

# Separation-Individuation and the “New Look” at the Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable: A Test of an Integrative Model

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*The relationship between the imaginary audience (IA) and the personal fable (PF), narcissism, and various dimensions of separation-individuation was examined. The subjects were 45 sixth-graders, 54 eighth-graders, 40 tenth-graders, and 30 twelfth-graders, drawn from one school district in a predominantly middle-class community. Newly developed measures of imaginary audience and the personal fable were used, as were the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence. The results were: (a) the IA and the PF were positively correlated with narcissism; (b) the IA was positively related to object relational concerns such as engulfment, symbiosis, succorance, enmeshment, and separation anxiety; (c) the PF was positively related to dependency denial and to self-centeredness, and was negatively related to separation anxiety and engulfment; (d) males reported higher scores on measures that reflect agentic concerns, such as narcissism, personal fable, omnipotence, invulnerability, and self-centeredness, females reported higher scores on interpersonal dimensions, such as enmeshment, symbiosis, and separation anxiety. Cross-sectional findings and sex differences are reported. The results are seen to support an integrative model of adolescent ego development.*

The theory of adolescent egocentrism has been the traditional source of insights for explaining numerous features of adolescent behavior. According to Elkind (1967), adolescent egocentrism is the characteristic failure of an adolescent to accurately determine what is the object of another's attention. This differentiation failure, or egocentrism, is

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said to result from the formal operational structure-in-formation. "This egocentrism emerges because, while the adolescent can now cognize the thoughts of others, he fails to differentiate between the objects toward which the thoughts of others are directed and those which are the focus of his own concern" (Elkind, 1967, p. 1029). Hence the young adolescent is said to distort reality in an excess of assimilative cognitive activity, overwhelming the real and actual with the ideal and possible (Lapsley, in press a). Two patterns of ideation, the imaginary audience and the personal fable, are said to emerge with this differentiation failure of formal operations. The imaginary audience describes the adolescent's tendency to see the self as the object of others' attention, to anticipate the reactions of others to the self in real or imagined situations. The personal fable is the belief in one's personal uniqueness, omnipotence, and invulnerability. These twin ideation patterns have been invoked to account for some commonly observed adolescent behaviors, such as self-consciousness, a concern with shame and shyness, risk-taking, idealism, and "adolescent boorishness, loudness, and faddish dress" (Elkind, 1967, p. 1030).

Research on adolescent egocentrism has undergone three phases (Lapsley, in press b). The first phase was concerned with the operationalization of the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs, and with the charting of age, sex, and other correlates of the constructs (Adams & Jones, 1981; Elkind & Bowen, 1979; Enright, Lapsley, & Shukla, 1979; Enright, Shukla, & Lapsley, 1980; Lechner & Rosenthal, 1983). The results of this phase were generally interpreted as being supportive of the theory. The second phase of research was devoted to the test of the crucial assumption of the theory, namely, that the onset of adolescent egocentrism is associated with formal operative thought. The results here are more equivocal. Three studies found either that imaginary audience and personal fable scores were highest in concrete operational subjects, or that formal thought actually diminished these ideations (Goossens, 1984; Gray & Hudson, 1984; Riley, Adams, & Nielsen, 1984). Two additional studies found uniformly null relations between formal thought and the extant measures of imaginary audience and personal fable (Lapsley, Milstead, Quintana, Flannery, & Buss, 1986). On the basis of these findings it appears to be the case that "the developmental pattern in egocentrism . . . does not appear to be consistently linked to theoretical based patterns in formal operations of cognitive development" (Riley et al., 1984, p. 402).

Because the crucial assumption of the adolescent egocentrism theory has not been supported, and because of problems internal to the theory (Lapsley, 1985; Lapsley & Murphy, 1985; but see Elkind, 1985), and because of conceptual problems associated with the cognitive developmental approach to adolescence generally (Blasi & Hoeffel, 1974), the third phase of research, currently in progress, has attempted to recast the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs into an alternative theoretical context. The first step was to show that these ideations constitute a problem of interpersonal understanding. They are generated in an attempt to understand some aspect of self and other, or alternatively, are products of advances in interpersonal understanding that are first evident in early adolescence. Hence, according to Lapsley and Murphy (1985), developmental sequences that describe the ontogenesis of interpersonal understanding, such as the sequence identified by Selman (1980), would provide a more suitable and consistent theoretical grounding of the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs than would the egocentrism of logical development.

Lapsley and Murphy (1985) showed, for example, how the role-taking skills afforded by Level 3 in Selman's (1980) sequence can be usefully deployed to account for the emergence of imaginary audience and personal fable ideations, and the emergence of Level 4 in the sequence can account for their diminution in late adolescence. The imaginary audience was linked to the Level 3 ability to reflect upon the self from a third-party perspective. The personal fable was linked to the Level 3 understanding that the mind is a self-observing ego endowed with volitional properties and personal agency which, as a result, is an active processor, monitor, and manipulator of experience. This heightened sense of personal agency is thought to diminish at Level 4 when the adolescent becomes aware that the observing ego is powerless to control unconscious motivations, which highlights the limits of self-reflective self-control. The imaginary audience declines at this level with the ability to coordinate all possible third-party perspectives, which obviates the need to imagine the reaction of others to the self (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985).

