

The Imaginary Audience, Self-Consciousness, and Public Individuation in Adolescence

Richard M. Ryan
Rebecca Kuczkowski
University of Rochester

ABSTRACT In this study, we examined the construct of the imaginary audience (Elkind & Bowen, 1979), presumably a precipitant of adolescent egocentrism, as it relates to public individuation and self-consciousness. We hypothesized that the imaginary audience inhibits public individuation and represents a critical form of public self-consciousness. We also argued that the imaginary audience is a normal aspect of early adolescent development that diminishes in the context of secure parental relationships by late adolescence but remains salient if these relationships are insecure. These hypotheses were examined in a cross-sectional study of 850 adolescents in the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 12th grades. Support was generally found for the hypothesized relations. The validity and limitations of the imaginary audience and public individuation constructs are discussed, along with more general theoretical issues concerning adolescent self-consciousness.

Concern with how others view one's self is a characteristic of both maturity and conformism. To be without concern or perspective with regard to others' viewpoints is to be socially insensitive and/or immature. However, to be dominated or preoccupied by what others think can be antithetical to autonomy and self-direction, i.e., represents conformity.

Preparation of this manuscript was facilitated by grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (HD 19914) and the National Institute of Mental Health (MH 18922) to the Human Motivation Program, Department of Psychology, University of Rochester. Address correspondence to Richard M. Ryan, Department of Psychology, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14627.

Journal of Personality 62:2, June 1994. Copyright © 1994 by Duke University Press.
CCC 0022-3506/94/\$1.50

Accordingly, the study of factors associated with social perspective taking and their role in the regulation of behavior has been increasingly central to developmental theories (Broughton, 1983).

Of central interest in this study is the theoretical connection between egocentric thought in adolescence, self-consciousness, and public individuation. Adolescent egocentrism, defined as a failure to differentiate one's own perspective from those of others, is often manifest in the phenomenon of an imaginary audience (Elkind, 1985). We examined relations between individual differences in the salience of imaginary audiences in adolescence and public self-consciousness and social anxiety, both of which represent a heightened concern with what others think. We further suggested that the imaginary audience phenomenon inhibits public individuation, or one's willingness to stand out or be different from others. Issues of gender, social contexts, and other problems concerning these constructs were also explored.

Egocentrism in Adolescence

Piaget (1962) defined egocentrism as a failure to distinguish self from non-self that takes a variety of forms specific to particular stages in development. Egocentrism is characteristic of cognitive functioning whenever a child is beginning to cope with a novel domain of action and assimilation and accommodation are out of step. As such, egocentrism is a regular concomitant of disequilibrium (Flavell, 1977).

In early adolescence, egocentrism theoretically resurges coincident with the emergence of formal operational thought (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1969) and becomes influential in social cognition. As part of this normative transition, the adolescent becomes increasingly occupied with assimilating not only the fact that there are multiple possible perspectives on the self, but also that among them is one's own. The task of assimilating and coordinating the perspectives of others and locating one's own ego with respect to them is formidable. Egocentrism, which at every stage of development involves "confusion of the ego and the external world" (Piaget, 1965), characterizes cognitive functioning in this period insofar as the adolescent fails to differentiate between what others are actually thinking and his/her own preoccupations concerning the self.

Elkind's (1967, 1985) theory of imaginary audiences represents the most widely cited application of Piaget's analysis of egocentrism to adolescence. Both in and out of social situations, the adolescent may

behave "as if" he/she is the focus of attention from a projected audience that shares his/her preoccupations and concerns. This imaginary audience is proposed to account for a variety of adolescent behaviors and experiences, such as heightened self-consciousness, distortions of others' views of the self, and a tendency toward conformity and fadisms.

