Family Communication Dimensions, Separation-Individuation and Imaginary Audience in Iranian Adolescents

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ABSTRACT: Adolescentś egocentrism is a controversial concept in cognitive developmental theories and there are little studies that investigated its antecedents. The present study examined a causal model of the relationships between dimensions of family communication, separation-individuation and imaginary audience in adolescence period. Participants were 356, boys and girls, high school and college students of Shiraz city. Participants completed the New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS), Pathology of separation-individuation scale (PATHSEP) and The Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument (RFCP). Results showed that conversation was a negative and conformity was a positive predictor of the imaginary audience (IA). When the dimensions of family communication patterns and PATHSEP- as predictors of the imaginary audience- were tested together, results clearly revealed the mediation role of PATHSEP between FCP and IA. This explanatory model is elaborated in the article.
Keywords: Conversation, Conformity, Separation-Individuation, Imaginary Audience.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION

Egocentrism is one of the most famous cognitive phenomena in Piaget's theory of intellectual growth. According to Piaget, the egocentrism generally refers to a lack of differentiation in some area of subject-object interaction (Piaget, 1962). Elkind (1967) described the concept of egocentrism in detail than Piaget (1962), especially in adolescence period. He believed that transition to formal operations in adolescence and equipping adolescents' mind to hypothetical thinking and regarding all possibilities is accompanied by tendency to assimilate social information to self-regarding ideation (or ability to consider, simultaneously, the thought of themselves and the thought of other people),resulting in a special kind of cognitive egocentrism. According to this view, the egocentrism emerges because the adolescent fails to differentiate between the objects toward which the thoughts of others are directed and those which are the focus of his own concern. Since, a few physiological metamorphoses occur in adolescence and these are the main concerns of young adolescent. It is predictable, accordingly, that they assume that other people are as obsessed with their behaviors and appearances, as they are with. One consequence of cognitive egocentrism in adolescence is anticipating the reactions of other people to him/herself, in actual or impending social situations. In Elkind words, the adolescent is continually constructing, or reacting to, an *imaginary audience* (Elikind, 1967, 1980). Therefore, when the adolescent takes a self-critical or self-admiring position, the audience takes on the same affective viewpoint.

Elkind et al. (1979) developed an Imaginary Audience Scale (IAS) and in a developmental study on imaginary audience asked a group of 4th to 12th grade students to answer to IAS questions. The results showed a curvilinear relationship between age and IAS's scores. Following Elkind, several empirical studies have investigated the imaginary audience phenomena. Although results have been shown that it exists, but there were some discrepancy about its origin. For example, in a review of research on the topic Buis et al. (1989) questioned the link between IAS and adolescent egocentrism. Cohn et al. (1988) also concluded that the IAS appears to be associated with self-consciousness, not with egocentrism.

These inconsistent results, led to exploring an alternative framework. Lapsley et al. used social-cognitive theoretical framework for the imaginary audience. To further clarify, Lapsley et al. (1985) specifically linked imaginary audience with level 3 of Selman's theory of interpersonal understanding. Selman proposes five levels or stages of perspective taking in the area of interpersonal understanding. The first three levels (0-2) describe how the child develops from being unable to distinguish his/her perspective from another's to realizing other's may have unique perspectives, eventually gaining the ability to view the self from another's perspective. In the third level, third person or mutual perspectives, the individual as conceptualizing perspective of varying levels, such as superficial information, common interests, or unspoken deeper feelings. In this level, adolescent is able to step outside of the dyad and view self and

other from and "observing ego" point of view. This new awareness of the self as both the agent and an object in social interaction is thought to account for imaginary audience ideation; as such awareness heightens self-consciousness (Damonet al., 1982; Lapsley et al., 1985) and throws the adolescent's imagination of other's reaction to the self into high gear (Lapsley et al., 1985). This model investigated in several studies, buthas not received empirical support too (Jahnkeet al., 1993; Vartanian et al, 1996; Pesce et al., 1986; Peterson et al., 1991).