The "new look," then, placed the imaginary audience and personal fable in the context of the social cognitive development of self-understanding. More recent research has expanded the theoretical parameters of the constructs even further, and has shown, in the process, the considerable integrative potential that these constructs apparently enjoy. Lapsley and Rice (1988), for example, attempted to show that

the tendency to construct imaginary audiences and personal fables can be seen as consequences of the second phase of separation-individuation in adolescence. According to psychoanalytically-informed theories (Blos, 1962; Josselson, 1980), the separation-individuation process begins when the adolescent de-idealizes parents or, more precisely, withdraws cathexes from the introjected representation of parents. This de-idealization is said to result in "mourning reactions," or a sense of depletion, ambivalence, or isolation. These reactions are compensated for by narcissistic self-inflation, which supplies the adolescent ego with the aliments that are necessary to maintain self-esteem until that time when the adolescent can successfully regulate it from internal sources (vs. relying on parental introjections as the source of esteem; see Blos, 1962; Josselson, 1980).

Hence the principal tasks of adolescent separation-individuation are (a) to maintain a hold on object relations in the face of the decaathexis of the object world, and (b) to reestablish firm ego boundaries (Lapsley, in press a; Lapsley & Rice, 1988). According to Blos, one maintains a hold on object relations by "object relational ideation." One establishes firm ego boundaries by the "willful creation of ego states of a poignant internal perception of the self" (Blos, 1962, p. 98). Object relational ideations are private fantasies, imaginative trial actions, and "visions of the self" (Josselson, 1980, p. 199) that prepare the adolescent for the affective experience of interpersonal interaction, and what has been called "imaginary audience" ideation in social cognitive theory. The creation of "poignant internal perceptions of the self" by a "self-observing ego" (Blos, 1962, p. 100) serves to establish ego boundaries. "Self-induced ego states of affective and sensory intensity allow the ego to experience a feeling of self and thus protect the integrity of its boundaries and its cohesion" (p. 92). This often results, according to Blos, in a heightened sense of personal uniqueness, a surge of personal agency, and a sense of invulnerability, or what social cognitive theory has called "personal fable" ideation.

According to the "new look," then, the imaginary audience and personal fable are ideation patterns that advance adolescent ego development. They restore self-esteem in the face of mourning reactions. The new look also suggests that the ability to engage these ideations may depend on the social cognitive abilities permitted by Level 3 in Selman's (1980) sequence of interpersonal understanding. The "self-observing ego" properties of Level 3, and the concomitant ability to generate third-party perspectives, permit the construction of per-

sonal fables and imaginary audiences, respectively (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985). One intriguing feature of this model is that the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs may serve as the conceptual bridge between social cognitive accounts of self-understanding and neo-psychoanalytic accounts of ego development (Lapsley & Rice, 1988).

It should be apparent that much of the work of the third phase of research has been theoretical in nature. To date only a single empirical study has attempted to test certain features of this integrative model. Lapsley, Jackson, Rice, and Shadid (1988) attempted to show, in light of the new look, that the "self-observing ego" (operationalized as high self-monitoring) engages object relational and personal fable ideations, and that these ideations are tied to levels of ego development. Their results showed that high self-monitoring predominated in early adolescence, that high self-monitors had significantly higher imaginary audience and personal fable scores (vs. low self-monitors), and that high scores on self-monitoring, imaginary audience, and personal fable were associated with lower levels of ego development, as measured by Loevinger's Sentence Completion Task (Loevinger, Wessler, & Redmore, 1970). These results were seen to attest to the generative power of the new look to anticipate novel facts about adolescent development (Lapsley et al., 1988).

In retrospect, it became clear, however, that the use of the Loevinger model of ego development would not provide the most informative test of the new look. This was so because the Loevinger model is silent about ego development defined in terms of the separation-individuation process. Fortunately new assessments of separation-individuation have been recently developed (e.g., Levine, Green, & Millon, 1986) that would provide a more forthright test of the model. It has also been pointed out that the extant measures of the imaginary audience and the personal fable, although quite serviceable for the purposes of the first and second phases of research on these constructs, may not be up to the task of the third phase, which has considerably expanded the theoretical parameters of these constructs (Lapsley, in press b). The purpose of this study, then, was to more fully examine the relation between separation-individuation and the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs, with newly created measures of the latter constructs. In addition, the relationship between these constructs and narcissism in young adolescents was examined, since the model suggests that narcissism funds the expression of imaginary audience and personal fable

ideations. Finally, this study examined possible sex differences in the pattern of relations between the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs and the different components of separation-individuation. The interest in sex differences springs from two concerns. First, the previous "adolescent egocentrism" literature has suggested that females are more prone to construct imaginary audiences and personal fables than are males (e.g., Enright et al., 1979, 1980). In addition, the socialization literature suggests that males are more agentic and express individuation concerns through autonomy, self-assertion, and independence, while females express a more pronounced concern with interpersonal issues (Josselson, 1988; Lueptow, 1984).

The Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (Levine et al., 1986) was used to measure separation-individuation. This measure assesses nine basic dimensions of the separation-individuation process, as informed by psychodynamic theory (e.g., Blos, 1962; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Weiner, 1970). These dimensions include nurturance-symbiosis, nurturance-succorance, engulfment anxiety, separation anxiety, need (dependency) denial, rejection-expectancy, self-centeredness, interpersonal enmeshment, and healthy separation. It was anticipated that the imaginary audience and the personal fable would be differentially related to these variables. Insofar as the personal fable reflects (defensive) agentic self-assertion, with its emphasis on uniqueness, invulnerability, and omnipotence, it was hypothesized that high scores on this measure would be associated with high scores on both self-centeredness and dependency denial, and low scores on separation anxiety. In contrast, it was expected that low scores on the personal fable measure would be correlated with high engulfment anxiety and nurturance-symbiosis. Insofar as the imaginary audience ideation reflects an attempt to maintain a hold on object relations, it was expected that high scores on the imaginary audience measure would be positively associated with those dimensions of separation-individuation that reflect object relational concerns, such as engulfment, symbiosis, succorance, enmeshment, and separation anxiety. It was also expected, of course, that strong positive correlations would result between narcissism and the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs.

The final set of predictions concerned sex differences. It was hypothesized that males and females would differentially utilize imaginary audience and personal fable ideations as defensive restitutions. In addition, it was hypothesized that males and females would express different patterns of concern as they sort through separation issues. In

particular, it was hypothesized that males would score higher than females on measures of narcissism, personal fable, self-centeredness, and dependency denial. Females, on the other hand, would score higher than males on more interpersonal concerns, such as nurturance-symbiosis, engulfment, separation anxiety, and imaginary audience ideation.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The subjects for this study were 45 (18 males, 27 females) sixth-graders, 54 (25 males, 29 females) eighth-graders, 40 (18 males, 22 females) tenth-graders, and 30 (15 males, 15 females) twelfth-graders, for a sample total of 169 subjects. All of the subjects were volunteers. Informed parental consent was a prerequisite for participating in this study. The mean age of subjects at each grade were as follows: for sixth grade,  $\bar{X} = 11.75$  ( $SD = .57$ ); for eighth grade,  $\bar{X} = 13.74$  ( $SD = .48$ ); for tenth grade,  $\bar{X} = 15.76$  ( $SD = .53$ ); and for twelfth grade,  $\bar{X} = 17.5$  ( $SD = .51$ ). These subjects were drawn from a single school district that services a predominantly white, middle-class community. The schools were organized in this district such that the elementary grades contained grades 1-6, the middle school, grades 7-8, and the high school, grades 9-12. Hence none of subjects in this study were sampled after completing a school transition, a matter of some concern insofar as school transitions may affect self-related ideation (e.g. Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983).

### Instruments and Procedure

*Separation-Individuation.* This construct was assessed by means of the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA), developed by Levine et al. (1986). This measure assessed nine dimensions of the separation-individuation process, as conceptualized by psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Blos, 1962; Mahler et al., 1975; see Steinwand, 1984). The original instrument validation research identified six discriminant factors. These factors were labeled nurturance-symbiosis, engulfment anxiety, separation-anxiety, dependency (need) denial, self-centeredness, and healthy separation. The *nurturance-symbiosis* scale consisted of 14 items that tap strong dependency needs, feelings of self-object fusion and merger, and intimate, enmeshed interpersonal relationships. The

*engulfment anxiety* scale consisted of 11 items that measured the extent to which subjects fear close interpersonal relationships or relationships that threaten the sense of independence and self-hood, or the extent to which subjects feel controlled or enveloped by others who are seen to impinge on autonomy. The *separation-anxiety* measure (12 items) assessed strong fears of losing emotional or physical contact with important others, and feelings of rejection, abandonment or desertion, as well as anxiety or depression due to actual, anticipated, or perceived separation. The *need denial* scale (13 items) assessed the denial or avoidance of dependency needs by rejecting or failing to understand feelings of closeness, friendship, and love. This denial of interpersonal needs is thought to be defensive in that it denies the anxiety associated with psychological separation. The *self-centeredness* scale consisted of 13 items that measured an overvaluation of the self or an excessive need for attention and approval from others. Finally, the *healthy separation* scale (11 items) assessed the adolescent's appreciation of both dependence and independence needs, or the sense of independence in the context of ongoing relationships.

Two additional scales, labeled *nurturance-succorance* (7 items) and *interpersonal enmeshment* (8 items), were derived from the internal factor structure of the SITA measure. These composite scales reflected a concern for dependency and self-object boundary diffusion, respectively. In addition, a recently developed scale, labeled *rejection-expectancy* (14 items), was included here for exploratory purposes. Subjects responded to scale items in a 5-step Likert-type format ranging from *always true* or *strongly agree* to *never true* or *strongly disagree*. Although reliability information has not been previously reported, internal structural validity has been established by a priori prediction of factor loadings for the theoretically-derived scales. The external criterion validity of the SITA scales has been demonstrated with differential predictions with personality typologies derived from the Millon Adolescent Personality Inventory (Millon, Green, & Meagher, 1982).