Elkind and Bowen (1979) developed an Imaginary Audience Scale (IAS) to assess the salience of this phenomenon to adolescents. The IAS consists of two subscales (the Abiding Self and the Transient Self) intended to tap concerns about exposing two different components of the self: the abiding and the transient selves. The abiding self is defined as containing characteristics such as mental ability and personality traits which the adolescent views as permanent (or abiding) aspects of the self. The transient self consists of more superficial or impermanent aspects of the self, such as a bad haircut or soiled clothing. Higher scores suggest more concern that either these stable or passing features of the self will be exposed, indicating a greater influence of the imaginary audience.

In our view, Elkind and Bowen's IAS entails at least two important elements: (a) The adolescent must believe that an "audience" will focus on his/her behaviors and attributes; and (b) the audience is primarily experienced as a potential threat insofar as the adolescent may be exposed in some negative sense. The scale fails to fully assess potentially admiring audiences, or situations where egocentric thought might facilitate more exhibitionistic tendencies (as opposed to inhibition). Thus the IAS taps only one style of egocentric thought, namely one that is both evaluative and critical. Under the sway of such an imaginary audience one would be expectably more constrained and controlled by the real and/or projected views of others. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the imaginary audience might interfere with the expression of individuality.

To test this formulation, we contrasted the IAS with the construct of public individuation (Maslach, Stapp, & Santee, 1985), which purportedly represents one's willingness to stand out from the crowd and display a differentness from others. Maslach et al. argue that public individuation is characterized by heightened self-awareness, nonconformity, and a need to be unique, and they contrast it with inhibition and social anxiety. Findings from their validation study supported these formulations. We hypothesized that there would be a negative relation between IAS and public individuation assessments. This would indicate that the IAS is a measure not simply of egocentrism, but also of one's

tendency to regulate oneself from the perspective of others. Theoretically this would also link the often-observed conformist tendencies of early adolescence to the phenomenon of egocentrism.

The Imaginary Audience and Self-Consciousness

Elkind's formulation of egocentrism also suggests that heightened self-consciousness should correspond to the imaginary audience phenomenon. Lapsley and Murphy (1985) and Cohn et al. (1988) have, in fact, argued that the IAS does not really measure egocentrism per se, but rather a by-product of egocentrism, i.e., self-consciousness. They base their position on the item content of the IAS as well as on studies relating the IAS to measures of shyness, nervousness, and social skills.

Self-consciousness often involves a projection of the other as viewing the self, and thus an imagined audience (Ryan, Plant, & Kuczkowski, 1991). We argued, more specifically, that Elkind and Bowen's imaginary audience concerns public self-consciousness, which refers to the awareness of oneself as a social object (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Persons who are high in public self-consciousness are greatly concerned with how they are viewed by others and may be accordingly more susceptible to conformity and loss of autonomy (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Plant & Ryan, 1985). For example, public self-consciousness has been shown to correlate with concern with appearance (Solomon & Schopler, 1982) and use of makeup among women (Miller & Cox, 1982). It has also been related to susceptibility to coercion and tendencies to comply with others (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Deci & Ryan, 1985). The correlation of the IAS with public self-consciousness would thus relate to our interpretation that overuse of the imaginary audience represents a loss of autonomy (Ryan, 1991, 1993). We also suggested that due to the threatening and critical nature of the audience represented in the IAS, it should be associated with greater social anxiety, which is characterized by the belief that others will view one negatively in social interactions (Fenigstein et al., 1975). By contrast we expected that public individuation would be associated with greater private self-awareness, since such self-differentiation might expectably be facilitated by access to one's own inner states. That is, adolescents who have a clear sense of their own feelings, motives, and opinions might, on average, be more able and likely to differentiate themselves from others. We also predicted that public individuation should be

negatively related to social anxiety, since individuals scoring high on measures of public individuation would be less concerned with the critical views of others. To examine these hypotheses we employed a well-established measure of self-consciousness, the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS; Fenigstein et al., 1975). The SCS assesses three distinct dimensions of self-consciousness: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety, which should differentially relate to the IAS and public individuation measures as specified.

