

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Links of Adolescents Identity Development and Relationship with Peers: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Objective: According to Erik Erikson, the main task of adolescents is to solve the crisis of identity versus role confusion. Research has shown that a stable and strong sense of identity is associated with better mental health of adolescents. Good relationships with peers are also linked with better emotional and psychological well-being of adolescents. However, there is a lack of reviews of studies in the scientific literature examining the relationship between the adolescents' identity development and relationships with peers. The aims of this article were to analyze links between adolescent identity development and relationships with peers identified from a literature review, summarize the results, and discuss the theoretical factors that may predict these relationships. **Method:** A systematic literature review. **Results:** Analysis of findings from the systematic literature review revealed that a good relationship with peers is positively related to adolescent identity development, but empirical research in this area is extremely limited. **Conclusions:** The links between adolescents' identity development and their relationship with peers are not completely clear. The possible intermediate factors that could determine the relationship between adolescent identity development and their relationships with peers are discussed. Further empirical researches is needed in this area.

Key Words: *identity, adolescence, relationships with peers*

Résumé

Objectif: Selon Erik Erikson, la principale tâche des adolescents consiste à résoudre la crise d'identité versus la confusion des rôles. La recherche a démontré qu'un sentiment d'identité fort et stable est associé à une meilleure santé mentale des adolescents. De bonnes relations avec les pairs sont également liées à un plus grand bien-être émotionnel et psychologique des adolescents. Toutefois, il y a un manque de revues d'études dans la littérature scientifique qui examine la relation entre le développement de l'identité des adolescents et les relations avec les pairs. Cet article visait à analyser les liens entre le développement de l'identité des adolescents et les relations avec les pairs identifiés dans une revue de la littérature, à résumer les résultats, et à discuter des facteurs théoriques qui peuvent prédire ces relations. **Méthode:** Une revue systématique de la littérature. **Résultats:** L'analyse des résultats de la revue systématique de la littérature a révélé qu'une bonne relation avec les pairs est positivement reliée au développement de l'identité de l'adolescent, mais que la recherche empirique dans ce domaine est extrêmement limitée. **Conclusions:** Les liens entre le développement de l'identité des adolescents et leurs relations avec les pairs ne sont pas complètement définis. Les facteurs intermédiaires possibles qui pourraient déterminer la relation entre le développement de l'identité des adolescents et leurs relations avec les pairs sont présentés. Il faut plus de recherches empiriques dans ce domaine.

Mots clés: *identité, adolescence, relations avec les pairs*

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Introduction

According to Erikson (1968), the main and most important developmental tasks for adolescents are to solve the identity versus role confusion crisis, construct their own unique sense of identity, and find the social environment where they can belong to and create meaningful relationships with other people (Chen, Lay, Wu, & Yao, 2007). Various theories exist that try to define the concept of identity. For example, Waterman (1993; as cited in Guardia, 2009) believed that identity reflects a person's best potential which is self-realizing. Identity is expressed through self-realizing activities which person feels as self-defining or fitting, engaging, energizing, purposeful, and helpful in fulfilling his/her goals of life. According to Berzonsky's social-cognitive theory of identity styles (1988; as cited in Guardia, 2009), identity is the cognitive model of how persons process and examines identity relevant information. Others propose that identity in general is nothing other than the answer to the question: "who am I?" (Motyl, 2010). Identity theory developed by Stryker (1968; as cited in Adamsons & Pasley, 2013) focuses on the individual's integration of societal expectations regarding the meaning of occupying particular social positions or statuses (for example, parent, spouse, employee) and the behavioural expectations associated with such statuses. The most general and broad concept of identity is proposed by Erikson (1968). He described identity as a fundamental organizing principal which develops constantly throughout the lifespan. Identity provides a sense of continuity within the self and in interaction with others ("self-sameness"), as well as a frame to differentiate between self and others ("uniqueness") which allows the individual to function autonomously from others (Erikson, 1968). Moreover, Erikson's concept of identity was particularly focused on adolescents' development. For these reasons identity definition based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development was used in this study.

