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THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOLESCENTS' SELVES: DESCRIPTION, TYPOLOGY AND CONTEXT

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Summary—Real self and ideal self are seen as important determinants of self-satisfaction or self-acceptance. Specific importance can be ascribed to other self-representations such as the unwanted self, and the self according to significant others. Empirical study was oriented towards the description of subjective importance of the self-modalities (total sample 745 subjects, a mean age 15.8 years). Results indicate a stability of high importance self according to parents, and of the importance of the actual, ideal, and unwanted self of adolescents. Three empirical types were identified: External anchored, less autonomous self-concept (Type 1), autonomously anchored, parents influenced self-concept (Type 2), and autonomously anchored, peers influenced self-concept (Type 3). Copyright © 1996 Elsevier Science Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Identity formation is considered to be the most important developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Petersen & Leffert, 1992). Within this context, self-definition, self-structuring and self-understanding are central and necessary processes (Berzonsky, 1990).

The dynamics of the organization of the adolescent's self-system may be understood in terms of the ongoing processes of differentiation and integration, which are reflected in the various forms of perceived selves and inter-relationships among them (Oosterwegel, 1992). Besides the analysis of actual contents of these perceived selves, the knowledge of their personal relevance and their subjective importance is the key for the understanding of adolescent self-development (Marsh, 1986; Pelham & Swann, 1989).

Theoretically, we can consider many perceived selves: intraindividual and interindividual (Oosterwegel, 1992), real and normative selves, actual and possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), former, present, and future selves, selves according to significant others, etc. Some of them can be very important for self-regulation and self-worth of adolescents, whilst some actual or possible perceived selves can be of a small or very specific importance for an individual.

During a period of adolescence, we can assume changes in subjective importance of perceived selves as well as many interindividual differences. However, traditionally major attention is focused upon real (actual) self and ideal self (Assor & Tzelgov, 1987; Glick & Ziegler, 1985). Many researchers *a priori* suppose that these two intrapersonal perceived selves are the most important for adolescents. Discrepancies between the real and ideal self are often interpreted as an indicator of cognitive development of adolescents or as an indicator of their self-acceptance.

In spite of this, the other perceived selves can be also of similar importance: the unwanted or undesired self (Macek, 1991; Ogilvie, 1987) and many interpersonal perceived selves according to significant others, i.e. parents, friends, adult authorities, etc. (see Higgins, 1987; Oosterwegel, 1992; Smollar & Youniss, 1985; Spiel, 1992). Our recent pilot study (Macek, Osecká & Blatný, 1992) revealed, that especially the perceived self according to parents, preserves its high importance stably during the period of adolescence. The importance of other perceived selves, such as the real self, ideal self, self according to friends, etc., was more dependent on gender and the age of adolescents.

However, the importance of perceived selves is only one cognitive aspect of a process of self definition. Another aspect of the self-system (affective components, cognitive structure and multidimensionality of the self-concept) as well as other cognitive and psychosocial characteristics take part in the process of adolescent identity formation (Berzonsky, 1990; Bosma, 1991; Kroger, 1989; Nurmi, 1991). We have found that the importance of perceived selves is more closely related to the

different cognitive identity variables (cognitive styles, future expectation, coping strategies) than to emotional (affective) aspects of the self-system (Macek & Osecká, 1992).

This study represents a further analysis of this matter. The first aim is to specify gender and age differences in the importance of perceived selves in the age of mid-adolescence (14–17 years).

However, we can expect high interindividual variability here. Therefore, the second aim of our study is to create an empirical typology of adolescents according to the importance of perceived selves as a criterion. Such types (or subgroups) should demonstrate not only specific configurations of important perceived selves, but also different relationships of these configurations to other psychosocial characteristics of adolescents, which participate in a process of their identity formation.

METHOD

For purposes of this study, three adolescent samples were included. Sample I included 274 participants (117 girls, 157 boys) at two age levels: 14 and 16. Sample II included 171 participants (111 girls, 60 boys) between ages of 15 and 19. Sample III included 300 participants (149 girls, 151 boys) at age 17. The data were collected during February 1992 (Sample I), during December 1992 (Sample III) and during May 1993 (Sample II).