The Imaginary Audience, Public Individuation, and Self-Esteem

Another set of predictions concerns the implications of the imaginary audience and public individuation constructs for adolescents' self-esteem. If the IAS entails a heightened concern with the other's evaluation of the self and a projection of a critical, evaluative other, it is probably also the case that the self-concept will be more vulnerable because of its contingent relations to external evaluations. Thus, adolescents for whom the imaginary audience is most prominent will be likely to evidence lower self-esteem.

We specifically predicted that adolescents scoring high on the IAS would have lower global self-esteem, perceived lovability, and identity integration, each of which we measured using subscales of a well-validated measure (O'Brien & Epstein, 1988). We chose to assess lovability in addition to global self-esteem because lovability concerns one's sense of being worthy of receiving love from others. We reasoned that self-critical forms of self-awareness entail a sense that one's lovability is contingent on how one appears, and thus would be more fragile. We were also interested in identity integration, since we expected that feelings of stability and continuity of one's identity would also be inversely related to the experience of contingency of self in the eyes of others. In contrast, adolescents higher in public individuation should exhibit greater self-esteem, since the vulnerability and contingency of the self with respect to others is less salient to them.

Egocentrism, Public Individuation, and Social Contexts

Yet another controversy surrounding Elkind's imaginary audience construct is the degree to which it is a function of qualities in relationships

with caregivers. Riley, Adams, and Nielson (1984) proposed that fear of exposure to an imaginary audience may derive from poor parent-child relationships, which lead to greater psychological insecurity during adolescence, and thus to heightened self-consciousness and concerns with others' views of oneself. In an initial study of their reconceptualization, they provided evidence of negative correlations between parental support and affection and IAS scores. Similar relations between parental support and the IAS were found by Anolik (1981) and by Adams and Jones (1982).

Lapsley and Rice (1988) extended this argument in their "new look" account of the imaginary audience which, they argue, combines "self-psychological" (Kohutian) and "social-cognitive" (Piagetian) paradigms. In their view, the imaginary audience represents an aspect of the transitory narcissistic phase of adolescent ego development, during which the individuating adolescent is anticipating the reactions of others in real and fantasized situations. Such "make-believe" ideation helps prepare the child for the formation of more extensive extrafamilial relationships, and thus plays an important role in individuation. Although this narcissistic phase of development is normative in early adolescence, its persistence beyond this period may reflect difficulties in separation-individuation due to nonoptimal parenting. Insecure attachment with parents may contribute to the adolescent's continuous insecurity in a social environment, as reflected in the salience of imaginary audiences. Thus Lapsley and Rice suggest that the diminished use of imaginary audiences during later adolescence is linked to high-quality parenting, while a poor parent-child environment would maintain the salience of the imaginary audience phenomenon over the course of adolescence. Accordingly, we examined the relations between adolescents' emotional security in relation to their parents and both the IAS and public individuation constructs, using a measure of perceived emotional security in relation to parents (Wellborn & Connell, 1987). We hypothesized that the association between emotional security and the IAS would increase with age and that older subjects with more secure relationships with their parents would report less influence from the imaginary audience.

Finally, in an exploratory manner, we examined the relations between self-reported social behavior and both the IAS and public individuation constructs. Both Piaget's perspective (cf. Elkind, 1985) and that of Lapsley and Murphy (1985) suggest that increased social interaction should be associated with decreases in the imaginary audience phenomenon. In addition, one would expect that the self-consciousness

entailed in the imaginary audience experience might by itself inhibit social interaction. We thus predicted that the IAS would be negatively associated with the frequency of outings with peers and of dating, and positively correlated with more asocial activities such as watching TV or staying at home. We did not predict relations between public individuation and social activity, since the willingness to stand apart could be accompanied by either high or low frequencies of social interactions.

Gender, Age, and the Imaginary Audience

Several theoretical perspectives (e.g., Foreman, 1978; Miller, 1986) suggest that girls are more strongly socialized toward concern with external appearance. We suggest that the development of an imaginary audience focused on the "transient" or outward features of the self reflects a process through which such concerns are internalized (Ryan, 1991, 1993). Elkind and Bowen (1979) reported that girls scored more highly than boys on both the abiding and transient self measures. However, we saw no theoretical reason to predict differences on the scores of abiding self between boys and girls. In addition, we expected no differences between boys and girls in public individuation.