Both, the high-quality and satisfying relationships with other people (Walsh, Harel-Fisch, & Fogel-Grinvalds, 2010) and the formed sense of identity (Dumas, Lawford, Tieu, & Pratt, 2009) are associated with better adolescent' mental health and psychological well-being. A positively solved identity vs. role confusion crisis enables a person to integrate self-perception images into a stable personal identity, as well as strengthen performance of different roles and assumed commitments (Erikson, 1968). Achieved identity is associated with a lower expression of psychosomatic and neurotic symptoms (Chen et al., 2007), and reduced anxiety (Crocetti, Klimstra, Keijsers, Hale, & Meeus, 2009), depression and suicidal tendencies (Ramgoon, Bachoo, Patel,

& Wig, 2006). Achieved identity is also related to psychological well-being (Sandhu, Singh, Tung & Kundra, 2012), emotional adjustment (Dumas et al., 2009), and greater emotional stability (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008).

Similarly, relationships with peers are also associated with better mental health of adolescents and his/her successful adaptation to the environment (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). Although relationships with parents are still relevant for adolescents (Eckstein, Rasmussen, & Wittschen, 1999), relationships with peers become the centre of adolescents' life (Tarrant, 2002). Research has shown that belonging to the "normal" - or - popular peer group is positively associated with better adolescent adaptation to the environment (Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Cechaviciute, 2005). Research has shown that peer group acceptance and good relationships work as protecting factors against social anxiety and depression (La Greca, & Harrison, 2005). It is also related with less internal and external problems regardless of adolescent' sex, age and family structure characteristics (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). If adolescents are unable to resist peer pressure and negative influences, they may be more prone to delinquent behaviour or use of psychoactive substances. This may be so as, adolescents may seek to conform to behavioural norms of the peer group with, which they identify themselves with (Stewart-Knox et al., 2005). Identification with a delinquent peer group is a predictor of physical and relationship aggression (Pokhrel, Sussman, Black, & Sun, 2010). Aggression experienced in adolescents' romantic relationships, peer pressure, and peer rejection are associated with increased symptoms of depression, alcohol use, psychosocial functioning problems (Schad, Szwed, Antonishak, Hare, & Allen 2008), internal distress and social anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

In adolescence, a self-comparison with peers becomes more important when adolescents try to associate their identities with their peers (Hill, Bromell, Tyson, & Flint, 2007). Members of the peer group can model their behaviour according to group norms', therefore peer groups can have significant impact on adolescents' development (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). A peer group not only provides emotional support for adolescents, but also provides a social status necessary for his/her identity development (Nawaz, 2011). However, it is not clear what psychosocial factors may link adolescent identity development and relationship with peers.

Research has shown that adolescents' identity development is related to their relationship with peers. According to

Rassart and colleagues (Rassart, Luyckx, Apers, Goossens, & Moons, 2012), good and supporting relationship with peers is positively related to adolescent identity development because it can help prevent stagnation in the process of identity exploration. Attachment to peers and belonging to peer groups, as well as the support one get from romantic relationships and good relationships with friends, are also positively related to adolescent identity development (Nawaz, 2011; Pugh & Hart, 1999; Klimstra et al., 2013; Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh 2002). However, appears that only a few studies examining the links between adolescent identity development and relationships with peers has been published in the peer-reviewed literature. Studies that have been published appear to show that high-quality relationships with peers are positively related to adolescent identity development. However, the dimensions of relationships with peers discussed in these studies substantially vary, ranging from intimate romantic relationships to membership within wider social peer groups. In addition, these studies are mainly based on correlation analysis, which cannot determine causal relationships between the variables, and also do not address what other factors could predict the links of adolescent identity development and relationships with peers. In order to summarize the research about adolescent identity development in the context of relationship with peers, a systematic literature review was conducted. The main tasks of this literature review were to: summarize results of adolescents' identity development and relationships with peers; and, discuss the theoretical factors that could predict the links of adolescent identity development and relationships with peers.

Methodology

Inclusion criteria for the systematic literature review.

Only empirical studies which examined:

- i) adolescent' identity development according to Erickson's theory of psychosocial development; and,
- ii) various aspects of adolescents' relationships with peers were included in the systematic literature review. In addition, studies were only included if the participants were non-clinical samples.

Excluded were studies that only presented theoretical content and studies that only examined gender, racial or ethnic identity because gender, racial and ethnic identity are more reflective of different types of identity, rather than identity

itself. Other inclusion criteria were studies' availability, quality, language and year of publication: only freely available, peer-reviewed, full-text articles in English, which were published between 1985 and 2014, were included. The following databases were searched: Medline, Social Psychology Network, Google Scholar and EBSCO. The following combinations of key words were used: identity, development, adolescent *, relationship *, peer *, friend *. In total 53 articles were found: 16 – in Medline, 0 –in Social Psychology Network, 16 – in Google Scholar and 26 – in EBSCO. All articles were screened according to titles, abstracts and used methodologies. Articles, which did not match inclusion criteria, were not included into systematic review.