The total sample consisted of 745 adolescents (377 girls, 368 boys), with a mean age of 15.8. Two age groups were defined as follows: younger adolescents ($N = 290$, mean age 14.4) and older adolescents ($N = 455$, mean age 16.6). Finally, Ss were divided into four groups: younger girls ($N = 134$), younger boys ($N = 156$), older girls ($N = 243$) and older boys ($N = 212$).

The questionnaire measures

Our Self-Modalities Importance Measure (SMI) is based on a paired comparison of importance of nine perceived selves: the actual, real self (statement: "How I am"); the ideal self ("How I would like to be"); the unwanted self ("How I would not like to be"); the self according to parents ("How I think that my parents see me"); the self according to friends ("How I think that my friends see me"); the self according to adult authorities ("How I think that my favorite teacher, leader, etc., sees me"); the ideal according to parents ("How I think that my parents would like to see me"); the ideal according to friends ("How I think that my friends would like to see me"); and the ideal according to adult authorities ("How I think that my favorite teacher, leader, etc. would like to see me"). These nine self-modalities are presented in the form of their 36 possible paired combinations. (Example: "Decide, which is or more importance for you to know: 1. How am I? or 2. How would I like to be?").

The Identity Style Inventory (ISI) (Berzonsky, 1989, 1992) includes 39 items that are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Four separate scores are yielded for: (a) Information oriented style (active seeking out and evaluation of an individual's relevant information before making a decision); (b) Normative oriented style (the orientation that is more concerned with conformity to the normative standards and prescriptions of significant others); (c) Avoidant/diffuse oriented style (procrastination and defensive avoidance of problems, situational rewards dictate a course of action); and (4) Commitment (personal involvement in the beliefs, norms, and values) (Berzonsky, 1989).

The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and Life-Satisfaction Scale (LSS) are two factors from Bernse Questionnaire of Adolescent's Subjective Well-Being (namely factors self-value and positive attitude toward life—see Grob, Lüthi, Kaiser, Flammer, Mackinnon & Wearing, 1991). SES includes five items, LSS includes eight items. Four points on the Likert Scale were used (from "totally false" to "very true"). Total scores of self-esteem and life-satisfaction were calculated and used for the next analysis.

The Daily Hassles Inventory (DHI), Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI), and Future Expectations Inventory (FEI) were constructed for the purpose of the Euronet Pilot Study of Adolescents (Flammer, Grob & Nurmi, 1991).

DHI includes 13 items, expressing common daily problems. Total score of daily hassles is interpreted.

CSI contains 17 common reactions on stress and three summarized scores were used for the next

analysis: rational (active) coping, emotional (passive) coping, and interpersonal—family oriented coping.

FEI includes 16 possible future goals of adolescents. In respect to the aims of this study, five more general domains of future expectations are used: the goal oriented to social prestige; the future responsibility to others; the future leisure time; the future family life; and the future orientation to basic life values (health, profession, etc.). All items were assessed on four points of the Likert scale.

SMI, ISI, SES, and LSS were presented to all participants. DHI, CSI, FEI were presented to Samples I and II only.

RESULTS

1. The importance of perceived selves

1.1. The total sample. Table 1 shows the means of the importance of self-modalities for the total sample as well as for subgroups according to the gender and age criteria.

Within the total sample of adolescents, the most important of the perceived selves (self-modality) is the self according to parents. It ranks first on the scale of important with relative distance from other perceived selves. The real (actual) self, ideal self, self according to peers, and unwanted self are assessed at a similar level of importance. Evidently, they are more important than remaining perceived selves. Also, the ideal according to parents was reported as a relatively important self modality of the adolescent's self-system. The ideal according to peers and the actual self according to authorities are less important. However, these two perceived selves are ranked far from the least important self-modality—the ideal according to authorities.