We also explored age-related trends in the IAS and public individuation within each sex. Elkind and Bowen (1979) suggested in their initial study that the imaginary audience behavior would be highest in the transition to adolescence (i.e., 12- to 13-year-old range). Studies by Enright and colleagues (Enright, Lapsley, & Shulka, 1979; Enright, Shulka, & Lapsley, 1980) have suggested that IAS scores linearly decrease over the course of adolescence.

Summary and Overview

In this study we extensively examined the constructs of imaginary audiences and public individuation. Our strategy was cross-sectional and correlational. We examined age and sex effects on the IAS and PI measures; the relations of the IAS and PI measures to each other and to public self-consciousness and social anxiety; their relations with the perceived quality of parental attachments; and their relations to various aspects of self-esteem and social behavior. This nomological net should clarify the validity of both measures, as well as the perceived intra- and interpersonal context of egocentrism and public individuation in adolescent development.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 850 students from a suburban school district. Seventh ($N = 318$) and eighth ($N = 306$) graders were drawn from a middle school, and ninth ($N = 151$) and twelfth ($N = 75$) graders were drawn from the district's high school. The sample consisted of 411 girls and 439 boys, approximately evenly split within grades.

Procedure

All measures were administered by two examiners during regularly scheduled class periods. One examiner was responsible primarily for task instructions, while the second responded to individual questions. Students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation. Scheduling issues and classroom demands necessitated that not all subjects received all measures. In particular, ninth graders received fewer measures than other grades since we were limited to a single classroom visit. Differential N s are specified in the Results section.

Measures

Five specific scales, as well as ad hoc behavior frequency ratings, were used as measures in this study. Each is described below.

Public Individuation scale. The Public Individuation scale (Maslach et al., 1985) is a measure of people's willingness to act differently or to publicly differentiate themselves from others. The scale is made up of 12 items each rated on a 4-point Likert scale, all of which load on a single factor. It has both high internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$ to $.87$) and temporal stability. Maslach et al. provide considerable evidence of the scale's discriminant and convergent validity. Reliability in the current sample was $.87$.

Imaginary Audience Scale. The Imaginary Audience Scale (IAS; Elkind & Bowen, 1979) is comprised of 12 heterogeneous vignettes involving potentially self-revealing situations. Subjects indicate their probable emotional or behavioral reaction to each situation by choosing one of three alternatives, which are then scored using a 3-point scale, with 1 indicating low and 3 indicating high self-consciousness. The IAS consists of two subscales, each comprised of six situations. The transient self items measure reactions in relatively public and potentially embarrassing situations (e.g., having a grease spot on your clothes when you arrive at a party), while the abiding self items involve situations with the potential to reveal more stable or deeper aspects of the self (e.g., having a

visitor come to your school who asks you to tell a little about yourself). Elkind and Bowen (1979) reported alphas of .52 for the transient self subscale, .54 for the abiding self subscale, and .63 for the total IAS; test-retest correlations were .66 for transient self, .62 for abiding self, and .65 for the IAS total. Reliabilities in the current sample, considered across all grades, were transient self = .37, abiding self = .48, and IAS total = .52. As mentioned above, the IAS has been related in previous studies to measures of perceived parental relations and self-esteem.

Self-Consciousness Scale. The Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS; Fenigstein et al., 1975) consists of 23 statements to which subjects respond on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Factor analysis of the SCS yielded three component dimensions (Fenigstein et al., 1975). *Private self-consciousness* measures the disposition to be attentive to private self aspects such as thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies, while *public self-consciousness* assesses the awareness of oneself as a social object. *Social anxiety* is a reaction to public self-consciousness which involves a discomfort in the presence of others due to the expectation of negative evaluation. Fenigstein et al. (1975) reported 2-week test-retest correlations of .84 for public self-consciousness, .79 for private self-consciousness, and .73 for social anxiety. The SCS has been used in numerous studies and has been shown to have reasonable validity and empirical utility (Carver & Scheier, 1981). It was administered to all 8th and 12th graders and to most participants in Grade 7 (total $n = 570$). Reliabilities in the present sample were .61, .74, and .74 for the private, public, and social anxiety subscales, respectively.

Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory. The Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory (MSEI; O'Brien & Epstein, 1988) is a 116-item multidimensional scale that assesses both component aspects of self-evaluation and global self-esteem using a 5-point Likert format. The discriminative and convergent validity of the MSEI has been extensively researched and reported (e.g., O'Brien & Epstein, 1988; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). For the purposes of the current study, the subscales of global self-esteem, identity integration, and lovability were employed, each of which consists of 10 items. Identity integration taps one's sense of cohesion and purpose, whereas lovability concerns the sense that one is worthy of love and care from others. All subjects completed the global self-esteem subscale. However, the identity integration and lovability subscales were administered to the 7th-, 8th-, and 12th-grade samples only. Reliabilities in the current sample were .90, .76, and .81 for the global self-esteem, identity integration, and lovability subscales, respectively.

Parental Emotional Security scale. The Parental Emotional Security scale (PES; Wellborn & Connell, 1987) consists of nine items rating emotional states experienced with parents (e.g., "When I'm with my parents I feel ignored").

Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Wellborn and Connell report that the parent items form a single factor of high to low security, with an internal consistency of .84. Reliability in the current sample was .71. The PES scale has been used in several previous studies (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1990; Ryan & Connell, 1989). The PES scale was completed by all subjects in Grades 7, 8, and 12.

Behavior frequency ratings. Behavior frequency ratings were obtained on subjects in Grades 9 and 12 ($n = 230$). These items were created ad hoc, although they were modeled after questions used in a previous survey of adolescent life (Coleman, 1961). Students were asked to rate on scales from 0 to 7 the number of evenings a week that they "stay at home" or are "out with friends." Dating frequency was rated on a 7-point scale, with specific anchors ranging from no dating to more than four dates a week, with intermediate levels specified in between. Finally, TV watching was rated on a similar 7-point scale with anchors ranging from no or almost no TV per day to more than 4 hours a day on average.

RESULTS

Grade and gender effects on the imaginary audience and public individuation variables were examined using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in which the IAS and public individuation total scores were the dependent variables. The MANOVA for Grade \times Sex interactions was not significant, $F(6, 1710) = .69, ns$. The MANOVA for grade, however, was significant, $F(6, 1710) = 6.25, p < .001$. Univariate analyses showed that this grade effect was in evidence for the IAS total score, $F(3, 846) = 10.01, p < .001$, but not for public individuation. To further analyze this effect a subsequent MANOVA was run using the abiding self and transient self subscales of the IAS as dependent variables. The grade effect was significant only for abiding self, $F(3, 846) = 5.30, p < .001$. Follow-up t tests revealed that students in Grade 12 were lower on abiding self than those in Grades 7, 8, and 9, whereas there were no significant differences between students in the lower three grades. Thus the diminishment of the imaginary audience appears to occur between Grades 9 and 12. The MANOVA for sex differences was also significant, $F(2, 847) = 6.06, p < .002$. Univariate analysis showed that this sex effect was significant for the IAS, $F(1, 848) = 10.82, p < .001$, but not for public individuation. As before, an additional MANOVA was accomplished using abiding self and transient self as the dependent variables. As hypothesized, differences

were apparent only for the transient self subscale, $F(1, 848) = 25.29$, $p < .001$, with females ($x = 8.87$) being higher than males ($x = 8.23$). Table 1 provides means and standard deviations by grade and sex for the primary measures.