Assessment of study quality and data extraction.

The quality of the studies was assessed according to the following criteria to determine which of the 53 studies to retain for analysis:

- Adolescent's identity development was analyzed in accordance with Erikson psychosocial development theory;
- Information about the participants of the study was provided;
- Participants were non-clinical samples;
- Research concepts were clearly defined;
- Reliability coefficients of used instruments were given;
- Organization and implementation of the research were described;
- Obtained results and findings of the study were clearly described.

In total seven of the 53 studies identified in the systematic literature review met the quality criteria: four – from EBSCO database and three – from Google's Scholar search engine. The data about participants' age and reliability of used instruments were extracted. The data from the analysis of the links between adolescent' relationships with peers and identity development were also extracted. Different methods of assessment of identity development and relationships with peers were used across the included studies, therefore meta-analytic calculations were not performed.

Results

In total seven articles identified through the systematic literature review met the inclusion and quality criteria. The main characteristics of these studies are presented in Table 1. There were different methodologies used in assessing adolescent

Table 1. Characteristics of the population and measures used in the studies identified in the systematic literature review

Authors, year of publication	Sample size	Age of participants	Measures used (reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha)
1. Pugh, & Hart, 1999	N = 497 (gender distribution were approximately equal)	Students in grades 10-12	Orientation to peer group questionnaire: orientation to the peer group formal ($\alpha=0.75, 0.73$) and informal ($\alpha=0.59, 0.61$) reward system scales ¹ ; Erikson psychosocial development inventory (EPSI) ² ($\alpha=0.79, 0.75$)
2. Nawaz, 2011	N = 550 (300 boys, 250 girls)	17-25 years	Attachment to parents and peers questionnaire (IPPA-R) ³ ($\alpha=0.93$); Questionnaire of Ego identity statuses extended version (EOM-EIS-2) ⁴ ($\alpha=0.92$).
3. Klimstra et al., 2013	Sample 1: N = 485 (222 girls, 63 boys); Sample 2: N = 390 (222 girls, 168 boys).	Sample 1: Mean = 18.6 years (SD = 0.57); Sample 2: Mean = 16.7 years (SD = 0.80).	NEO five questionnaire (NEO-FFI) ⁵ ($\alpha=0.87 - 0.89$); Quick Big Five Questionnaire ⁶ ($\alpha=0.76 - 0.92$); Utrecht-Groningen Scale of Identity Development ⁷ ($\alpha=0.5 - 0.9$); Utrecht-scale of Management of Identity Commitment (U-MICS) ⁸ ($\alpha=0.62 - 0.94$); sociodemographic issues about aspects of romantic relationships in pair.
4. Rassart et al., 2012	N = 429 (200 girls, 229 boys)	14-18 years, Mean = 16.3 years (SD = 1.15)	Dimension of Identity development scale (DIDS) ⁹ ($\alpha=0.82 - 0.94$); Attachment to parents and peers questionnaire (IPPA) ³ ($\alpha=0.81 - 0.83$)
5. Adams, Ryan, Hoffman, Dobson, & Nielsen, 1985	N = 80 (40 girls, 40 boys)	18-25 years Mean = 20.4	Ego identity status questionnaire (EOM-EIS) ¹⁰ ($\alpha=0.71 - 0.93$); Attentiveness and questionnaire of communication style (IN) ¹¹ ($\alpha=0.59 - 0.71$) Asch conformist behaviour experiment tasks ¹²
6. Meeus et al., 2002	N = 148 (72 girls, 76 boys)	Mean = 15 years (SD = 2.05)	Attachment to parents and peers questionnaire (IPPA) ³ ($\alpha=0.67 - 0.81$); Utrecht-Groningen Identity Development Scale ⁷ ($\alpha=0.76 - 0.87$).
7. Doumen, et al., 2012	N = 343 (274 girls, 79 boys)	Mean = 18 years (SD = 1.62)	Identity Style Questionnaire (ISI-4) ¹³ ($\alpha=0.67 - 0.79$); Attachment anxiety and avoidance of intimate relationships scale short version (ECR) ¹⁴ ($\alpha=0.62 - 0.76$); Friendship Quality Scale (FQS) ¹⁵ ($\alpha=0.83$); (Loneliness trait scale (STLS) ¹⁶ ($\alpha=0.82$).
¹ Pugh & Hart, 1999			¹⁰ Adams, Shea & Fitch, 1979
² Rosenthal et al., 1981			¹¹ Nideffer, 1976
³ Armsden & Greenberg, 1987			¹² Asch, 1956
⁴ Bennion & Adams, 1986			¹³ Luyckx, Lens, et al., 2010; Smits et. al., 2009;
⁵ Hoekstra et al. 1996			¹⁴ Wei et. al., 2007
⁶ Goldberg, 1992; Vermulst, Gerry 2005			¹⁵ Bukowski et. al., 1994
⁷ Meeus 1996; Meeus & Dekovic, 1995			¹⁶ Gerson & Perlman, 1979
⁸ Crocetti et al. 2008			¹⁷ Positive activities (working on school publications, extracurricular reading, participation in the arts, studying hard) usually formally awarded in school.
⁹ Luyckx et al., 2011			¹⁸ Social activities (partying, getting into trouble, watching sport) valuable between adolescents groups

