student was asked to nominate 10 peers with whom they would like to spend their night, and 10 peers with whom they would not like to spend their night. To follow, ego development was measured with an 11-item form of the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test, and other characteristics such as hostility, deviant and criminal behaviors, and alcohol usage were evaluated through self-report surveys. Observed positivity in adolescent-mother relationships and attachment security were assessed through direct interactions and interviews between participants and their mothers. Finally, close friendship competence was assessed with questions asked to the participant's closest friend. Analysis of the results from this method highlighted that popular adolescents exhibited higher levels of attachment security, ego development, and observed positivity when interacting with mothers. While peer leadership was not directly addressed in the study, adolescent peer leaders are often popular, so correlation to leadership was inferred in this case. In addition, the findings showed that popular adolescents were more likely to increase behaviors more likely to receive peer approval (minor deviant behaviors) and decrease those more likely to receive peer disapproval (hostility). This finding aligns with the result from Schick's¹⁰ study, which found that withdrawn behaviors (like hostility) are uncommon in popular adolescents. The idea that popular adolescents may increase engagement in minor deviant behaviors for the sake of peer approval is consistent with the finding from Porter and McFarland's¹⁵ finding that higher levels of deviant behaviors (ex: drug/alcohol use) decreased popularity. The results of the study indicate that psychologically and socially secure and confident young people are often associated with popularity. Their minor risk taking behavior can also attract attention from other peers who are also developing their sociability and confidence and this age level. Behaviors on social media were examined in a study conducted by Fujimoto, Sniders, and Valente²³. Adolescent 'dislike' ties within friendships, popularity, substance use, and Facebook use were assessed. The study consisted of eleventh and twelfth grade students who

were asked to nominate anywhere from 7-19 close friends and 10 students that were 'most disliked' to evaluate friendship and dislike ties. In addition, to assess substance and Facebook use, participants filled out questionnaires. Popularity was examined with a peer nomination method which required all adolescents to identify up to seven of the most popular students. This method showed that adolescents of higher status and more frequent Facebook use had a more significant correlation to dislike ties. It also was found that friendship could, in some cases, promote reputational dislike, and that adolescents tended to dislike someone if a friend did the same, which coincides with Porter and McFarland's²² findings regarding the strong presence of peer influence in adolescents. This finding ties back to the idea of peer influence, suggesting that a negative characteristic of adolescent peer leaders may be the way by which they can alter their friends' perspectives as teenagers tend to conform to peer norms. In this case, the study's correlation to peer leadership was inferred rather than directly stated because popularity and peer influence are often linked with peer leaders.

Contextual Factors

A 2020 study that aimed to identify the difference in ability to show empathy between adults and adolescents found that adolescents exhibit much less empathetic emotion than do adults²⁴. To obtain this result, the researchers had adults and adolescents (aged 13-15) fill out questionnaires as well as receive an fMRI during tasks that elicit emotions of empathy. Empathy is an emotion that often elicits other positive traits or is associated with positive people, so the result that adolescents often have lower levels of empathetic emotion suggests this may contribute to higher levels of apathetic and antipathetic emotion as well as the negative leadership traits. However, a recent study by Martínez-Valázquez et al.²⁵ explored whether this changed as adolescents aged. By asking adolescents of different ages (20 early, 20 middle, 20 late, and 20 adults) to perform the prisoner's dilemma paradigm with a partner as well as to respond to different empathetic emotion scales, the researchers found that as adolescents age, they develop more empathetic emotions. From the results of these two studies as well as the results of Brown and Anistranski¹⁸ and Sumter et al.¹⁹, it is indicated that as peers reach the later stages of adolescence, they may be less likely to develop negative leadership traits or to negatively influence their peers. While an individual could have all of the traits of an adolescent peer leader, Schneider et al.²⁶ explored how these traits can foster leadership. By conducting interviews on children ranging from elementary to high school (adolescence occupying a large portion of this range), Schneider et al. found that positionality was the way by which children were able to hone leadership factors and their environment to function as a leader. Their finding suggests that traits alone (ex: nar-