The interrelations between the constructs of abiding self, transient self, public individuation, and the subscales of the SCS were examined using Pearson correlations and are reported in Table 2. Results include the entire sample ($n = 850$), except where the SCS was concerned ($n = 570$), since ninth graders and approximately half of the seventh graders were not given this scale. As hypothesized, public individuation was negatively related to both the abiding self and transient self. Furthermore, as predicted, the abiding and transient self subscales were positively related to both public self-consciousness and social anxiety, but were unrelated to the private dimension of the SCS. By contrast, public individuation was negatively related to public self-consciousness and social anxiety, but was positively correlated with private self-consciousness.

In order to better illustrate the structure of this nomological network, a higher order factor analysis using a varimax rotation was performed on those subjects who completed all the measures (see Table 3). Results show that these interrelated constructs were well described by two factors: Factor 1, representing abiding self, transient self, social anxiety, public self-consciousness, and public individuation (loading negatively); and Factor 2, representing private self-consciousness and public individuation (loading positively).

Table 4 presents both zero-order correlations and simultaneous regressions in which abiding self, transient self, and public individuation were used to predict self-esteem outcomes. The correlations between these three items and the self-esteem variables supported the hypothesized pattern, in that abiding self and transient self related negatively to these outcomes, and public individuation positively. The simultaneous regression examines the relative contributions of these variables when considered together, and thus is a more conservative test of these relations. With regard to general self-esteem, abiding self, transient self, and public individuation each made significant and unique contributions in the expected directions, together accounting for approximately 20% of the variance. Only abiding self and public individuation uniquely contributed to the predictions of lovability and identity integration.

Another hypothesis, derived from Lapsley and Rice's (1988) formulation, was that the association between parental supports and the IAS

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Imaginary Audience and Public Individuation
Measures by Sex and Grade

| Grade | Abiding self | | Transient self | | IAS total | | Public individuation | |
|-------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 7 | 10.78 (1.33) | 10.74 (1.52) | 8.29 (1.48) | 8.76 (1.56) | 18.11 (3.60) | 18.47 (3.83) | 2.70 (.53) | 2.76 (.56) |
| 8 | 10.71 (1.41) | 11.07 (1.47) | 8.26 (1.45) | 8.95 (1.71) | 18.96 (2.14) | 20.02 (2.56) | 2.76 (.52) | 2.68 (.61) |
| 9 | 10.54 (1.64) | 10.99 (1.22) | 8.29 (1.68) | 8.88 (1.58) | 18.34 (2.73) | 19.87 (2.04) | 2.66 (.59) | 2.69 (.63) |
| 12 | 10.20 (1.44) | 10.11 (1.51) | 8.10 (1.50) | 8.89 (1.69) | 18.30 (2.41) | 19.00 (2.61) | 2.88 (.58) | 2.89 (.59) |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. IAS = Imaginary Audience Scale.

Table 2
Correlations between Imaginary Audience (IAS), Public Individuation (PI), and Self-Consciousness (SCS) Constructs

| | TS | AS | PI | PV | PB |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| IAS transient self (TS) | — | | | | |
| IAS abiding self (AS) | .24* | — | | | |
| Public individuation (PI) | -.32* | -.46* | — | | |
| SCS private (PV) | -.01 | -.08 | .26* | — | |
| SCS public (PB) | .27* | .41* | -.27* | .19* | — |
| SCS social anxiety (SA) | .31* | .39* | -.23* | .21* | .18* |

Note. $N = 850$, except for SCS variables, where $N = 570$.

* $p < .001$.