*Narcissism.* The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), developed by Raskin and Hall (1979, 1981), was used to assess the narcissism construct. The NPI is a 54-item, forced-choice questionnaire that is designed to measure narcissism as a normal personality trait. Scale items were derived from a consideration of five features of the DSM-III diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality. These features included: (a) grandiose sense of self-importance and uniqueness; (b) preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, beauty, and ideal



love; (c) exhibitionism; (d) sense of entitlement; and (e) interpersonal exploitiveness. The inclusion of the NPI played a crucial role in the present study. This was so for two reasons. The first was that narcissism was expected to fund the expression of IA and PF ideations. The second was tied to the suggestion that impaired negotiation of the separation-individuation project in adolescence may provide the foundation for narcissistic personality organization in adulthood (Lapsley & Rice, 1988). This latter suggestion is driven by the fact that the diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder can be seen as an exaggerated penchant to construct personal fables (Lapsley & Rice, 1988).

The psychometric properties of the NPI appear to be quite good. Performance on the NPI has been related to extraversion (Raskin & Hall, 1981), creativity, use of first-person singular pronouns (Raskin, 1980), and sensation-seeking (Emmons, 1981). In three studies, Emmons (1984) established convergent and discriminant validity of the NPI with several well-known personality inventories. In addition, scores on the NPI were positively correlated in this study with self-esteem, public self-consciousness, body competence, need for uniqueness, and high self-monitoring, and were negatively correlated with social anxiety, private self-consciousness, other-directedness, and self-ideal discrepancy. Internal reliabilities have been uniformly high (.69-.89).

*Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable.* Recently developed scales were used to assess these constructs. Items for both scales were generated on the basis of theoretical considerations by a team of five researchers. Item inclusion on the relevant scale or subscale was contingent on an 80% interrater agreement criterion. The New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS) was designed to assess the extent to which subjects engage in object relational ideation, interpersonal fantasies, and "visions of the self." The NIAS is a 42-item Likert-type scale that required subjects to indicate along a 4-step continuum (*never to often*) how often they engage in object relational ideations. Sample items included: "rescuing a friend from danger"; "imagining how others would feel if you were gone"; "being rejected by a boyfriend or girlfriend"; and "imagining what everyone will think if you became famous." High scores on the NIAS represented a heightened tendency to construct imaginary audiences. The New Personal Fable Scale (NPFS) is a 46-item, forced-choice (true, false) measure that assesses feelings of personal uniqueness (13 items), omnipotence (19 items), and invulnerability (14 items). Omnipotence was defined in terms of having virtually unlimited authority or influence, or as an agent of unlimited

power. Sample items included: "I believe that I can do anything I set my mind to"; "I believe that no one can stop me if I really want to do something"; "I think I am a powerful person"; and "I think that I am better than my friends at just about anything." Invulnerability was defined in terms of an incapability of being wounded, injured, or harmed. Sample items included: "Nothing seems to bother me"; "I believe in taking risks"; "I can get away with things that other people can't"; "I am not afraid to do dangerous things"; and "It is easy for me to take risks because I never get hurt." Sample items for personal uniqueness included: "No one has the same thoughts and feelings that I have"; "I'm somehow different from everyone else"; and "Nobody will ever know what it's like being me." High scores on the NPFS represent a heightened sense of a personal fable.

The full range of psychometric evidence for these new measures is not yet available. There are, however, two unpublished data sets from independent laboratories that do provide encouraging information. One study examined the relationship between the personal fable and suicidal ideation and depression in a sample of late adolescents (D. Cole, personal communication, November 1988). The internal consistency reliabilities (coefficient alpha) were: for the full scale,  $\alpha = .78$ ; for omnipotence,  $\alpha = .67$ ; for invulnerability,  $\alpha = .72$ ; and for personal uniqueness,  $\alpha = .53$ . Item-to-total correlations for the three subscales ranged from .64 (uniqueness) to .80 (omnipotence), while the average intercorrelation among the subscales was  $\bar{X}_r = .30$ . This study also revealed significant negative correlations between the personal fable (full scale) and both the Beck Depression Inventory ( $r = -.41$ ) and the Zung Depression Inventory ( $r = -.32$ ), as well as the Parasuicidal Behavioral Questionnaire ( $r = -.24$ ), attesting to the adaptive consequences of engaging personal fable ideation. A second study (J. Prentice, personal communication, February 22, 1989) administered both the NIAS and the NPFS to over 200 early and middle adolescents. The reliabilities were: for NIAS,  $\alpha = .92$ ; for NPFS,  $\alpha = .71$ ; for omnipotence,  $\alpha = .70$ ; for invulnerability,  $\alpha = .57$ ; and for uniqueness,  $\alpha = .37$ . With the possible exception of the personal uniqueness measure, and given some sample specific variability, the instrument reliabilities appear to be quite serviceable for the purposes of examining group differences. One purpose of the present study was to provide additional information on the validity of these scales by examining the pattern of correlations with theoretically relevant constructs.

Subjects responded to these measures in a randomized order (for each subject) in group settings. The total time of administration was approximately 45-60 minutes.

## RESULTS

### Instrument Reliability

Instrument reliabilities are reported in Table 1. The NPI and the NIAS report the highest reliabilities. The reliabilities for the SITA and NPFS subscales are moderate, with the exception of the uniqueness subscale (NPFS), which is too low to be considered in subsequent analyses. It should be kept in mind that moderate reliabilities will set a limit on the magnitude of observed correlations.