Table 2. Summary of links between adolescent identity development and relationships with peers from studies identified in the systematic literature review

Authors, year of publication	Analyzed aspects of relationships with peers	Methods of data analysis	Results (statistical significance)	Comments
1. Pugh & Hart, 1999	Adolescents' orientation to peer group, adolescents' perceptions of which group they would be assigned to by their peers (formal achievement in school, participation in extra activities, participation in parties and sports, activities outside the school).	Multiple regression analysis	Orientation to formal award activities peer group is positively related with faster development of ego identity**; Orientation to informal peer group is positively associated with better ability to imagine themselves in the future*	
2. Nawaz, 2011	Attachment to peers, quality of friendship with peers.	Correlation analysis	Attachment to peers is positively associated with identity development.* The correlation coefficient of identity development and attachment to peers is higher than the coefficient of identity development and attachment to parents.	Attachment to parents and friends explain only 4% of the variance. Correlation is stronger for girls.
3. Klimstra et al., 2013	Strength and stability of adolescents' romantic relationships	Multiple regression analysis	Adolescents less committed to their identity are more likely to experience broke up in their romantic relationships**.	Identity strength is more important for stability of romantic relationships than personality traits.
4. Rassart et al., 2012	Attachment to peers, quality of friendship with peers.	Correlation analysis	The quality of relationships with peers and affection towards them is positively related to identity integration and identity commitments*.	
5. Adams et al., 1985	Conformist behavior when feeling peer group pressure, links of personality traits and communication style in interpersonal relations.	Correlation analysis	In young men sample identity achieved and foreclosure statuses were related to more accurate information processing, lower expression of negative feelings to others, and lower obsessiveness in interpersonal relationships*. In girl sample identity achievement and foreclosure statuses were related to higher external attentional focus, more accurate information processing, and lower need to control their interpersonal relationships*. Conformist behaviour is not related to any of the identity statuses.	Contradictory results.
6. Meeus et al., 2002	Attachment to peers, strength and quality of relationship with peers/ friends.	Multiple regression analysis	Attachment to peers is positively related with commitment to relationships*** and identity exploration status**. Commitment to identity is positively related with parent and peer trust in relationships***.	
7. Doumen et al., 2012	Quality of relationships with peers, loneliness, attachment to peers.	Structural equation modeling	Integrated identity is positively related with better relationship with peers*** and negatively with a feeling of loneliness* and avoidant attachment style***. Identity diffusion is positively related to anxious and avoidant attachment styles*** and feeling of loneliness**. Anxious and avoidant attachment mediates the relationship between identity and the quality of relationship with peers.	

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

identity development and relationships with peers in the included studies. Adolescents' relationships with peers were most frequently analyzed by measuring attachment to peers (4 of 7, #2, #4, #6, #7). Other relationships considered in one study each included: orientation to peer group (#1), having a romantic relationship (#3), conformist behaviour (#5), and adjustment to peers (#5). Reliability coefficients of the measures used in the various studies met a proposed threshold indicating suitability for use in psychological research for group comparisons (i.e., Cronbach $\alpha > 0.5$) (Streiner & Norman, 2008).

