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EXPLORING RELATIONS AMONG POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE IMAGINARY
AUDIENCE AND PERSONAL FABLE IDEATIONS AND ASPECTS OF ADOLESCENT
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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This study considered two classic patterns of adolescent thought: imaginary audience and personal fable ideation. Imaginary audience ideation can be likened to over-estimating one's significance in other people's thoughts. On the other hand, personal fable ideation reflects a belief that the self is unique, omnipotent, and invulnerable. Past research has indicated that these thought patterns may be negatively related to adolescent adjustment. For example, imaginary audience has been likened to adolescent self-consciousness, shame, and susceptibility to peer pressure, while personal fable is thought to be related to adolescent loneliness, risk-taking, and pregnancy. However, whereas some studies have found that imaginary audience ideation predicts depression, personal fable ideation seems to serve as a buffer against it. Past research has not considered positive versus negative varieties of these cognitive constructions; considering that traditional operational definitions of imaginary audience ideation have been negative, whereas traditional operationalizations of personal fable have been positive in nature, these findings are not surprising. Imaginary audience and personal fable ideations may either insulate the adolescent from or predispose them to depressive affect, depending on the extent to which they reflect positive or negative beliefs about the self. Thus, to understand more fully how these thought patterns relate to emotional well-being, traditional measures of both thought patterns were revised to reflect both positive versus negative beliefs about oneself. Pilot data from 100 college students indicated that the newly revised measures were internally consistent. Those measures as well as measures of emotional adjustment were then given to a new sample of college and high school students. Although data collection is still underway, preliminary results indicate that imaginary audience and personal fable ideations which are positive in nature do, in fact, appear to be related to positive affect and superior adjustment, while negative versions of these ideation patterns are related to depressive affect. These preliminary findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between positive versus negative varieties of imaginary audience and personal fable, particularly when studying the role both thought patterns play in adolescent adjustment and development.