Linking Adolescent Subculture with Attitudes Towards Immigrants: Do Peer Crowds Have Any Role to Play?

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The purpose of this study was to examine whether adolescents’ self-identification with peer crowds at school was related to their attitudes towards immigrants. The study was based on a sample of Swedish adolescents (N = 905; $M_{age} = 14.08$, $SD = .95$). The findings revealed that affiliation with particular peer crowds at school was linked to tolerant attitudes towards immigrants. Specifically, it was found that when adolescents perceived themselves as a part of Radical or Mainstream peer crowds they tend to have higher tolerance towards immigrants. At the same time, no significant effects were found with regard to adolescents who perceived themselves to belong to peer crowds within Counterculture. Furthermore, no significant links were found between affiliation with peer crowds and prejudice towards immigrants. The results of the study suggest that tolerance and prejudice should be studied as separate constructs, and highlights the important role of peer crowds as potential determinants of attitudes towards immigrants.

Keywords: attitudes, peer crowd, adolescents, tolerance, prejudice.

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Att länka ungdomskultur med attityder mot invandrare: Spelar ungdomars subgrupperingar någon roll?

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Syftet med denna studie var att undersöka huruvida ungdomars subgrupperingar spelade roll när det kom till ungdomars attityder gentemot invandrare. Studien baserades på ett urval av svenska ungdomar (N = 905; $M_{\text{age}} = 14.08$, $SD = .95$). I studien upptäcktes att ungdomars subgrupperingar i skolan var länkat till tolerans gentemot invandrare. Specifikt, så upptäcktes att ungdomar som såg sig själv inom subgrupperingarna Radical och Mainstream tenderade att ha högre tolerans. Samtidigt så fanns det inga signifikanta effekter att hitta när det kom till ungdomar som såg sig själv tillhöra subgrupperingen Counterculture. Vidare så upptäcktes inga signifikanta relationer mellan ungdomars subgrupperingar och fördomsfullhet gentemot invandrare. Resultatet av studien föreslår att tolerance och prejudice borde studeras som två separata termer, och lyfter fram vikten av ungdomars subgrupperingar som potentiella faktorer kring attityder gentemot invandrare.

**Nyckelord:** attityder, ungdomar, tolerans, fördomar, subgrupperingar

Handledare: Lilliia Korol

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Linking Adolescent Subculture with Attitudes towards Immigrants: Do Peer Crowds Have Any Role to Play?

“Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit” – Mahatma Ghandi

In today’s society, immigration and integration have become particularly burning issues. Due to war, poverty, and other reasons people are seeking a way out of their current situation. Europe has been a ‘hotspot’ for immigrants, particularly since 2015, when the civil war in Syria escalated and a huge number of immigrants started to arrive to European countries. Sweden is one of the countries that has taken in most refugees per capita (EU, 2018), and is today a diverse country with almost 15 percent of the population represented by immigrants (SCB, 2018). With a growing immigration rate, increasing cultural diversity has made attempts to support harmonious inter-ethnic relations a pressing challenge for the Swedish society. Even though the Swedish population has become more tolerant towards immigrants (Demker, 2016), there is still a breeze of racial beliefs and prejudices sweeping through the country. For instance, a Swedish party ‘Sverigedemokraterna’ that has gotten the support of 12,86 percent of voters, has a limitation of immigration as one of its primary goals (Sandberg & Demker, 2014; Valmyndigheten, 2014). Overall, Swedish adolescents are highly tolerant, but there is still 5-10 percent that are shown to hold prejudicial attitudes towards newcomers (Tid för tolerans, 2014). Negative attitudes are linked to violence (Kuhn, 2004) and immigrant youths are frequently bullied and harassed due to their ethnic and cultural background. This in turn has negative consequences for their psychosocial functioning and adjustment in Swedish society (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2014). Moreover, as many as 5,8 percent of students in ninth grade reported they were exposed to xenophobia-related hate crimes (SCB, 2015). Therefore, in order to improve inter-ethnic relations and achieve equality in Swedish society, it seems critical to
provide more comprehensive understanding of what makes young people hold tolerant or prejudicial inter-ethnic attitudes.