Recently, Lapsley et al. (Lapsley, 1993; Lapsley et al., 1989) suggested a new look of imaginary audience that focused on interpersonal relationships more apparently. This theoretical perspective suggest that adolescents become self-conscious and concerned with what others think of them when they themselves begin to question who they are, how they fit in, and what they will do with their lives. In this view, adolescent, according to his development level and during identity attaining process is exploring psychological separation from parents (Lapsley, 1993; Lapsley et al., 1989; Lapsley et al., 1988). So, separation-individuation is perhaps the task of adolescence (Lapsley, 1993), and is necessary step toward acquiring a mature sense of identity. The goal of separation-individuation is to maintain a sense of connectedness with family members while establishing the self outside of family. Therefore, adolescents become increasingly concerned with their no familial relationships, and begin to think or fantasize about themselves in various social/interpersonal scenarios in which they are the focus. Such interpersonally-oriented daydreaming allows them to maintain feelings of connectedness with others as they renegotiate relationships with parents. In this model, imaginary audience is regarded as a coping strategy (Lapsley, 1993). The basis of the "new look" model has been supported empirically (Docherty et al., 1995; Lapsley et al., 1989; Vartanian, 1997).

According to new look, any threat to family member's relationship and social support can heighten imaginary audience as a coping strategy. Since, social support can be one of the predictors of imaginary audience, in present study family communication dimensions used as an indicator of familial relationships and supports. Koerner et al. (2002a, 2002b) regarded two dimensions for family communications: *conversation* orientation and *conformity* orientation. Conversation orientation is defined as the degree to which families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interactions about a wide array of topics. In families on the high end of this

dimension, family members freely, frequently and spontaneously interact with each other, spend large amounts of time in interactions and discuss a substantial range of topics. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Families on the high end of this dimension are characterized by emphasize on uniformity of beliefs and attitudes in their interactions. In intergenerational exchanges, communication in these families reflects obedience to parents and to other adults (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Koerner et al., 2002a, 2002b).

Previous studies have shown that separation-individuation and social support system are predictors of IA, but their pattern of relationships is not clear. These studies revealed that adolescents who perceive their parents as less supportive tend to display more imaginary audience ideation (Anolik, 1981; Riley, et al., 1984; Vartanian et al., 1995), and also, the college students who perceived greater social support from their environment reported less intense separation-individuation concerns (McClanahan, et al., 1992). The present study suggested and examined causal model of imaginary audience in which dimensions of family communication(conversation and conformity) were exogenous variables, imaginary audience was indigenous and separation-individuation was mediator variable. Although, there is no empirical evidence for the present model, but according to Lapsley's new look –the role of separation-individuation in IA- and results of mentioned studies, the current model can be offered in theoretical level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants were 150 male and 206 female (N=356) senior high school and junior college students of Shiraz city. This sample included 182 participants from grade 11 and 174 from junior college students. Although formal indexes of socioeconomic status were not obtained, it appeared that participants came from lower to upper-middle-class families. The instruments' of this study consist of:

The Persian Version of New Imaginary Audience Scale (NIAS)

The NIAS (Lapsley et al., 1989) is a 42-item scale that asks participants to indicate, using a 4-point scale (i.e., 1=never through 4=often) how often they daydream about themselves and others. The NIAS items were translated to Persian and translated back to English by two independent language specialists fluent in both Persian and English. Afterwards, the translators compared their translations to achieve consensus. The authors have received consent letter of Lapsly by an email for the measure. Two items of

this scale were eliminated because of contravention with Iranian culture. The final Persian version was then prepared and administrated to the participants.

High scores on the NIAS indicate a greater tendency to construct IAs. The NIAS seems to demonstrate excellent reliability (α=.92; Lapsley et al., 1989; α=.95; Vartanian, 1997). The value obtained in the current study (α=.93) confirmed the initial reliability of the measure. The result of factor analysis showed one general factor (eigenvalue= 11.40). This factor explained 28.51 percent of the variance. The result of item-total correlation also showed acceptable validity of the measure.

The Persian version of Pathology of separation-individuation scale (PATHSEP).

