

3. Peer similarity in self-regulatory abilities

Aim: To examine the extent to which young adults select and influence each other on self-regulatory abilities, referring to the goals they set, their motivation to pursue these goals, and their capacity to reach these goals.

Theoretical background:

Emerging adulthood, defined as the age period from late teens to mid-20s, is a transitional phase in which young people navigate through increasingly complex and demanding social and academic worlds where they also take on an increasing number of adult roles and responsibilities. This transition from late adolescence into emerging adulthood, often accompanied by the transition to college, is also a phase of identity exploration, where adult life goals are shaped. In this transitional phase, young people are confronted with new responsibilities, expectations, and demands, which often do not align with each other and can even be contradictory. To successfully navigate through this phase, self-regulatory skills are crucial. Peer networks are important to adjust to college life and academic success (Stadtfeld et al., 2019). For that reason, a better understanding of the social network dynamics among previously unacquainted college students is crucial.

Social goals of belonging and academic goals can contribute to a student's well-being and academic success. Social goals for status (i.e., popularity) can distract from working toward academic goals, because they can lead to risky behaviors, such as substance misuse. To obtain a balance between these social and academic goals and successfully navigate through this transitional phase, self-regulatory skills such as goal flexibility (i.e., the ability to switch between goals depending on the social context) and goal motivation, are vital for young people's well-being and contribution to society. This project examines whether young people with low self-regulation choose friends with social status goals rather than achievement goals, are more open or susceptible to negative peer influence, and whether this leads to diversions from academic goals or problems with substance use. It is expected that young people will select friends on the goals they set, their motivation to pursue these goals, and their capacity to reach the goals. Thus, young people will select each other based on these pre-existing aspects of self-regulation. Furthermore, it is expected that young people will influence each other's self-regulatory abilities.

Research Design:

This project is part of GUTS, an NWO Gravitation project: growinguptogetherinsociety.com. In a team with other GUTS researchers (based in Leiden and Amsterdam), prospective longitudinal network data, survey data, and neuroimaging data will be collected among young adults (e.g., a cohort of students at an applied university). The longitudinal network data will be the basis for the dissertation. Disentangling selection from influence requires stochastic actor-oriented modeling, implemented in SIENA, a program that models changes in the peer network (selection: similar individuals choosing each other to hang out with) and behavior (influence: connected individuals becoming increasingly similar) between time points (Laninga-Wijnen & Veenstra, 2023). The first paper will be based on other data (e.g., the previously collected SNARE Study).

Literature

- Laninga-Wijnen, L., & Veenstra, R. (2023). Peer similarity in adolescent social networks: Types of selection and influence, and factors contributing to openness to peer influence. In B. Halpern-Felsher (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Health*. Elsevier, doi: 10.1016/B978-0-12-818872-9.00047-9.
- Stadtfeld, C. et al. (2019). Integration in emerging social networks explains academic failure and success. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(3), 792-797.

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