**Inter-Ethnic Attitudes**

One of the ground phenomenon in social psychology is attitudes (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Existing research on inter-ethnic attitudes has either analyzed tolerance and prejudice as two opposite ends of the same spectrum or has seen them as two separate constructs (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). In terms of the latter, according to more recent studies, tolerance and prejudice are presented as two independent yet related constructs (Miklikowska, 2015). Previous research explains inter-ethnic prejudice as negative attitudes and inter-ethnic tolerance as positive attitudes, towards a person or a group that does not share the same ethnic identification (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011; Van Zalk & Kerr, 2014). For example, if a person identifies with ethnic swedes, their negative attitudes towards a person or group with another ethnicity is seen as prejudice, and their positive attitudes is seen as tolerance. Tolerant people can also be defined as those who share beliefs about equality (Van Zalk & Kerr, 2014). However, since one can have prejudices against immigrants and still be supporting the equalitarian principles in other areas, the idea that tolerance and prejudices could be considered each other’s strict opposites, becomes paradoxical (Van Zalk & Kerr, 2014). Taken together, existing literature suggests that tolerance and prejudice are two independent constructs that need to be analyzed separately.

**Determinants of inter-ethnic attitudes.** The main purpose of studying inter-ethnic attitudes is to understand how race, ethnicity, and cultural differences occur in today’s society. In order to improve inter-ethnic relations and reduce prejudicial attitudes, particularly among a younger population, it is critical to understand how these negative attitudes derive and what explanatory factors underlie their occurrence. One possible explanation is to be found in
sociodemographic characteristics. For instance, the level of parental education was found to be significantly linked to tolerance. In particular, adolescents whose parents had higher degree of education level were more likely to be tolerant (Tid för tolerans, 2014). At the same time, people who struggle in the labor market and have lower education level tend to express fear of competition for a social status and job, which in turn may motivate them to be more prejudicial towards newcomers (Demker, 2016).

Gender and age are two other demographic factors that have been found to be significantly linked to prejudicial attitudes. Specifically, it is well-documented that younger individuals tend to be more open and more tolerant than adults (Demker & Sandberg, 2014). In addition, girls have been shown to be more tolerant than boys, and their motives behind their attitudes differ (Demker & Sandberg, 2014). Girls tend to worry more about increasing negative attitudes in society, and boys tend to worry more about increasing immigration rate (Tid för tolerans, 2014). Further, recent studies in Sweden (Tid för tolerans, 2014) suggest that adolescents’ choice of program at the upper-secondary school is associated with their inter-ethnic attitudes. Specifically, students at the preparatory programs are more likely to be tolerant, while vocational students are more inclined to demonstrate prejudice (Tid för tolerans, 2014). Altogether, these findings provide some evidence that sociodemographic characteristics have an important role to play as potential determinants for inter-ethnic attitudes among adolescents.

Peer Crowds

Existing literature conceptualizes adolescent peer group types in similar yet different ways. For instance, Sussman and colleagues (2006) describe these groups by referring to them as “peer group association” (Sussman et al., 1990) or “peer group self-identification” (Sussman et al., 1994). Other researchers use terms such as “peer crowd affiliation” (Prinstein & La Greca,
2002), and “peer group identification” (Mosbach & Leventhal, 1988). In this study, we will refer to these peer groups as “peer crowds”.

Adolescent years is a period of time when the individual starts to develop their social identity and seek to find out who they really are (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Arrett, 2007). Theories regarding social identity are based on so called social categories, which can, for example, consist of nationality, religion, and race, that the adolescent is using to organize their social surrounding (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Social scientists have noticed a certain tendency in which people place others and themselves into social types, which are consensually recognized and labeled (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Beebe, 2002). Thus, when adolescents self-identify with a particular peer crowd, a cognitive phenomenon derives since peer crowds are grounded in an individual’s self-perception of themselves. These peer crowds consist of a set of attributes that a specific group has (Moran, Walker, Alexander, Jordan, & Wagner, 2017). Adolescents may also identify with these groups in order to develop personal autonomy from their parents, or to develop a sense of identity (Ashmore et al., 2002). Cultural norms exist within these groups, and these norms have a tendency to be reinforced by peers when they successfully or unsuccessfully participate in the culture. They also adopt norms and beliefs that their peer crowd has. For instance, Brains and Computer-Nerds do not want to stand out, Athletes and Populars keep up with the latest cultural trends, and Punks and Goths identify with being different from average youths (Moran et al., 2017). Thijs and colleagues (2016) found that adolescents’ attitudes are regulated by external and internal motivators, and by the impact of social norms. They also found that there was a unique effect between the perceived norms of friends and their self-determination. Further, Bayram-Özdemir and colleagues (2018) showed that adolescents whose social network supported prejudicial attitudes towards immigrants were more likely to engage in ethnic bullying of their immigrant peers. Taken together, existing research provides some evidence that peer crowds
might have an important role to play as a potential determinant of adolescents’ inter-ethnic attitudes. Yet, as far as we are aware no study up to today has aimed to explore the link between youth subculture and their tolerant and prejudicial attitudes. The present research seeks to address this gap in knowledge.