Original version of this measure is developed by Christenson et al. (1985). Lapsley et al. (2002) convert this scale to a 19-item scale. In the current study this short version is used. The PATHSEP items translation and back translation process was similar to before scale. The authors have received consent letter of Lapsley by an email for the measure.

The items are rated along a 10-step Likert continuum, with higher scores indicating more pathology of separation-individuation. This scale showed strong evidence of convergent and discriminant validity with respect to Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA) subscales (Levin, et al., 1986), College Adjustment Scale (Anton et al., 1991) and adult attachment style (Bartholomew et al., 1991). Lapsley and Horton (2002) reported one general factor that explained 36 percent of the variance in factor analysis of the measure. Reliability of the measure was strong too (α=.90). The value obtained in the current study (α=.85) confirmed the initial reliability of the measure. The result of factor analysis showed one general factor (eigenvalue= 5.49). This factor explained 28.90 percent of the variance. The result of item-total correlation also showed acceptable validity of the measure.

The Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument (RFCP).

The RFCP (Fitzpatrick et al., 1994) is a self-report questionnaire asking respondents to agree or disagree with 26 statements about their families' communication. This scale has two subscales: conversation and conformity. The RFCP items translation and back translation process was similar to before scales. The authors have received consent letter of Koerner by an email for the measure.

Both subscales of the RFCP have proved their reliability with a mean reliability of alpha=.89 (range=.84-.92) for conversation and mean reliability

of alpha=.79 (range=.73-.87) for conformity and test-retest reliability coefficients as close 1 for conversation and between .73 and .93 for conformity (Koerner et al., 2002a). In Iran, Kouroshnia (2006), Jowkar et al. (2008) and Rahimi (2007) reported acceptable alpha coefficients for the scale. Koerner et al. (2002a) have regarded content, criterion-based and construct validity for the measure. The value obtained in the current study (α=.91 for conversation and α=.87 for conformity) confirmed the initial reliability of the measure. The result of factor analysis showed two factors (eigenvalues= 8.91 for conversation and 3.57 for conformity). These factors explained 48 percent of the variance. The result of item-total correlation also showed acceptable validity of the measure.

RESULTS
Intercorrelations among variables

Correlations between all measured variables are presented in table 1. There was negative correlation between family communication dimensions (conversation and conformity). There were negative correlations between conversation with separation-individuation and imaginary audience, whereas positive correlations between conformity with separation-individuation and imaginary audience were observed. Finally, separation-individuation and imaginary audience were positively correlated with each other.

Family communication dimensions, separation-individuation and IA

To examine the research model, these quintal simultaneous regressions were conducted according to the steps recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). At the first step, the IA regressed on 'conversation' and 'conformity' dimensions. Results showed that the 'conversation' was negative significant predictor (β=-0.29, *p*<0.001) and 'conformity' was positive significant predictor (β=0.19, *p*<0.001) of the IA. In the second step, 'separation-individuation' regressed on 'conformity' and 'conversation' dimensions. Results revealed that this variable was predicted negatively by conversation (β=-0.25, *p*<0.001) and positively by conformity (β=0.24, *p*<0.001).

In the third step, IA regressed on 'separation-individuation' with entering 'conformity' and 'conversation' as control variables. Results exhibit that 'separation-individuation' variable was good positive predictor (β=0.49, *p*<0.001) of IA and both 'conformity'(β= 0.07, P=N.S.) and 'conversation' (β= -0.15, *p*<0.01) beta coefficients decreased in this step.

In the final step, mediator effect of separation-individuation tested by comparison of path coefficients of conformity and conversation from step 1 to step 3. Since, the effects of the both variables decreased significantly, especially on conformity variable, (from β = 0.19 to β =0.07), mediator effect of separation-individuation confirmed. Based on conducted steps the final path diagram extracted (figure 1).