### Analysis of Group Differences

*Grade and sex.* Means and standard deviations for each measure, by grade, are reported in Table 2. Table 3 reports this information by sex. A Grade (4)  $\times$  Sex (2) MANOVA was calculated to examine group differences among the measures. A significant multivariate effect (Pillai) was evident for both Grade,  $F(36, 423) = 3.26, p < .001$ , and Sex,  $F(12, 139) = 6.30, p < .001$ . The multivariate Grade  $\times$  Sex interaction was not significant. Univariate ANOVAs were calculated to locate the sources of significant variation. Significant grade effects were evident for Imaginary Audience,  $F(3, 150) = 3.96, p < .001$ ; Separation Anxiety,  $F(3, 150) = 4.06, p < .001$ ; Healthy Separation,  $F(3, 150) = 5.71, p < .001$ ; Engulfment,  $F(3, 150) = 7.47, p < .001$ ; Enmeshment,  $F(3, 150) = 3.14, p < .03$ ; and Rejection Expectancy,  $F(3, 150) = 3.47, p = .01$ . Significant sex effects were evident for Narcissism,  $F(1, 150) = 9.53, p < .002$ , favoring males; Personal Fable,  $F(1, 150) = 40.48, p < .001$ , favoring males; Self-Centeredness (SITA),  $F(1, 150) = 5.02, p < .01$ , favoring males; Need Denial (SITA),  $F(1, 150) = 20.83, p < .001$ , favoring males; Separation Anxiety (SITA),  $F(1, 150) = 14.72, p < .01$ , favoring females; Healthy Separation (SITA),  $F(1, 150) = 6.34, p < .01$ , favoring females; Nurturance-Symbiosis (SITA),  $F(1, 150) = 4.03, p < .03$ , favoring females; Engulfment,  $F(1, 150) = 7.61, p < .007$ , favoring females; and Interpersonal Enmeshment,  $F(1, 160) = 6.31, p < .01$ , favoring females. Separate univariate analyses were calculated for the Invulnerability and Omnipotence subscales of the NPFS. Both scales revealed signif-

TABLE 1. Full Scale and Subscale Reliabilities

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Reliability Coefficient</i>
Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence	
Engulfment	.70
Self-Centeredness	.54
Need Denial	.69
Separation Anxiety	.68
Healthy Separation	.48
Nurturance-Symbiosis	.58
Nurturance-Succorance	.54
Interpersonal Enmeshment	.60
Rejection Expectancy	.79
Narcissism	.87
Imaginary Audience	.92
Personal Fable	.65
Omnipotence	.64
Invulnerability	.63
Uniqueness	.14

NOTE: All of the reliabilities are coefficient alpha, except for the Personal Fable subscales (KR-20).

ificant sex effects for Invulnerability (NPFS),  $F(1, 160) = 48.12, p < .01$ , favoring males; and Omnipotence (NPFS),  $F(1, 160) = 17.61, p < .01$ , favoring males. In general, males, more so than females, were narcissistic and self-centered, tended to deny dependency needs, and were likely to construct personal fables and to feel invulnerable and omnipotent. Females, more so than males, showed separation anxiety, feelings of interpersonal enmeshment, engulfment, and symbiosis, and advances in healthy separation.

Post hoc analyses of the significant grade effects were calculated with the Scheffé procedure. The results were: Sixth-graders had the highest Imaginary Audience scores, significantly higher than those of eighth- or twelfth-graders, who had the lowest IA scores; and sixth-graders also had the highest Need Denial scores, significantly higher than those of eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-graders. A similar pattern was found for Separation Anxiety, in that sixth-graders reported more separation anxiety than did eighth-, tenth- or twelfth-graders. Tenth-graders reported more engulfment than did the other grades, and tenth-graders also reported more separation anxiety than did eighth- or twelfth-graders. Regarding Healthy Separation, although the sixth-,

TABLE 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Separation-Individuation, Narcissism, Imaginary Audience, and Personal Fable, by Grade

Variable	Grade					
	6	8	10	12	$\bar{X}$	SD
Separation-Individuation						
Engulfment	33.89	33.62	38.02	31.13	31.13	6.05
Self-centeredness	39.71	39.06	39.70	38.63	38.63	6.02
Need denial	29.96	27.15	28.00	25.90	25.90	5.27
Separation anxiety	37.40	33.69	37.47	34.33	34.33	8.46
Healthy separation	40.02	39.20	42.35	42.77	42.77	4.39
Nurturance-symbiosis	46.78	45.13	47.10	46.33	46.33	8.02
Nurturance-succorance	23.75	22.18	21.63	22.13	22.13	3.73
Interpersonal enmeshment	23.68	23.79	25.70	25.67	25.67	4.73
Rejection expectancy	34.02	35.94	37.05	30.67	30.67	8.00
Narcissism	52.51	54.68	55.55	55.23	55.23	7.02
Imaginary audience	115.98	107.05	112.50	104.53	104.53	20.11
Personal Fable	71.91	70.63	70.47	70.80	70.80	4.67
Omnipotence	27.91	27.67	27.07	28.00	28.00	2.66
Invulnerability	21.41	22.00	22.07	21.70	21.70	2.45
Uniqueness	21.20	19.72	19.97	19.80	19.80	1.24

TABLE 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Separation-Individuation, Narcissism, Imaginary Audience, and Personal Fable, by Sex