The Present Study

The main aim of the present study is to investigate the possible linkage between adolescents’ self-identification with peer crowds at school and their inter-ethnic attitudes. Previous studies tend to focus on gender differences, socioeconomic status, and parental influences as explanations for youth’s attitudes towards immigrants. Our main goal is to contribute to the field by shedding some light on whether peer crowds have any role to play as an additional explanatory factor, when it comes to adolescents’ inter-ethnic attitudes.

Previous research tends to focus primarily on adolescents when studying attitudes toward immigrants (see, for example, Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin, 2014; Van Zalk & Kerr, 2014). During the adolescent years, children start to develop their cognitive skills regarding social categorization, including racial status (Allport, 1924). Recent research by Raabe and Beelmann (2011) confirms that a child’s tolerance towards immigrants increases until the adolescent years, and then ceases to develop. This points to the conclusion that attitudes of young people towards immigrants are permanent and follow into adulthood. Thus, it is an age in which its possible to influence attitudes which leads us to wanting to get a deeper understanding to what underlies inter-ethnic attitudes among adolescents in particular.

Following findings of prior research (Thijs et al., 2016), we believe cultural norms within peer crowds could have an impact on inter-ethnic attitudes. Furthermore, given existing findings that show gender and socioeconomic differences in the development of tolerance and prejudice
(Sandberg & Demker, 2014; Tid för tolerans, 2014), we will control for these factors in the present research.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The sample for the present study was taken from a longitudinal study, called the Seven School Study, which was conducted by Margaret Kerr and Håkan Stattin. The study collected data during a 4-year period, and was conducted in Örebro, a medium-size town in central Sweden. The original study was designed to assess adolescents’ experiences inside and outside school, and their relationship with peers, teachers, and parents. The participants were selected from schools within neighborhoods with different socio-economic characteristics. The sample for the current study included 905 adolescents (M\text{age} = 14.08; SD = .95, range = 12-16). The students were in grade six to nine. They were born in Sweden and had parents of Swedish background. 65% of the participants reported living with both parents, and 18% mentioned they lived with both parents but not simultaneously. The sample included 48.4% participants that identified themselves as females, and 51.6% participants that identified themselves as males. The size and demographics of our sample allows us to generalize our results onto a bigger population.

**Measures**

**Self-Perception of Peer Crowd Affiliation.** To assess adolescents’ self-identification with peer crowds at school, the respondents were asked to answer the following question “What group of youths do you feel that you belong to?” (Becic & Kerr, 2009). The available responses included the following peer crowds: Skater, Hardrocker, Sporty/Athlete, Brain, Hip-Hopper, Synth, Goth, Popular, Aestethic, Punk, Hippie, Computer Nerd, Popper, and Immigrant. The participants were asked to rate their answers using a 5-item Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 =
“Not at all like me” to 5 = “Exactly like me”. The peer crowds were generated through a focus group (Brown, 1989), which consisted of 10 students who identified peer crowd names and confirmed that these crowds were present in their schools. The students were briefed on peer crowds and had an understanding of what these could be.

**Tolerance & Prejudice.** Tolerance and prejudice were assessed via an 8-item scale from the Tolerance and Prejudice Questionnaire (Van Zalk et al., 2013) and were rated using a 4-item scale (from 1=Don’t agree at all to 4=Agree completely). The sample items for tolerance included: “Immigrants are good for the Swedish economy”, “We should have a welcoming attitude towards immigrants that would like to live in Sweden”, “The Swedish culture gets enriched by immigrants coming to Sweden”, and “In the future, Sweden will be a country with exciting encounters between people who come from different parts of the world”. The inter-item reliability for tolerance was acceptable (α = .78). The sample items for prejudice included: “Immigrants increase criminality”, “Immigrants often take jobs from those born in Sweden”, “Immigrants often come here only to use the welfare in Sweden”, and “It happens too often that immigrants have customs and traditions that don’t fit in to the Swedish society”. The inter-item reliability for prejudice was also acceptable (α = .76).