Table 1. Interco relations among predictors and outcome variables

	2	3	4
conversation	- .38*	- .35*	- .35*
Conformity		.34*	.29*
Separation-Individuation			.57*
Imaginary Audience			

* p < .001
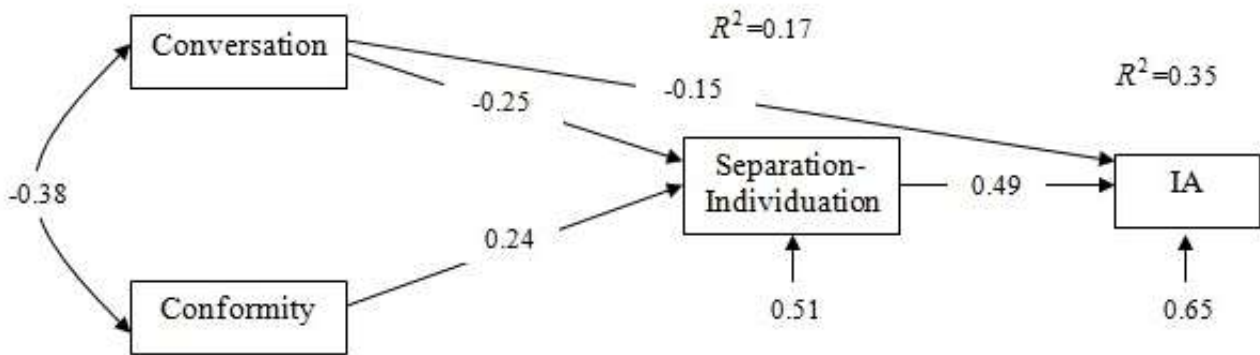
Figure 1: Total model

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the predictors of 'imaginary audience' in framework of a causal model. In this model, dimensions of family communication were distance or exogenous variables and 'separation-individuation' was near or mediator variable. Results confirmed the mediation effect of separation-individuation between family communication and IA. Results also revealed that the conversation both directly and indirectly- by affecting the 'separation-individuation'- was negative predictor of IA. In contrast, the conformity was positive predictor of IA, only by affecting the level of separation-individuation feeling in adolescents. In other words, conformity only was indirect predictor of IA. These results are good evidences for the role of family communication in developing the imaginations of other people views, with their effects on the sense of psychological separation in adolescents.

In relation to correlation between family communication dimensions and IA, Vartanian (1997) in her review of literature concluded that, adolescents who perceived those individuals in their environment as expressing or enacting positive regard for them were less concerned about revealing aspects of themselves in front of others. She deduced negative effect of social support on IA, based on her review. Of course, she noted that social support was not predictor of IA when NIAS (measure of IA according to new look) was used instead of Imaginary Audience Scale (IAS).In addition, she found that social support was not high predictor of IA in presence of separation-individuation. It is notable that, Vartanian did not examine the mediational effect of separation-individuation. Along this line, in the present study separation-individuation regarded as mediator variable, and results showed that social or family supports were predictors of IA, from the path of separation-individuation variable.

In relation to the role of family communication dimensions in the model, the findings are consistent with previous studies that revealed the conversation was a positive and conformity was a negative predictor of social relationship or family cohesion (Baumrind, 1971; Koerner et al., 1997; Elwood et al., 1998). On the other hand, social relationships and family cohesion lead to maintain connectedness to family system and in continue decrease separation-individuation concerns in adolescents (McClanahan, &Holmbeck, 1992).Furthermore, Lapsley et al. (1989) showed that IA correlated positively with interpersonal separation–individuation concerns included:

separation anxiety, nurturance symbiosis and succorance, engulfment anxiety and interpersonal enmeshment. According to "new look" of IA, they discussed, the tendency to think about the self and others in interpersonal relationships increases, as adolescents try to maintain a sense of closeness and connectedness with others.

Therefore, this study with suggesting a hierarchical model of IA proposed a new scope on predictors of imaginary audience in adolescence. In summary, the present results might be helpful in guiding further research on the IA by identifying two global sources of these ideation patterns: relatively universal, *internal* processes (e.g., separation–individuation) and *external* individual difference variables (e.g., family communication dimensions) and their pattern of relationships.

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