1.2. The age and gender differences. Concerning sex and age differences, multivariate analysis (MANOVA) and univariate analysis (ANOVA) of variance 2 × 2 (age subgroups × gender) was used to analyse the importance of perceived selves.

Both multivariate effects are significant, that is, sex and age of adolescents influence the subjective importance of perceived self modalities. No significant interactions of age × gender were found.

In regard to the real self, the age and gender differences were found to be significant. Real self was more important for girls than boys and more important for older than younger adolescents. However, it can be seen, that the importance of real self increases with age more rapidly for girls than boys.

No significant age and gender differences are found concerning the importance of ideal self.

The importance of unwanted self is different in respect to age levels as well as in respect to girls or boys. Especially for older adolescents unwanted self is more important than for younger ones. Also, girls report higher importance of unwanted self than boys.

In respect to importance of self according to parents, a significant difference was found for age levels only. This self-modality was more important for younger than for older adolescents.

Table 1. Importance of self modalities: means for total sample groups of girls, boys, younger and older adolescents

	Total	Girls	Boys	Younger	Older	Gender d.f. = 1705	Age group d.f. = 1705
Actual (real) self	4.74	4.97	4.52	4.48	4.91	$F = 7.41$ $P = 0.007$	$F = 6.21$ $P = 0.013$
Ideal self	4.72	4.77	4.67	4.73	4.72		
Unwanted self	4.67	4.92	4.41	4.25	4.93	$F = 7.31$	$F = 12.62$
Self according to parents	5.32	5.46	5.17	5.46	5.23		$F = 5.99$ $P = 0.015$
Self according to peers	4.67	4.91	4.43	4.41	4.83	$F = 9.79$ $P = 0.002$	$F = 4.74$ $P = 0.03$
Self according to authorities	2.91	2.85	2.97	3.06	2.82		
Ideal according to parents	3.87	3.65	4.10	4.18	3.67	$F = 10.3$ $P = 0.001$	$F = 9.82$ $P = 0.002$
Ideal according to peers	3.01	2.89	3.14	2.83	3.12		$F = 4.78$ $P < 0.029$
Ideal according to authorities	1.57	1.30	1.87	1.77	1.45	$F = 19.0$ $P = 0.000$	$F = 4.06$ $P = 0.044$
Multivariate effects						$F = 4.23$ $P < 0.001$	$F = 4.22$ $P < 0.001$

Anova 2 × 2 (sex, age group). Only significant results are mentioned.

The importance of self according to friends depends on both independent variables. This self-modality is more important for girls than for boys and more important for older adolescents than for younger ones. The effect of gender is higher than the effect of age.

Age and gender differences were not found in respect to the importance of self according to authorities.

On the other hand, gender and age differences were significant in regard to the importance of ideal self according to parents: this normative self is more important for boys than for girls and more important for younger adolescents than for the older ones.

The ideal according to friends is less important for younger adolescents than for the older ones. The effect of gender was not found.

Highly significant gender differences are typical for the ideal according to authorities—girls reported its lower importance than boys. Also, the age differences were significant: ideal according to the authorities was more important for younger adolescents than for the older ones.

2. The empirical typology

To describe specific groups (empirical types) with different profiles of important perceived selves, solutions for two, three, four, and five clusters were tested (Quick Cluster, SPSS/PC+). The goal was to find such clusters (subgroups), which would be different in respect to the subjective importance of perceived selves. Moreover, clusters would have to include a sufficient number of Ss in respect to the next statistical analyses.

Concerning these criteria, four clusters were selected. According to the Wilks criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly influenced by the independent variable 'type' (cluster), $F(27,688) = 148.00$, $P < 0.001$. Regarding the number of Ss, three clusters were comparable (209, 267, and 219 Ss), the fourth included nine Ss only. That is why we describe, as empirical types, the first three clusters only.

2.1. The type differences. As indicated in Table 2, significant type differences were found on all nine dependent variables.