**Socio-demographic variables.** Participants were also asked questions with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and perception of their family economy.

**Procedures**

The data were collected through a questionnaire which was administered in Swedish. The collection of the data was conducted by trained research assistants, during regular school days. The participants were assured that it was voluntary, and that their responses would be
confidential. Furthermore, the participants were informed about the goals of the study. The study and procedures were approved by the Regional Research Ethics Committee in Sweden.

**Statistical Analyses**

In order to answer our research questions, we ran a series of statistical analyses, including an exploratory factor analysis, bivariate correlational analysis, independent samples t-test, and a hierarchical regression analyses for one of the outcome variables (i.e., tolerance). In our hierarchical regression analysis, gender was used as a control variable. We decided not to include socioeconomic status as a covariate in our regression models since our preliminary analysis did not show any significant correlations of this variable with tolerance and prejudice. We also decided to not run a hierarchical regression analysis for prejudice, due to our bivariate correlational analysis showing no significant correlations between peer crowds and prejudice.

**Results**

**Factor Analysis**

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using a principal component analysis with Promax rotation. This was done to determine if peer crowds could be represented into fewer subset of meaningful groups. In order to comprise peer crowds into fewer categories, and to decide the number of factors to retain, we set up three criteria to follow. These criteria were: Eigenvalues larger than 1, a visual inspection of the scree plot (factors above the curve’s inflection point), and a comparison with groups suggested by prior research. The first factor analysis revealed six factors with a factor loading above 1. In addition, the visual inspection of the scree plot revealed that three factors were above the curve’s inflection point, where the curve began to level off. Taking into account these preliminary tests, we ran a factor analysis with a fixed number of three factors to extract. While comparing our results with prior findings (e.g.,
Moran et al., 2017), we came to the conclusion that a three-factor solution best represented the current data (see Table 1).

Factor 1 consisted of the positive loading of the “Hardrocker”, “Synth”, “Goth”, “Aesthetic” and “Punk” crowds and we decided to label this group *Radical*. Factor 2 consisted of the positive loading of the “Athlete”, “Brain”, “Popular” and “Popper” crowds and we decided to label this group *Mainstream*. Factor 3 consisted of the positive loading of the “Skater”, “Hiphopper”, “Hippie” and “Computer-Nerd” crowds and we decided to label this group *Counterculture*. The factor scores from the factor analysis were used in the subsequent hierarchical regression analyses.

**Table 1.** Exploratory Factor Analysis on the Peer Crowd Affiliation Items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hardrocker</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synth</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goth</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aestethic</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punk</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popper</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skater</td>
<td></td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiphopper</td>
<td></td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippie</td>
<td></td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer-Nerd</td>
<td></td>
<td>.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Variance</td>
<td>18.87%</td>
<td>14.27%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 905. Structured Matrix obtained with Principal Axis Factoring Extraction, Promax Rotation with Kaiser Normalization.

**Hierarchical Regression Analyses**

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and factor scores for the study variables are presented in Table 2. As it can be seen from the table, tolerance had small positive correlation
with Radical and Mainstream peer crowds, but not Counterculture. At the same time, prejudice was not found to have significant correlations with any peer crowd. As expected, tolerance and prejudice had a significant large negative correlation with each other.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between the Crowd Affiliation Variables and Tolerance and Prejudice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Radical</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.14***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mainstream</td>
<td>-.22***</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Counterculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tolerance</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Prejudice</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.50***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>1.48 (0.50)</td>
<td>1.37 (0.57)</td>
<td>2.36 (0.81)</td>
<td>1.55 (0.61)</td>
<td>2.52 (0.74)</td>
<td>2.37 (0.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor Score</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.0088</td>
<td>-.00032</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Gender was coded as 1 = males, 2 = females. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Gender had a significant positive correlation with tolerance and a significant negative correlation with prejudice. In addition, an independent samples t-test showed that boys (M = 2.41, SD = .75) had less tolerant attitudes towards immigrants than girls (M = 2.63, SD = .72), t (856) = -4.25, p < .001. The independent samples t-test also showed that girls (M = 2.26, SD = .66) had less prejudiced attitudes than boys (M = 2.46, SD = .75), t (856) = 4.14, p < .001.