Variable	Males		Females	
	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Separation-Individuation</b>				
Engulfment	32.57	5.83	35.69	7.46
Self-centeredness	40.56	5.44	38.30	6.02
Need denial	30.35	6.86	25.89	6.91
Separation anxiety	33.05	6.95	37.84	7.43
Nurturance-symbiosis	45.05	6.36	47.22	6.55
Nurturance-succorance	21.96	4.60	22.87	4.13
Interpersonal enmeshment	23.51	4.60	25.39	5.21
Rejection expectancy	35.33	8.70	34.28	9.49
Healthy separation	39.66	4.92	41.73	4.93
Narcissism	56.40	6.80	52.87	7.28
Imaginary Audience	107.66	21.31	112.39	19.47
Personal Fable	73.10	3.99	69.15	4.46
Omnipotence	28.62	2.69	26.82	2.96
Invulnerability	23.04	2.02	20.76	2.14
Uniqueness	20.19	1.68	20.17	1.38

eighth-, tenth-, and twelfth-graders showed equivalent performance on this measure, the remaining contrasts showed "stepwise" improvement in healthy separation scores. Finally, regarding Rejection Expectancy, sixth-, eighth-, and tenth-graders reported more rejection expectancy than did twelfth-graders.

*Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable.* A second set of analyses was undertaken in order to examine whether subjects who scored "high" or "low" on the imaginary audience and personal fable scales would show a differential pattern of responding on the measures of separation-individuation and narcissism. Subjects who scored one-half standard deviation above and below the mean were sorted into high and low imaginary audience and personal fable groups, respectively. Group differences were then assessed with MANOVA, with the narcissism and separation-individuation subscales entered as dependent variables. Significant multivariate results were evident (Pillai) for both Imaginary Audience,  $F(10, 86) = 6.73, p < .01$ ; and Personal Fable,  $F(10, 107) = 6.84, p < .01$ . Table 4 reports the means and standard

**Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Significant Univariate Effects, by High and Low Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable Groups**

Variable					Univariate Significance	
	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	F-value	<i>p</i> -level
<b>I. Imaginary Audience</b>	High ( <i>n</i> = 49)		Low ( <i>n</i> = 48)			
<b>Separation-Individuation</b>						
Engulfment	36.77	6.64	30.77	6.75	19.50	.001
Separation anxiety	39.16	7.13	30.83	6.86	34.36	.001
Nurturance-symbiosis	48.20	5.71	44.06	7.96	8.69	.01
Nurturance-succorance	23.29	3.78	21.02	4.76	6.71	.05
<b>Interpersonal</b>						
enmeshment	25.79	4.68	23.39	5.47	5.39	.05
Narcissism	56.33	7.62	52.37	7.46	6.65	.05
<b>II. Personal Fable</b>	High ( <i>n</i> = 62)		Low ( <i>n</i> = 56)			
<b>Separation-Individuation</b>						
Engulfment	32.74	6.15	35.80	7.52	5.90	.05
Self-centeredness	41.39	5.56	36.32	5.88	23.09	.001
Need denial	29.55	8.17	25.55	5.47	9.53	.003
Separation anxiety	33.11	7.94	37.61	6.24	11.50	.001
Narcissism	58.13	6.95	50.23	6.54	40.14	.001

deviations for the significant univariate effects for the Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable Groups. As this table indicates, high scorers on Imaginary Audience also reported higher scores on Narcissism, Engulfment, Separation Anxiety, Nurturance-Symbiosis, Nurturance-Succorance, and Interpersonal Enmeshment, than did subjects in the low imaginary audience group. High scorers on Personal Fable also had higher scores on Self-Centeredness, Need Denial and Narcissism, and lower scores on Engulfment and Separation Anxiety, than did subjects in the low personal fable group. Hence these results show that those subjects who are inclined to construct imaginary audiences also showed object relational concerns, as reflected in their SITA scores for nurturance, enmeshment, engulfment, and separation anxiety. Those subjects who tended to construct personal fables, on the other hand, were more

self-centered, tended to deny dependency needs, and scored lower on the measures of engulfment and separation anxiety. Finally, high scorers on both IA and PF were more narcissistic than were low scorers.

### Analysis of Trend

Orthogonal polynomials were generated to test for linear and quadratic trends in the data. Significant linear trend was evident for Imaginary Audience,  $F(1,166) = 3.79, p = .05$ ; Need Denial (SITA),  $F(1, 164) = 4.62, p < .03$ ; Healthy Separation (SITA),  $F(1, 165) = 10.57, p < .01$ ; and Interpersonal Enmeshment (SITA),  $F(1, 165) = 4.97, p < .03$ . The inspection of means shows that Imaginary Audience and Need Denial scores tended to decline from early to middle adolescence, while Healthy Separation and Interpersonal Enmeshment tended to increase. Significant quadratic trend was observed for Engulfment (SITA),  $F(1, 164) = 10.12, p < .01$ ; and Rejection Expectancy (SITA),  $F(1, 164) = 8.67, p < .01$ . Peak responding for both variables was in the tenth grade, with declines thereafter.