cissism and extraversion) are not enough for an adolescent to become a leader, and that there must be external factors (ex: race, ethnicity, adult mentorship) to foster this sort of leadership mindset and environment. Along with this Schneider et al.²⁶, Kargianni and Montgomery²⁷ sought to understand what crafts an adolescent into a leader, as they hypothesized that traits alone were not enough to foster a leadership personality. Their results, which found leadership to be a dynamic procedure that can develop over time by means of exposure and influence, indicate that the influence of and exposure to an adolescent peer leader may elicit the same types of behavior in others. The studies above indicate several traits and qualities that adolescent peer group leaders could possess: such as being narcissistic, aggressive, engaging in deviant behaviors, inflicting negative peer influence on others, etc. However, there are limitations that could hinder the correlation between the findings. None of the studies reviewed indicated a cultural demographic of the participants. A potential imbalance in cultural settings could have functioned as a limitation in the assessment of this literature, as cultural norms could play a role in what adolescents look up to or admire in a peer. While several of the studies surveyed a similar number of participants, the adolescents surveyed in each study differed in age, which also could have provided a shortcoming to the literature review because at different ages, adolescents hold different values, and different activities and traits could act as influential at different stages (ex: at 12, adolescents are less likely to value and engage in deviant behaviors than at 16). In addition, several studies used different methods of surveying the participants, which could have made for subjective results in some cases (ex: an adolescent may be unwilling to be completely truthful in a self-survey).

Discussion

This review of literature explored which characteristics are common in adolescent peer group leaders. The paper sought to identify common personal attributes and predictors of those who lead peer groups during adolescence, as well as the role of personality, popularity, and peer influence. In exploration of the positive characteristics commonly found among adolescent peer group leaders, the finding that being caring, being a ‘buddy’, and humor, and that ‘being fun’ was a trait positively correlated to likeability and popularity suggest that traits that foster an enhanced ability to forge connections between adolescents could point to an adolescent peer group leader. In addition, the literature found that adolescents with higher social competence and lower shyness were more likely to become peer leaders highlighting the importance of the personality traits of openness and extraversion to attracting peers. This aligns with the previous idea, but also indicates that qualities that allow for socialization and ability to communicate (ex-

traversion and openness) advance an adolescent’s potential to be a group leader. Being cool and being social were traits also found in influential peers, advancing the understanding that sociable, well-liked peers are often those that hone leadership roles. Based on these findings, it is shown that positive traits that help build and strengthen friendships (ex: being caring and a ‘buddy’) as well as those that facilitate good communication and social skills (ex: higher social competence, being cool and social) were the most common among influential adolescents and peer group leaders. In adolescent peer groups, peers who are able to create and maintain strong friendships, as well as communicate and socialize effectively and with care are able to become influential and positive leaders. Regarding the leaders themselves, the literature review found that the traits of positive adolescent group leaders tended to become strengthened as they led others, suggesting that positive leadership is helpful for developing the leaders themselves as well as other peers. In examination of the negative attributes commonly associated with adolescent peer group leaders, it was found throughout several of the studies that negative peer influence from a dominant or controlling peer leader can take a very serious toll on adolescents, leading them to risk-taking behaviors and aggression. However, it was also indicated that as adolescents age, they become less susceptible to peer influence and more empathetic, suggesting that this issue mainly prevails among younger aged adolescents. While “coolness” reflected positive and attractive features for peers, those who were “cool” but also confident enough to show aggression and minimal risk behaviors could also be idolized by their peers, as they could be viewed as popular and well-liked. This concept and the finding that peers attracted to those that exhibited some risky behaviors were more prone to being susceptible to negative peer influence suggest that qualities and traits that give adolescent peers a certain level of control over others (ex: dominance or narcissism) could contribute to an ability to have a leadership status. With narcissism, for example, features such as confidence and charisma can be attractive, leading to popularity and likeability, however, negative narcissistic behaviors such as aggression can provide for a leadership role as well because other peers could feel controlled or unable to escape a narcissistic leader. As well as increasing a peer’s likelihood of susceptibility to peer influence, adolescents were more likely to dislike someone if their friend did the same. This idea further highlights the concept of peer influence and loyalty to friendships, showing that a negative characteristic of adolescent peer leaders can shift their peers’ perspectives and mindsets. It was demonstrated that negative attributes that allow for control, dominance, and negative peer manipulation (ex: narcissism, aggression) were the most prevalent among adolescent peer group leaders. Because of their sensitive age and the complexity of their peer group dynamics, adolescents who are able to control and negatively manipulate