Findings from the included studies are summarized in Table 2. In the majority of studies (6 of 7, #1-4, #6-7) statistically significant links between adolescent identity development and relationships with peers were found. Achieved sense of identity is positively associated with attachment to peers (#2, #4, #6, #7), adolescents' orientation to the formal peer groups' achievements (#1), stability and robustness in romantic relationships (#3), better relationships with peers, and reduced sense of loneliness (#7). In contrast, mixed findings were found in one study. More specifically, Adams et al. (1985) (#5) found achievement of identity is associated with better interpersonal characteristics (attentiveness to social information, capability of addressing numerous ideas and thoughts, being less controlling and expressing less negative emotions in the context of interpersonal relationships) while conformist behaviour with peers is not predicted by identity statuses.

Discussion

The importance of relationships with peers increases markedly in adolescence (Tarrant, 2002) and is related with adolescent identity development (Pugh & Hart, 1999). However, based on this systematic review there is an overall lack of studies analyzing links between adolescents' relationships with peers and their identity development using Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. In addition, the different contexts, methodologies, and measures used in the included studies leave uncertainties in a number of areas. First, the links of identity development and relationship with peers were analyzed in samples of participants of different age and contexts. The ages ranged from 14 to 25 years. Analyzed aspects of relationship with peers also varied including relationships with friends, classmates or other peers in the school, and relationship with romantic partners. Given these variations, there are still questions as to "how identity development is related with adolescents' age and specificity of relationship type with peers". Second, the included studies were primarily based on correlation analysis

and thus not able to determine causal relationships between variables.

Results of the systematic literature review found that adolescent identity development is positively associated with an attachment to peers (Nawaz, 2011; Rassart et al., 2012; Meeus et al., 2002; Doumen et al., 2012), a better quality of relationship with peers and a lower tendency to experience negative feelings such as loneliness (Doumen et al., 2012). The reached identity is also positively related to being less nervous or competitive in interpersonal relations (Adams et al., 1985) and being more satisfied in romantic relationships (Klimstra et al., 2013). In addition, reached identity is positively related to the ability to reflect on one's interpersonal relationships and to be less controlling (Adams et al., 1985).

Desire to belong to a peer group and active involvement and participation in various peer groups activities are also linked with a reached identity (Pugh & Hart, 1999). This could be explained by the fact that peer groups become the place where adolescents can compare themselves with each other and achieve a personal sense of identity (Nawaz, 2011) which may be constructed in the context of social relationships. Participation in new activities and new experiences in the peer group allows adolescents to explore different values and norms. Discussions with peers may also help them to understand themselves better. In this way, adolescents could construct their identity by adopting certain values and norms of their peer group and rejecting others, which they have found as unacceptable with their worldview. Social interactions with peers with similar or different values also could help adolescents to clarify their worldview and values. This could be so as, communication with peers could give adolescents a supportive social environment where they can freely discuss what they are and who they would like to be. The peer group where adolescents belong can also provide values and norms which adolescents can identify with (Pugh & Hart, 1999). By communicating with peers, adolescents can not only discuss their identity issues with significant others, but can get their approval and in turn achieve identity more easily (Rassart et al., 2012). The fact that a high-quality relationship with peers is associated with the achieved identity could also be related to the fact that a good relationship between peers characterized by mutual cooperation, negotiation, and mutual understanding, helps adolescents to explore their identity with minimal risk to their self-image, which, in turn, may stimulate adolescents to commit to their goals and beliefs. In this way, good relationship with peers can enhance adolescent's self-esteem and help to define themselves and work as a protecting factor against the anxiety related with identity

development (Rassart et al., 2012). Results of this study revealed that achieved identity is related to better relationships with peers. Being a part of a peer group, good, positive communication with peers may provide appropriate social context for adolescent's personal identity development. Although the results of the systematic literature review do not disclose causal relationship between adolescent identity development and relationships with peers.

Despite identifying links between adolescent identity development and relationship with peers from the literature review, some theoretical ambiguities remain. In many of the analyzed studies (study #1-4, #6) it is not clear what other factors could be related or predict quality of relationships with peers and how these other factors might link with adolescent identity development. Adams & Ryan (1985) (study #5) and, Doumen and colleagues (2012) (study #7) touch on personality traits that may be related to identity development, but these links are mentioned only secondarily (study #5) or only as very specific characteristics, for example, anxiety or tendency to experience more loneliness (study #7). However, it still remains unclear what other factors could be related with adolescent identity development and quality of relationships with peers. Some additional factors, that are often examined in the context of relationships and are associated with quality of relationships, could be adolescents' ability to be empathic and differentiation of self.

