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## The Imaginary Audience and the Personal Fable: A Test of Elkind's Theory of Adolescent Egocentrism

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to test empirically Elkind's (1967, 1970, 1978) Piagetian theoretical formulation for the developmental nature of adolescent egocentrism. The contribution of this study is threefold because it includes: 1) Pubertal development (with a distinction between status and timing), which has been systematically ignored by other investigators; 2) a broad age range (11 - 18 year-old adolescents); and 3) a variety of manifestations and dimensions of egocentrism. The association of the two main forms of adolescent egocentrism—the imaginary audience and the personal fable—with age, gender, pubertal development, and formal operational thought was investigated. Participants were 314 adolescents who completed the Physical Development Scale (Petersen, Crockett, Richards, & Boxer, 1988), a battery of cognitive tasks (Demetriou, Efklides, & Platsidou, 1993), the Imaginary Audience Scale (Elkind & Bowen, 1979), the New Imaginary Audience Scale (Lapsley, Fitzgerald, Rice, & Jackson, 1989), the Personal Fable Scale (Elkind, personal communication, August 10, 1993), and the New Personal Fable Scale (Lapsley et al., 1989). Findings provided partial support for Elkind's hypothesis. Only the imaginary audience in the form of self-consciousness was associated with grade. Systematic gender differences emerged for several dimensions of imaginary audience and personal fable. For only a few dimensions of imaginary audience and personal fable the expected associations with pubertal and cognitive development, as well as interesting interaction effects, were found. Results are discussed in terms of their implications for Elkind's theory and for alternative interpretations of imaginary audience and personal fable.

### KEYWORDS

Imaginary Audience; Personal Fable; Pubertal Development; Formal Operational Thought

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