A chi-squared test revealed a significant association between types and age, $\chi^2(2) = 7.35$, $P < 0.05$ and also between gender and types, $\chi^2(2) = 13.7$, $P < 0.005$.

In respect to other psychosocial characteristics of identity process formation, significant univariate effects were found (more details in Table 3) for:

- informational, normative, diffuse identity style and commitments;
- global level of life satisfaction;
- global sum of daily hassles;
- rational, emotional and on family oriented coping;
- importance of future leisure activities, future interpersonal responsibility, and future orientation on general values (health, profession).

No significant differences between groups were found in respect to global self-esteem and future goals orientation toward family life and social prestige.

Table 2. Means comparisons by types according to the importance of self-modalities

| | Type | | | |
	1	2	3	*F*-test
Importance of:				
Actual (real) self	3.55ab	5.38a	5.31b	70.26
Ideal self	2.84ac	5.77ab	5.37bc	242.87
Unwanted self	2.60ab	5.78a	5.41b	211.08
Self according to parents	6.16ab	5.68ac	4.29bc	80.35
Self according to peers	5.27ab	3.23ac	6.12bc	255.19
Self according to authorities	4.29ab	2.38b	2.32a	109.02
Ideal according to parents	4.70a	4.45b	2.46ab	130.90
Ideal according to peers	3.68a	1.93ab	3.78b	105.38
Ideal according to authorities	2.79ab	1.29bc	0.75ac	104.03

Note: Within rows, means sharing a common single-letter differ significantly by at least $P < 0.05$ (Tukey-HSD procedure); degrees of freedom for all unvariate *F*-test = 2,691. All *F*-tests are significant at least on $P < 0.001$ level.

Table 3. Type differences (means comparisons) in respect to different psychosocial characteristics (dependent variables)

Dependent variables	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	F-test	P
Identity styles:					
(a) Informational	3.28a	3.45a	3.40	4.84	0.008
(b) Normative	3.40	3.44b	3.32b	3.07	0.05
(c) Diffusion	2.93c	2.88b	3.06bc	6.43	0.002
Commitments	3.37ab	3.56ab	3.32b	9.36	0.0001
Future goals oriented on:					
(a) Social prestige	2.60	2.62	2.59		
(b) Social responsibility	3.39a	3.40b	3.18ab	11.08	0.0000
(c) Family life	3.27	3.36	3.42		
(d) Pleasure leisure time	3.01	3.02	3.17	2.91	0.055
(e) Basic values	3.91a	3.88b	3.78ab	8.80	0.0002
Coping strategies:					
(a) Rational, active	2.69a	2.85a	2.76	3.46	0.03
(b) Emotional, passive	1.91a	1.92b	2.10ab	5.62	0.004
(c) On family oriented	2.25a	2.31b	1.88ab	10.15	0.001
Daily hassles	1.94	1.89	2.00	2.73	0.06
Life satisfaction	2.88	2.94b	2.81b	5.26	0.005
Self-esteem	2.80	2.85	2.82		NS

Note: Within rows, means sharing a common single-letter differ significantly by at least $P < 0.05$ (Tukey-HSD procedure).

To summarize, the obtained adolescent types (groups) are different in relevant self-variables (importance of perceived selves) as well as in other psychosocial characteristics, which play an important role in the process of identity formation.

2.2. The description of types.

Type 1: External Anchored, Less Autonomous Self-concept

These adolescents were the youngest of all (mean age 15.6 years, 88 girls and 119 boys). In contrast to others, they evaluated the autonomous modalities of self (real, ideal, and unwanted self) as less important. On the other hand, the self according to parents was found to be the most important. Similarly, the other interpersonal anchored modalities of self (self according to peers, self according to authorities) obtained a high importance rank. Also, some normative, interpersonal anchored selves (the ideal according to parents, the ideal according to peers), were presented as relatively important.

Concerning identity styles, normative orientation was found to be the most characteristic trait of this group. Compared to other types, these adolescents reported lower score of information orientation and rational coping strategies.