Furthermore, we examined if peer crowds could predict tolerance (see Table 3). In the first step of the regression model, gender was entered as a control variable. The second step included gender as well as the peer crowd groups, Radical, Mainstream and Counterculture. The results of the first hierarchical regression analysis suggested that 2.1% of the variation in adolescents’ tolerance towards immigrants was explained by gender, F (1, 667) = 14.02, p < .001. Specifically, girls were more likely to be tolerant than boys (β = .14, p < .001). Moreover, 3.1% of the variations in adolescents’ tolerance towards immigrants was explained by peer crowds, F (3, 664) = 7.29, p < .001. Specifically, youths identifying with the peer crowds within Radicals (β = .12, p < .001), and youths identifying with peer crowds within Mainstreams (β =
.11, \( p = .004 \)), were more likely to be tolerant towards immigrants. However, Counterculture was not found to be related to tolerance towards immigrants (\( \beta = .07, p = .084 \)). The results from the bivariate correlational analysis showed that there were no significant correlations between prejudice and peer crowds. Therefore, we did not conduct a hierarchical regression analysis with prejudice as an outcome variable, since peer crowds would not be able to explain prejudice.

### Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Model Predicting Adolescents’ Tolerance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>.14***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterculture</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.02***</td>
<td>.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 \text{Change} )</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *\( p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.***

### Discussion

From this study we have learned that adolescents’ self-identification with a particular peer crowd at school is linked to their attitudes towards immigrants. Specifically, our findings reveal that Radical and Mainstream peer crowds are linked to tolerance, while Counterculture peer crowds is not. These findings suggest that students who perceive themselves as belonging to these two peer crowd groups are more likely to be tolerant towards immigrants. An explanation as to why those identifying with these particular peer crowds tend to be more tolerant might be due to the characteristics of the peer crowds themselves. Prior research has shown that those identifying with Athletes and Populars keep up with the latest cultural trends, as well as often find themselves in situations of social context (Moran et al., 2017). This might explain why those perceiving themselves as part of Mainstream peer crowds can be seen as more tolerant. Particularly because they may find themselves in social situations with immigrants, and they are quick to follow cultural trends which might include tolerance and inclusion. Previous studies
state that Swedish adolescents are tolerant in general, and if this is to be seen as a cultural trend, it might explain why those affiliated with Mainstream peer crowd would be more tolerant towards immigrants. Those belonging to the Radical peer crowds, however, have been characterized as identifying themselves as being unique and different from average adolescents (Moran et al., 2017). This might explain why those affiliated with the Radical peer crowd shows more tolerance towards immigrants, since immigrants as a group might also be seen as different from the average youths. Since they both can be perceived as not being part of the mainstream peers, they might be more likely to hold positive attitudes towards each other. Those identifying with Radical peer crowd also tends to find themselves in social situations, mostly regarding their interest in music (Moran et al., 2017), which might lead to an interaction with immigrants with shared interests. This in turn could possibly explain why they are to be seen as more tolerant.

With Sweden being much more diverse today than it was years ago (SCB, 2018) another explanation for the fact that peer crow affiliation can explain tolerance, might be found in the inter-ethnic interaction between adolescents of immigrant and native background. According to previous research, inter-ethnic interaction is a powerful tool in decreasing negative attitudes (Allport, 1924; Coté & Erickson, 2009). This might show that the situations in which they find themselves makes them interact with immigrants, and interaction might possibly be increased due to a more ethnical diverse society in general. In turn, this might explain why adolescents within these particular peer crowds are to be seen as more tolerant, since their characteristics show they tend to find themselves in social situations more often. However, if inter-ethnic interaction were to explain these results, it had to have happened during optimal conditions, which is stated to be when natives and immigrants are on the same level regarding social status (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).
There might also be an explanation based on specific peer crowd characteristics as to why those identifying with the Counterculture peer crowd does not relate to tolerance. Existing literature suggests that adolescents who perceive themselves as belonging to this peer crowd is characterized with having the odds against her or him, and has a sense of struggle in their lives. Similar to those affiliated with Radical peer crowds, they might also tend to create their self-image as being different from average youths (Moran et al., 2017). However, this peer crowd group is the most diverse, with Hippies, Skaters, Hiphoppers and Computer-Nerds. By being this diverse, the results for tolerance may vary due to different cultural norms within each peer crowd. Also, the factor loadings for Computer-Nerds is comparatively low to the rest. This might explain why the results from the hierarchical regression analysis regarding tolerance shows inconclusive results for those identifying with peer crowds within Counterculture, due to large variations in the results between these youths.