others are able to become influential and dominant in their peer groups. In exploring the role of personality and popularity regarding peer leadership, qualities such as higher levels of social behaviors, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotionality were all frequently associated with well-liked adolescents. Although popularity and likeability are related, Cillessen and Rose²⁸ distinguish between likeability and popularity, highlighting that popularity has higher correlations to relational aggression. Popular adolescents associated with engagement in minor deviant behaviors were found to have higher levels of ego development and attachment security, which suggests that courage and confidence are traits that may be indicative of adolescent peer group leaders. Popular adolescents, or those who want to become popular, were suggested to exhibit higher levels of aggression, indicating that popularity status may facilitate aggressive, dominating behavior. Based on these conclusions, it is highlighted that adolescents with outgoing, emotionally open, and self-confident personalities are more likely to become well-liked and popular, which are two traits very commonly associated with leadership; in addition, those who are looking for or maintaining popularity status rather than leadership may be prone to more aggressive tactics. The literature review also examined contextual factors relating to leadership in adolescents. Leadership was indicated to be a 'dynamic concept,' or a habit that develops and changes over time, suggesting that as adolescents age, they are likely to change their leadership habits. Since it was also found that with age, empathy and positive peer influence develop, this may be indicative that, during older adolescence, leaders may be more likely to be positive leaders than negative ones. Since leadership changes over time, environmental factors (such as race, ethnicity, and mentorship) were shown to impact one's leadership tendencies. Overall, this is indicative that adolescent peer leadership, both positive and negative, are not purely a result of personality traits, but are also very much affected by external factors. Overall, the studies reviewed had strengths and limitations. Strengths included reviewing peer-reviewed studies that used standardized survey tools. In addition, surveying and interviewing adolescents contributed to a greater understanding on this topic as many studies in this field solely focus on adults. Some studies combined both peer and adult perspectives, which provided a more holistic overview. A limitation of this narrative literature review could have stemmed from a cultural bias, as some of the studies were conducted in the Netherlands, Hong Kong, and China, while the majority did not specify. Cultural norms could play a significant role in what qualities or traits a certain adolescent views as admirable or indicative of a leader. In addition, the studies covered the entire range of adolescence, spanning from ages 10-18, and at different ages, adolescents value different qualities and traits, which could have provided for a limitation. Findings also cannot be generalized to all adolescent popula-

tions particularly with respect to age and culture as some studies studied younger adolescents or pre-adolescents. There are several paths that could be taken to continue research on adolescent peer leadership based on the results of this literature review. One approach could be to examine the differences between adolescent peer leaders from different cultures, which was a limitation in this literature review. This approach to furthering knowledge on this topic would provide for a better understanding of how culture and location impact leadership, as this review found that external factors indeed affect leadership in adolescents. Another approach that could be taken could be to explore the effect gender has on leadership in adolescents, as dynamics vary between boys and girls, and this literature review found that boys are more susceptible to peer influence. A third interesting outlet for further research could be to examine how the traits and behaviors of adolescent peer leaders in one group vary when they are placed into a different setting with different group dynamics.

Conclusion

Peer group dynamics play a crucial role in the influence of adolescents as is conveyed in the extensive research done on peer pressure and teens' tendency to conform to peer norms. Understanding the common traits of adolescent peer leaders is extremely significant as it can prevent young people from becoming involved with negative group leaders or influenced by peer group dynamics. Negative social influence and experience with peer pressure at an impressionable age such as adolescence can lead to maladaptive and risk-taking behaviours. Along with preventing teens from choosing the wrong groups, an enhanced awareness of prevalent attributes among these group leaders will also help adolescents to choose groups with dynamics and leadership qualities best fit for them individually. To advance the knowledge of this subject, studies could be conducted to further understand how contextual factors (such as culture, gender, and group setting) affect adolescent peer group leaders. As was found in the literature review, leaders can be both positive and negative, change over time, and can hold significant influence over those in a peer group. Because of this, the significance in identifying the role of personality traits, popularity and likeability, and peer influence in adolescent peer groups is how parents and professionals can use this knowledge to prepare peers to face these situations and avoid following popular peers with negative social influence. Based on these extensive factors, it is highlighted that adolescence is a time of vulnerability and growth, and adolescents are typically very influenced and developed. However, with a better understanding of peer group dynamics and leadership tactics, adolescents will be able to better navigate these environments, embrace the positive aspects of these groups, and avoid the negative aspects.

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