### Correlational Analyses

Table 5 reports the intercorrelation among the measures, controlling for age. There were a number of interesting patterns in this data. As anticipated, both the NIAS and the NPFS (in addition to the omnipotence and invulnerability subscales) showed strong moderate (positive) correlations with Narcissism. A similar pattern was observed with the SITA Self-Centeredness scale, which was positively correlated with IA, PF, and Narcissism, hence providing an internal measure of validity. In addition, Imaginary Audience was consistently correlated (positively) with variables that reflect interpersonal or object relational concerns, such as Engulfment, Separation Anxiety, Symbiosis, Succorance, and Enmeshment. In contrast, Personal Fable was positively correlated with variables that reflect agentic or defensive concerns, such as Self-Centeredness and Need Denial, and negatively with such variables as Separation Anxiety and Engulfment. The different pattern of relations seemed to suggest that IA and PF serve different functions during separation-individuation. IA reflected interpersonal concerns and the need to maintain a hold on object ties *because* one experiences separation anxiety during separation-individuation. This is reflected in the positive correlations noted earlier. Separation anxiety and the fear of engulfment are combatted, on the other hand, by the defensive construction of personal fables and by narcissistic self-assertion, which are



TABLE 5. Intercorrelations of Imaginary Audience, Personal Fable, Separation-Individuation, and Narcissism, Controlling for Age

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Imaginary Audience	—	.01	.04	.08	.35*	.23*	-.08	.49*	.12	.35*	.24*	.29*	.12	.30*
2. Personal Fable		—	.80*	.70*	-.21*	.41*	.27	-.31*	-.07	-.05	-.08	-.08	-.05	.58*
3. Omnipotence			—	.28*	-.25*	.46*	.19*	-.22*	-.05	.06	-.03	.05	-.14*	.56*
4. Invulnerability				—	-.08	.32*	.20*	-.40*	-.4	-.10	-.11	-.12	.01	.37*
5. Engulfment					—	.11	.06	.41*	.02	.05	-.16*	.18*	.48*	-.03
6. Self-centeredness						—	.06	-.12	.18*	.27*	.02	.30*	-.05	.60*
7. Need Denial							—	-.02	-.24*	-.24*	-.17*	-.30*	.37*	.14*
8. Separation Anxiety								—	.15*	.42*	.32*	.35*	.17*	-.13*
9. Healthy Separation									—	.30*	.15*	.28*	-.18*	-.06
10. Symbiosis										—	.58*	.74*	-.11	.13*
11. Succorance											—	.18*	-.22*	.05
12. Enmeshment												—	.02	.09
13. Rejection Expectancy													—	.05
14. Narcissism														—

NOTE: Variables 3 and 4 are from the New Personal Fable Scale. Variables 5 through 13 are from the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence.

\* $p < .05$ .

reflected in the negative correlations between PF and both Separation Anxiety and Engulfment.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to test an integrative model of adolescent ego development. According to this model, the tendencies to construct imaginary audiences and personal fables are the result of the separation-individuation process. In psychoanalytic theory, the deca-thexis of the object world and the "loss" of the internalized parent leads to mourning reactions, which are compensated for by a surge of narcissism. Narcissistic self-inflation replenishes self-esteem until that time when the adolescent can successfully regulate it from internal sources. Two defensive maneuvers are said to follow as a result of this narcissistic self-investment (e.g., Blos, 1962). The adolescent engages in "object relational ideation" and "poignant internal perceptions of the self." The former allows the adolescent to maintain a hold on object ties in the face of psychological separation, and the latter process allows the adolescent to maintain or to establish sharp ego boundaries. It has been argued that these twin processes are theoretically equivalent to the imaginary audience (object relational ideation) and personal fable (internal perceptions of the self by a "self-observing ego") constructs (Lapsley & Rice, 1988). If this is true, then the imaginary audience and personal fable constructs might serve as the conceptual bridge between psychoanalytic accounts of ego development, described in terms of the separation-individuation process, and social cognitive developmental accounts of self-understanding (e.g., Selman, 1980), described by the interpersonal understanding sequences (Lapsley & Rice, 1988). This is so because the emergence and decline of IA and PF ideations have already been theoretically linked to social cognitive development (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985). The emergence of these ideations is thought to be the result of the "self-observing ego" properties of Level 3 in Selman's sequence, and their attenuation in later adolescence to Level 4 in the sequence. Hence one could argue that one engages imaginary audience and personal fable ideations during the separation-individuation only when sufficient progress has been made in social cognitive development, or, alternatively, that the process of separation-individuation is uneventful insofar as it is accompanied by the social cognitive abilities provided by Levels 3 and 4 in the interpersonal

understanding sequence. Without these abilities, the adolescent will not be able to engage in the necessary defensive ideations (imaginary audience and personal fable).

The first step in testing this model, however, was to show that the imaginary audience and the personal fable are, in fact, meaningfully related to separation-individuation and to narcissism. In this respect, the present results offer encouraging support. The correlational analyses, for example, showed that imaginary audience and personal fable ideations were strongly correlated (positively) with narcissism. Furthermore, the tendency to create imaginary audiences was positively related to object relational concerns regarding engulfment, symbiosis, succorance, enmeshment, and separation anxiety. The tendency to construct personal fables was positively correlated with need denial and self-centeredness, and was negatively correlated with separation anxiety and engulfment, attesting to the agentic and defensive roles that the personal fable ideation plays during separation-individuation.

This pattern was also seen in the data reported in Table 4. High scorers on the imaginary audience measure (vs. low scorers) reported more narcissism, engulfment, separation anxiety, symbiosis, succorance, and interpersonal enmeshment. In contrast, high scorers on the personal fable measure (vs. low scorers) reported more self-centeredness, need denial, and narcissism, and less engulfment and separation anxiety.