Consistent with prior research (Demker & Sandberg, 2016), gender was found to be linked to attitudes towards immigrants, showing a significant difference between boys and girls, both regarding tolerance and prejudice. Girls tend to be more tolerant than boys, and boys tend to be more prejudiced than girls. However, our study shows that in terms of mean levels, prejudice is prevailing among the adolescents across both genders. Previous studies (Tid för tolerans, 2014) demonstrate that 5-10 percent of the adolescents in Sweden hold prejudicial attitudes in general. Considering that peer crowds explain tolerance but not prejudice, this might be explained by the fact that these attitudes represent two separate constructs. If tolerance and prejudice were the direct opposites of each other, then our findings would show similar results for prejudice and tolerance, since prejudice was still present. Since we do not see any significant relationship between peer crowds and prejudice, our study supports previous research stating that these two constructs should be studied separately (e.g., Miklikowska, 2015; Sullivan & Transue, 1999).
Another possible explanation for the lack of significant association between self-identification with peer crowds and prejudice may be due to the way we grouped peer crowds in the present study. The groups might be more similar when it comes to tolerance but differ more when it comes to prejudice. In future research, it would be interesting to revise the grouping of peer crowds and examine how these affiliations could be combined in regard to other constructs.

As presented earlier, our results with regard to the link between socioeconomic status and attitudes towards immigrants was not in line with previous research (Tid för tolerans, 2014; Demker & Sandberg, 2016). These studies show that low socioeconomic status explains prejudice while our study suggest that socioeconomic status was not linked either to prejudice or tolerance. The way we assessed socio-economic status in our study may be a possible explanation of these contradictory findings. Specifically, in the present research socioeconomic status was measured in terms of self-perception of the adolescents’ family’s financial situation (e.g., “What is the financial situation in your family?”). While in previous research socioeconomic status was explained by, for example, low parental education level (Demker & Sandberg, 2016; Tid för tolerans, 2014). This indicates that the measurement regarding socioeconomic status may differ, which might lead to these contradictory results.

There are some limitations in our study. First, our study is cross-sectional, which makes it impossible to infer the direction of causality in the relationship between affiliations with peer crowds and inter-ethnic attitudes among adolescents. Second, we consider immigrants as one group and do not specify where the immigrants are from. By generalizing where they are from, we cannot study how attitudes differ towards immigrants from separate regions. Third, the questions used to assess adolescents’ socioeconomic status focused on the adolescents’ perceptions of their financial situation in comparison with other peers. Due to social desirability,
the adolescents might want to give an appearance of higher socioeconomic status, or a higher degree of tolerance, than it really was.

Despite these limitations, there are strengths in our study. This study is a first attempt to understand whether peer crowds and attitudes towards immigrants are linked. To use peer crowds to predict attitudes towards immigrants is a new concept, which could help reveal if youths are to be perceived as tolerant based on their group affiliations. We can also conclude that it has an important role to play when it comes to tolerance, and due to the size and demographic of our sample this result can be generalized onto a larger population.

Our study suggest that tolerance and prejudice exist among Swedish adolescents, and by uncovering their potential determinants we are able to explain what makes youths hold different attitudes towards immigrants. With immigration and integration being a highly discussed topic in today’s society, the issue of adolescents’ attitudes towards their peers are highly relevant. This study also contributes with practical implications concerning adolescents’ attitudes. It suggests which groups of adolescents that might hold more positive attitudes towards immigrants, and which groups that could possibly be targeted in attempts to increase positive attitudes overall. Along with this, suggestions regarding how to ease the development of positive attitudes could be drawn from the characteristics of the groups of adolescents that showed to be more tolerant today. This study may not put forward a solution to prejudice in Sweden today, however it highlights a new perspective regarding which factors to explore when examining inter-ethnic attitudes in adolescents.
References


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