Table 3
Varimax Factor Loadings for Higher Order Analysis of Imaginary Audience, Public Individuation, and Self-Consciousness Variables

| | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|
| Transient self | .61 | -.04 |
| Abiding self | .77 | -.19 |
| Public individuation | -.65 | .53 |
| Private self-consciousness | .10 | .91 |
| Public self-consciousness | .66 | .19 |
| Social anxiety | .63 | .32 |

Note. $N = 570$. Factor 1 eigenvalue = 2.24; Factor 2 eigenvalue = 1.28.

would increase in late adolescence, such that those adolescents with less secure parental relationships would remain more highly occupied with an imaginary audience. To examine this, a Grade \times PES interaction was obtained using a simultaneous regression procedure, with transient self, abiding self, and public individuation serving as dependent variables and grade (7 and 8 vs. 12), PES, and their interaction as independent variables. The overall regression was significant for the abiding self variable, $F(3, 669) = 9.20$, $p < .001$, as was the beta for Grade \times PES ($B = .51$, $p < .03$). The parallel regression analysis for public individuation was also significant, $F(3, 669) = 4.67$, $p < .01$, as was the interaction between PES and grade in the prediction of public individuation ($B = .53$, $p < .02$). The interactions revealed that higher

Table 4
Multiple Regressions Predicting Self-Esteem Variables from Transient Self (TS),
Abiding Self (AS), and Public Individuation (PI)

| | Standardized beta weights | | | | <i>R</i> ² | <i>F</i> | <i>df</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|-----|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
| | TS | AS | PI | | | | |
| MSEI | | | | | | | |
| Global self-esteem | -.15** (-.28) | -.20** (-.35) | .25** (.39) | .21 | 74.39** | (3, 846) | |
| Lovability | — (-.18) | -.16** (-.28) | .23** (.32) | .13 | 33.23** | (3, 685) | |
| Identity integration | — (-.14) | -.14* (-.28) | .29** (.36) | .14 | 38.61** | (3, 685) | |

Note. MSEI = Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory. Only significant betas are reported. Zero-order correlations are given in parentheses and are significant at $p < .01$.

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Correlations of Self-Reported Frequencies of Dating, Going Out with Friends, Watching TV, and Staying Home with Transient Self (TS), Abiding Self (AS), and Public Individuation (PI) for Grades 9 and 12

| | TS | AS | PI |
|------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| Dating frequency | -.20** | -.21*** | .19** |
| Going out with friends | -.10 | -.19** | .03 |
| Watching TV | .11 | .23*** | -.16* |
| Staying at home | .03 | .09 | -.02 |

Note. $N = 230$.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$.

PES is more strongly associated with lower abiding self and higher public individuation scores for 12th versus 7th and 8th graders.

Table 5 presents the relationships between 9th and 12th graders' self-reported frequencies of dating, going out with friends, and the relatively asocial activities of watching TV and staying at home. Results show that abiding self and transient self are negatively related to dating, whereas public individuation is positively related. Subjects high in abiding self go out less frequently with friends and watch TV more frequently. Students high in public individuation report marginally ($p < .05$) less TV watching. There were no relationships between these variables and the self-reported frequencies of staying at home.

DISCUSSION

Awareness of oneself as a social object is a prominent feature of adolescent life, with both important developmental consequences and effects on social behavior. The emergence of the ability to formulate or project others' views of the self is a necessary step in cognitive development, and it facilitates the internalization of social norms and the acquisition of significant interpersonal skills. Thus this psychological transition is a central aspect of the processes of ego development (Loevinger, 1976) and socialization (Piaget, 1962).

Our interest in this article was the examination of constructs pertinent to this social perspective taking in adolescence. In particular, we focused on Elkind and Bowen's (1979) imaginary audience phe-

nomenon and its relation to self-consciousness and public individuation. We reasoned that the imaginary audience construct represents an objectification of self, that is, the taking of oneself as an object from imagined others' perspectives. However, it is also a projection of a critical perspective on the part of the other, and thus likely to have inhibiting effects upon self-expression and public individuation. This reasoning was supported by findings linking the imaginary audience with the constructs of public self-consciousness and social anxiety, and the demonstration of inverse relations between the imaginary audience and public individuation. It appears that whereas public individuation represents adolescents' willingness to stand out in the crowd, the imaginary audience construct represents a tendency to remain publicly hidden or submerged.

