

Who Influences who? Differential Susceptibility to Social Influence in Children and Adolescents

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Children and adolescents use people with whom they identify as a reference point for judgments (Stallen et al., 2013). In this process, people of different age may play differing roles as reference groups. The current study investigated the importance of adults, adolescents, and children as reference groups with regard to children's and adolescent's perceptions of clothing styles. Clothing can be a way to express one's personality and can create an important form of identity-signaling (Berger, 2008).

We used a computer-based experiment to test the influence of different reference groups. Participants included 70 adolescents ($M = 13.98$ years, $SD = .89$; 62.9% girls) and 59 children ($M = 8.02$ years, $SD = .81$; 52.5% girls).

We compared children and adolescents using multi-level analyses. We found no difference between adolescents' and children's susceptibility to influence from adolescents and adults. In contrast, a significant two-way-interaction ($p = .006$) between participant age group (children vs. adolescents) and reference group revealed that children were more susceptible to the influence of children than adolescents to children.

Results indicate children and adolescents are generally susceptible to social influence in clothing style judgments. Adolescents and children were equally influenced by other adolescents. Children, in contrast, were a more important reference group for children than for adolescents. Adults appeared to play a similar role for both children and adolescents. Results are discussed in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

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