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Background

Personal fable ideation is considered endemic to the adolescent experience; however, there is no consensus as to whether it is a multidimensional or singular construct. While Elkind (1967; 1985) considers it unitary, Lapsley (1993) views personal fable ideation as including three components:

Omnipotence - An increased sense of self-worth and a belief that one's actions are particularly informative or influential

Invulnerability - A sense that the risks of actions are less for oneself than for others

Personal Uniqueness - A sense that one is the focus of attention for others, and that others cannot understand what one feels or experiences

Previous research has provided evidence for a multidimensional conceptualization, as the three personal fables differentially predict positive and negative outcomes. Aalsma, Lapsley, and Flannery (2006) found that with respect to internalizing behaviour, personal uniqueness was positively predictive but omnipotence was negatively predictive.

The current study evaluated whether personal fable ideation may in turn moderate one's risk for internalizing symptoms. Cole (1989) has previously suggested that this may be the case. However, he considered personal fable ideation as a unitary construct. In the current study, then, we evaluated whether the three types of personal fables differentially moderated the risk for internalizing symptoms among female emerging adults. Specific risk factors of interest were lack of social support and perceived stress.

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Method and Reliabilities

Participants: 136 female Brandon University undergraduates between 18-25 years of age, following Arnett's conception of emerging adulthood

Reliabilities of Interest: Invulnerability ($\alpha = .77$), Omnipotence ($\alpha = .78$), Personal Uniqueness ($\alpha = .69$), Social Support ($\alpha = .88$; Vaux et al., 1986), Perceived Stress ($\alpha = .85$; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), BDI ($\alpha = .84$; Beck et al., 1961)

Predictions for the Current Study

H1: The three personal fables should be differentially correlated to risk and outcome variables.

H2: Omnipotence should buffer participants against risk for depression.

H3: Invulnerability may buffer against risks, but not as strongly as omnipotence.

H4: Personal uniqueness should *not* buffer against risks.

Conclusions

Our results support two primary conclusions. First, these results continue to suggest the need to conceptualize personal fable ideation as a multidimensional construct. Omnipotence, invulnerability, and personal uniqueness were differentially related to the risk and outcome variables under examination.

Second, personal fable ideation moderates the risk for depression from lack of social support and perceived stress. However, this buffering relationship was dependent upon the personal fable of interest. Omnipotence buffered against both risks, but invulnerability only buffered against perceived stress. Personal uniqueness failed to buffer against either risk factor.

Therefore, these results also follow previous work in suggesting that a sense of omnipotence may lead to positive outcomes, while feeling personally unique is generally not beneficial. A sense of invulnerability appears to lead to the most mixed profile of results.

Future Directions

We suggest three primary future directions for research. First, these buffering relationships should be evaluated developmentally, across adolescence and emerging adulthood. Aalsma, Lapsley, and Flannery (2006) suggest that the relationship between personal fable ideation and internalizing symptoms differs across this period. Second, it would be of interest to test whether these effects differ by sex, given past research suggesting differences in personal fable ideation between males and females. Third, it would be of interest to compare personal fable ideation to other personality factors that may influence decision-making and internalizing behaviour, such as need for cognition, consideration of future consequences, and hopelessness.

Correlation Analyses

	Omni	Inv	Uniq	LSS	PS	Dep
Omnipotence	----	.62	.14	-.36	-.37	-.35
Invulnerability	.62	----	.11	-.22	-.32	-.29
Personal Uniqueness	.14	.11	----	.12	.16	.08
Lack of Social Support	-.36	-.22	.12	----	.40	.46
Perceived Stress	-.37	-.32	.16	.40	----	.58
Depression	-.35	-.29	.08	.46	.58	----

Regression Moderator Analyses Predicting BDI

	Lack of Social Support	Perceived Stress
Omnipotence		
Personal Fable Ideation Risk Factor Score	$\beta = -.19$	$\beta = -.09$
PF x RF Interaction	$\beta = .34$	$\beta = .49$
Invulnerability		
Personal Fable Ideation Risk Factor Score	$\beta = -.19$	$\beta = -.10$
PF x RF Interaction	$\beta = .39$	$\beta = .51$
Personal Uniqueness		
Personal Fable Ideation Risk Factor Score	$\beta = -.10$	$\beta = -.14$
PF x RF Interaction	$\beta = .02$	$\beta = -.03$
Personal Fable Ideation Risk Factor Score	$\beta = .45$	$\beta = .58$
PF x RF Interaction	$\beta = .02$	$\beta = .03$