These results suggested that imaginary audience and personal fable ideations may operate orthogonally, and may serve different functions, during separation-individuation. The imaginary audience, as an expression of object relational ideation and the concomitant desire to maintain a hold on object ties, is constructed because of the separation anxiety engendered by the "loss" of the parental introjects. The personal fable, on the other hand, serves to deny both dependency needs and separation anxiety through agentic self-centeredness. Hence the imaginary audience seems to *express* the anxiety associated with the loss of object ties, while the personal fable is a restitutive defense against it. It is interesting to note that the imaginary audience and the personal fable may capture, on the intrapsychic level, the themes of *connectedness* (imaginary audience) and *assertion* (personal fable) that others have used to describe the individuation process (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). The goal of separation-individuation is *rapprochement* or the sense of individuation and autonomy in the context of ongoing relationships (Josselson, 1988). It may be the case that the concern with connectedness and relationships, and the anxiety over their potential loss, are

bound up with imaginary audience ideations, while individuation, the other side of the separation-individuation coin, is empowered by personal fable constructions.

A number of interesting age-related patterns were evident in the data. Sixth-graders, for example, reported the highest scores on measures of imaginary audience, need denial, and separation anxiety, and the lowest scores for healthy separation. Indeed, concerns with the imaginary audience and need denial tended to decline from early to late adolescence, while healthy separation increased. Engulfment and rejection expectancy increased until the tenth grade and then declined. Tenth-graders also reported more separation anxiety than eighth- and twelfth-graders. It would appear, then, that although some features of adolescent ego development showed linear developments from early to late adolescence (declines in imaginary audience and need denial, and increases in healthy separation), the rhythm of separation-individuation is not entirely uniform. Indeed, the sixth and tenth grades may be particularly important periods for ego development. Sixth-graders showed the greatest concern with the imaginary audience, separation anxiety, and need denial, while tenth-graders were seen to wrestle with rejection expectancy and feelings of engulfment. Longitudinal evidence will be needed to confirm this finding.

As expected, a consistent pattern of sex differences was observed. Males reported higher scores on those measures that reflect agentic concerns, while females reported higher scores on those measures that reflect a more interpersonal orientation. Hence males scored higher than females on the indices of narcissism, personal fable, invulnerability, omnipotence, and self-centeredness; females scored higher than males on the measures of interpersonal enmeshment, engulfment, and symbiosis, and reported more separation anxiety. Females also tended to report more healthy separation than did males. This pattern may reflect differential sex role socialization. Lueptow (1984) noted, for example, in his review of the sex role literature, that masculine sex roles are typically described as being agentic and instrumental, while feminine sex roles are communal and expressive. Indeed, the feminine themes of communion, connectedness, bondedness, and attachment are being increasingly asserted as legitimate categories by which to organize theoretical speculation concerning ego development generally, and the development of women in particular (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1980, 1988), in addition to or opposed to the masculine themes of

autonomy, separation, and independence. The present results would seem to support theoretical efforts of this kind.

Finally, the present study has been one of the first to utilize new assessments of the imaginary audience and the personal fable. The development of new assessments was thought necessary, given the expanded theoretical role that has been carved out for these constructs (Lapsley, in press a; Lapsley & Rice, 1988). The New Imaginary Audience Scale has many more items than the five-item subscale of the Adolescent Egocentrism Scale (Enright et al., 1979, 1980), and measures object relational ideation more forthrightly than does the Imaginary Audience Scale (Elkind & Bowen, 1979), which has been criticized for measuring not imaginary audience ideation, but self-consciousness (Lapsley & Murphy, 1985). The New Personal Fable Scale was designed to include the three components of personal uniqueness, omnipotence, and invulnerability, which theoretical considerations suggest are integral components of the construct. The only comparable measure is the five-item personal fable subscale from the Adolescent Egocentrism Scale (Enright et al., 1979), which seems to focus mostly (but not exclusively) on the personal uniqueness dimension.

For the most part, the performance of the new measures was entirely adequate for the purposes of this study. The NIAS showed strong internal consistency reliability. In addition, the consistent pattern of correlations with theoretically relevant variables provides a measure of validity as well for the NIAS. The NPFS showed somewhat lower reliabilities (.63-.65) than did the NIAS (.92), although reliability coefficients in this range are generally considered sufficient for making group predictions. The reliability of the personal uniqueness subscale was not at all satisfactory. What is encouraging is that the NPFS was also consistently correlated in expected ways with theoretically relevant variables. Although further scale development work is clearly needed, particularly with the personal uniqueness dimension, the present results suggest that the new measures of imaginary audience and personal fable hold some promise for advancing the understanding of the "new look" at adolescent ego development.

Future research in this area needs to focus on a number of issues. There is the need, for example, to assess the contribution that puberty makes to both the separation-individuation process and the construction of imaginary audiences and personal fables. In addition, an important test of the new look would entail showing that adolescents who are at Level 3 in their interpersonal understanding would also report higher

scores on IA and PF, and on the various dimensions of separation-individuation, than would Level 2 or Level 4 adolescents. Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to more accurately chart the developmental trajectory of separation-individuation.

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