Type 2: Autonomously Anchored, Parents Influenced Self-concept

Concerning age, the second type is similar to the first. However, there are more girls than boys here (143 girls, 120 boys, mean age 15.7 years).

The ideal self, unwanted self, real self, and also self according to parents were reported as highly important. On the other hand, other interpersonal anchored self modalities (self according to peers, self according to authorities) were found to be less important.

Regarding the identity formation, this group, more than others, preferred the information and normative style and their level of commitment was also the highest. Moreover, they presented the highest level of global-life satisfaction and the use of rational coping strategy more frequently than others.

Type 3: Autonomously Anchored, Peers Influenced Self-concept

More girls (132) than boys (87) entered the third type. These adolescents are older than others (mean age 16.2 years).

In contrast to previous types, these Ss reported the highest importance of self according to peers.

Autonomous selves were also highly important, self according to parents was found to be less important. Also, normative selves were described as less important (with the exception of ideal according to peers).

Compared to others, this groups presented higher scores of diffuse identity style, lower orientation on social responsibility and basic values in the future. Family oriented coping was found less typical, but the emotionally passive coping was more typical for these adolescents. Moreover, relatively lower life satisfaction and more daily hassles were found to be their characteristic.

DISCUSSION

The data reported here may have several implications for research of self-system and for understanding self-development in adolescence.

First, the subjective importance of perceived selves (self-modalities) is an important variable that is necessary to include within the design of self-system research. Although some studies are relevant (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Marsh, 1986; Oosterwegel, 1992; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Van der Werff, 1990), studies of self-concept rarely consider it.

Second, the importance of perceived selves is related to the age and gender of adolescents, as well as to their personality and psychosocial context.

Concerning age and gender differences, we have found main effects only, but no interactions. Therefore, we can describe some global developmental trends of importance of perceived selves.

Significant age differences were found for the importance of seven presented modalities of self. Only the ideal self and self according to authorities do not change in respect to their importance. The importance of the self according to parents decreases. However, the level of importance is highest compared to the other ones.

The importance of the real, unwanted and also self according to friends increases during mid-adolescence. For a group of older adolescents, all interpersonal normative (ideal) selves are apparently less important than actual interpersonal selves.

Regarding the gender differences, two autonomous selves (real self, unwanted self) and self according to peers are more important for girls than boys. Two normative selves, ideal according to parents and ideal according to authorities, are more important for boys than girls. It seems surprising that during mid-adolescence the importance of normative selves is higher for boys than for girls. On the other hand, this result also means that the girls assign more importance to intrapersonal and actual interpersonal selves.

Third, our results may contribute to the discussion about the role of parents and peers in the process of identity formation. Great importance of the self according to parents for most adolescents was confirmed. Some recent studies of adolescent self-concept show the meaning of relationships to parents in various contexts (Spiel, 1992; Youniss & Smollar, 1990). Formerly presented opinion, that importance of parents decreases during adolescence and importance of peers increases, should be carefully revised. Parents keep a status of the most important persons, although the reasons for this importance changes. Volpe (1981) found that mid- and late-adolescents conceptualized their relations to parents as more unilateral in form than did pre-adolescents or young adults. As Oosterwegel (1992) has mentioned, relations to parents and peers are of a different meaning. The parents are perceived in their role of setting standards that have to be met, the peers are sought for empathic understanding.

The presented empirical typology offers three specific patterns regarding this matter. Adolescents, who assign higher importance to peers and lower importance to parents, create a special subgroup (Type 3). They also report other different characteristics in context of their identity formation. Compared to others, they are more diffusely oriented, with a higher level of daily hassles. They are more emotional, passive and less satisfied in life, and much less oriented on help from parents than others.

The importance of self according to parents is encountered in two different configurations. On the one hand, if it is univocally preferred over other selves, it can be seen as an indicator of higher interpersonal dependence (and probably also lower stadium of identity formation—Type 1). On the other hand, if both self according to parents and autonomous selves are equally important, it is no indicator of proper adaptation and non-conflict in interpersonal relations.

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