Empathy is an essential communication skill that helps to understand the views of others and to predict their emotional reactions. Empathy is most commonly defined as the emotional trait which helps to facilitate the other person's emotional experience. It is also the cognitive skill that facilitates other person's emotion understanding (Hogan, 1969 and Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972, as cited in Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007). Empathy can also be defined as a relatively neutral or pleasant feeling for others that awakens altruistic motivation to reduce distress or meet the needs of other persons (Ocejo, López-Pérez, Ambrona, & Fernández, 2009). High levels of adolescent empathy are associated with a reduced experience of bullying and, a desire to protect victims of bullying (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoe, 2007). It is also related to adolescents' pro-social behaviour and, positive evaluations of the quality of their relationship with peers (Barr & Higgins-Dalessandro, 2007). Higher self-control, desire to cooperate, decrease conflict with peers (Mount, 2010) and helping others in emergency situations (Masten, Eisenberger, Pfeifer, & Dapretto, 2010) are also linked with empathy. Research shown that empathy is also associated with a successful adaptation in social relationships and more developed social competence (Glick & Rose, 2011),

as well as better communication skills in adolescence and adulthood (Allemand, Steiger, & Fend, 2014). In considering links between empathy and identity development Smits, Doumen, Luyckx, Duriez, & Goossens (2011) have found that empathy can be predicted by information-oriented and diffuse-avoidant identity styles, and empathy can predict adolescent interpersonal behaviour in social relationships. It means that empathy mediates relationship between adolescent information-oriented and diffuse-avoidant identity styles and behaviour in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it could be that empathy may also be one of the intermediate factors that links adolescents' identity development and relationships with peers and be in alignment with the finding from the systematic literature review that good relationships with peers are important for adolescent identity development (Doumen et al., 2012; Klimstra et al., 2013; Meeus et al., 2002; Nawaz, 2011; Rassart et al., 2012).

Differentiation of self is a personality factor which is associated with better interpersonal relationships, adaptive functioning in the environment (Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz, & Johnson, 2005), lower anxiety levels (Skowron & Dendy, 2004) and greater psychological well-being (Skowron, Stanley & Shapiro, 2009). The concept of differentiation of self becomes important in adolescence when the adolescent seeks to create their identity in the context of relationships with peers. Many adolescents tend to copy the behaviour of their friends or other important people in order to adapt to peers and/or to belong to a peer group. Through communication with peers adolescents have an opportunity to check their beliefs about themselves and the world and compare it with their peers. In communication processes adolescents also gets an opportunity to discuss, oppose and change their thinking about the world and themselves which is essential to identity development. Peer groups also provides values and norms which adolescents can identify with (Pugh & Hart, 1999). Susceptibility to peer pressure and conformism become problematic when adolescents encourage each other to participate in antisocial, or deviant activities such as smoking, substance use, early sexual behavior or bullying (Chan & Chan, 2008). The concept of differentiation of self, developed by Bowen (1978), involves a person's ability to distinguish him or herself as a separate, autonomous individual from other persons. Individuals with a high level of differentiation of self are able to perceive and distinguish their thoughts, opinions and worldview from other people and understand the other person's position simultaneously. Such a person is also able to share his/her experiences, feelings, opinions and respected differences with other persons and accept them at the same time. A person with a high

differentiation of self is also aware of his/her autonomy and personality boundaries and is able to take responsibility for his/her behaviour (Bowen, 1978). High differentiation of self is related to a better ability to create and maintain interpersonal relationships (Lal & Bartle-Haring, 2011; Holman & Busby, 2011). In adolescence, differentiation of self is important in order to establish and maintain good relationships with peers, realize one's unique place within relationships, and to be able to resist negative pressure of peers. Thus, differentiation of self could be a second factor which could be related to successful adolescent's relationships with peers and how he/she will be able to resist the negative values, group norms and behaviours of peers that he/she does not agree. Therefore adolescents' differentiation of self could also be one of the intermediate factors that could link adolescent's identity formation and relationships with peers and could predict direction and strength of these links. In order to examine these interrelationships, further empirical research in this area is needed.

Conclusions

1. Adolescents' identity development is positively related with their relationships with peers. Belonging to a peer group and good relationships with peers based on mutual respect and acceptance are positively related with adolescent identity development.
2. Personality related factors that could be linked with adolescents' identity development and their relationship with peers are not clear. Potential factors of interest, which are associated with good social relationships, are adolescent's ability to be empathic and his/her differentiation of self. Further empirical research investigating links between adolescent identity development, empathy, differentiation of self, and relationships with peers is needed.

Acknowledgements/Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflicts to disclose.

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