To the extent that subjects imagine (and fear) exposure of the abiding self, they also evidence less self-esteem in general, less security in their identity, and less sense of being worthy of love. The transient self subscale of the IAS was associated only with diminished general self-esteem, and not with either lovability or identity integration. This pattern of results suggests that lovability and identity issues may be more connected with one's abiding self, which presumably reflects one's more enduring characteristics and attributes, rather than with the passing or transient features reflected in the transient self construct. Conversely, adolescents high in public individuation reported greater global self-esteem, identity integration, and lovability. This supports the idea that standing apart from the crowd requires some self-confidence and identity stability.

There was also some evidence for the relation of imaginary audiences to social inhibition. Those highly concerned with exposing the abiding self reported dating and going out with friends less frequently and watching more TV, a presumably asocial activity. Again, we believe that the critical nature of imaginary audiences as conceived by Elkind and Bowen leads adolescents for whom such audiences are salient to be more inhibited in their behavior.

Hypotheses concerning links between the parental environment and the imaginary audience received mixed support. Correlations between the imaginary audience variables and self-reported security of relationships with parents were generally weak. However, there was support for the formulation that emotionally insecure relations with parents may be associated with a maintained salience of imaginary audiences in later

adolescence and with lessened public individuation. To the extent that parent-child relationships influence the strength of the imaginary audience phenomenon, it may be that adolescents in insecure relationships stay more self-conscious, self-critical, and less able to “stand out” after normal egocentrism would have typically diminished.

It was hypothesized, and found, that females would report a greater salience of imaginary audiences than males, and furthermore that this effect would be carried by the transient self subscale. This prediction stemmed straightforwardly from theoretical literature on gender issues, in which it has been argued that women are subject to greater evaluative pressure concerning appearance. We see this result as not only confirming this viewpoint, but also as showing one way in which this pressure is phenomenologically manifest—adolescent girls are more likely to imagine an audience focused on their outward self. The imaginary audience construct is thus informative concerning the manner in which external evaluative pressures become internalized.

Maslach et al.’s (1985) theorizing on public individuation was well supported by the current data. Adolescents scoring high on public individuation were more confident and less socially anxious than those who scored low on this dimension. However, this is not to say that these subjects lack an imaginary audience. It seems rather that they probably project an audience that is less critical and/or a self that will be more favorably received than that depicted in the Elkind and Bowen (1979) measure.

Insofar as adolescents are concerned with imaginary audiences, it seems important to consider how this audience is characterized (e.g., critical vs. supportive) and how the self is projected in the eyes of the other (Ryan et al., 1991). The audience of Elkind and Bowen’s (1979) conception is more critical than admiring, and feared rather than enjoyed. Yet, theoretically, egocentrism and narcissism could be characterized by a wide range of experienced audiences, some more positive than that instantiated in the IAS. Accordingly, the IAS only partially reflects Piaget’s original idea of egocentrism—that is, the confusion of self and non-self (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

Clearly there is a need to develop more reliable and more balanced operationalizations of imaginary audiences in future studies. The Elkind and Bowen (1979) measure shows weaknesses in both its coverage of the imaginary audience types and in its psychometric properties. Most notable was the low reliability of the IAS subscales in our cur-

rent samples. In addition, since the IAS taps only critical audiences, processes which might facilitate more benign or noncritical private audiences await further study.

Nonetheless, the results of the current study point to important theoretical and empirical connections between seemingly disparate approaches to adolescent self-consciousness. Indeed, the thrust of the research was to show that there is a common variance shared by the constructs of public self-consciousness, social anxiety, imaginary audiences, and (inversely) one's willingness to stand apart from others. What appears to be shared by these constructs is one's degree of concern with others' evaluations of oneself, a concern that is manifest phenomenologically in the awareness of oneself as a social object, and functionally in lowered self-esteem. More tentatively, the results also suggest that the persistence of critical self-consciousness beyond early adolescence may be influenced by relationship qualities between parent and child. It is hoped that future work in this area will further clarify the relations between types of self-consciousness and forms of self-regulation and the factors in one's social context that influence the development of both.

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Manuscript received December 26, 1991; revised November 3, 1992.

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