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The development of multiple role-related selves during adolescence

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Abstract
The organization of the adolescent self-portrait is discussed within a framework that focuses on the construction of multiple self-representations across different relational contexts. Contradictions between self-attributes in different contexts create conflict, beginning in midadolescence when cognitive-developmental structures allow one to detect but not resolve opposing attributes. Conflict is greater across roles than within roles. Moreover, for certain roles (e.g., self with mother vs. self with father) conflict is higher. Females, particularly those with a feminine gender orientation, report greater conflict involving attributes in more public contexts. Opposing self-attributes also raise concerns for adolescents about which attributes reflect true versus false self-behaviors. Conflict is more frequent for opposing attributes that pit true against false self-characteristics. False self-behavior is associated with liabilities including devaluation of false self-attributes, low self-esteem, and depressive reactions. Perceived support across relational contexts is highly predictive of favorable evaluations of attributes, high self-esteem, and true self-behavior within corresponding contexts. Strategies for resolving potential contradictions in self-attributes would appear to emerge as one moves into late adolescence and adulthood, when multiple self-representations are perceived as both appropriate and desirable, and the individual can achieve some degree of integration through higher level abstractions and the narrative construction of his or her life story.

Introduction

The study of the self-system has witnessed a number of shifts within the last two decades (see Harter, in press-a). Of particular relevance to this article is the shift from a focus on more global representations of the self to a multidimensional framework. Earlier theorists (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1979) emphasized constructs such as global self-esteem, namely the individual's overall sense of worth as a person. However, such an approach has been challenged on the grounds that it masks important evaluative distinctions that individuals, beginning in middle childhood, make about their adequacy in different domains of their lives. The prevailing zeitgeist, supported by extensive data, underscores the fact that multidimensional models of self far more adequately describe the phenomenology of self-evaluations than do unidimensional models (see Bracken, 1996; Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1982, 1990, 1993; Hattie, 1992; Marsh, 1987, 1989; Mullener & Laird, 1971; Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986). Moreover, differentiation increases with age, such that the number of domains that can be evaluated increases across the periods of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

From a developmental perspective, multiple self-representations can also be observed in the proliferation of role-related selves during adolescence. Thus, adolescents come to describe themselves quite differently across different interpersonal contexts, for example, with parents, teachers, classmates, close friends,

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and those in whom they are romantically interested. Historically, William James (1890) set the stage for the consideration of the multiple selves that may be manifest in different interpersonal roles or relationships. James (1890) concluded that "A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (p. 190). Moreover, James noted that these multiple selves may not all speak with the same voice. For example, he observed that "Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers, swears and swaggers like a pirate among his tough young friends" (p. 169). James noted that multiplicity could be harmonious, as when an individual is tender to his children but also stern with the soldiers under his command. Alternatively, there may be a "discordant splitting" if one's different selves are experienced as contradictory. James conceptualized such incompatibility as the "conflict of the different Me's."

Despite historical precedent for considering the multiplicity of the self, theoreticians in the first half of the century did not embrace James' contentions. As Gergen (1968) has observed, there was historical resistance to such a stance in the form of a "consistency ethic." Thus, many scholars placed major emphasis on the integrated, unified self (Allport, 1961; Horney, 1950; Jung, 1928; Kelly, 1955; Lecky, 1945; Maslow, 1961; Rogers, 1951). For Allport, the self includes all aspects of personality that make for a sense of inward unity. Lecky (1945) fashioned an entire theory around the theme of self-consistency, emphasizing how behavior expresses the effort to maintain the integrity and unity of the self. Epstein (1973, 1981) has more recently argued that an important criterion that an individual's self-theory must meet is *internal consistency*. Thus, one's self-theory will be threatened by evidence that is inconsistent with the portrait one has constructed of the self, or by postulates within the theory that appear to be contradictory. Epstein (1981) has formalized these observations under the rubric of the "unity principle," emphasizing that one of the most basic needs of the individual is to maintain the coherence of the conceptual system that defines the self.

More recently, the pendulum would appear to have swung back to an emphasis on multiplicity, with increasing zeal for models depicting how the self varies across situations. In contrast to the emphasis on unity, several social psychologists (Gergen, 1968; Mischel, 1973; Vallacher, 1980) have argued that the most fruitful theory of self must take into account the multiple roles that people adopt. Thus, Gergen contended that the "popular notion of the self-concept as a unified, consistent, or perceptually whole psychological structure is possibly ill-conceived" (1968, p. 306). Although consistency *within* a relationship was deemed desirable, consistency *across* relationships was viewed as difficult, if not impossible, and in all likelihood damaging. That is, people are compelled to adjust their behavior in accord with the specific nature of the interpersonal relationship and its situational context. In the extreme, high self-monitors (Snyder, 1987) frequently and flexibly alter their self-presentation in the service of creating a positive impression, enacting behaviors that they feel are socially appropriate, and that will preserve critical relationships. For Gergen, such multiplicity is not only a response to the demand characteristics of different interpersonal contexts, but also rests heavily on social comparison. As Gergen (1977) observes, "In the presence of the devout, we may discover that we are ideologically shallow; in the midst of dedicated hedonists, we may gain awareness of our ideological depths" (1977, p. 154).

Gergen (1991) has more recently elevated his argument to new heights in his sociocultural treatise on the "saturated" or "populated" self. Gergen observes that in our current era of postmodernism, individuals have been forced to contend with a swirling sea of multiple social relationships, which in turn requires the construction of numerous, disparate selves. In the face of this multiphrenia, individuals are forced to suspend any demands for personal coherence. Lifton (1993) develops a similar theme in his analysis of the emergence of the postmodern "protean self," named after Proteus, the Greek sea god who possessed many forms. For Lifton, the protean self emerges out of "confusion, from the wide-

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spread feeling that we are losing our psychological moorings" (p. 1). He attributes this confusion to unmanageable historical forces, rapid societal and economic changes, and social uncertainties. Lifton is a bit more sanguine than Gergen, however, emphasizing the flexibility and resilience of the protean self, whereas Gergen focuses more on the erosion of the belief in one's essential self.

Other social psychologists have also turned their attention to the investigation of multiple self-representations in adults (e.g., Ashmore & Ogilvie, 1992; Higgins, Van Hook, & Dorfman, 1988; Kihlstrom, 1993; Markus & Cross, 1990; Rosenberg, 1988). Each of these investigators agree that the self is multifaceted, rather than a monolithic, unitary cognitive structure. However, there is less unanimity on the nature of the structure of such selves and on the extent to which multiple representations are integrated. For some, the notion of a hierarchy is preserved (e.g., Kihlstrom). For others (e.g., Ashmore and Ogilvie), multiple selves form a somewhat loose "confederation." Still others believe that certain (but not all) subsets of self-attributes are interconnected (Higgins et al., 1988). In the extreme, theorists such as Kagan (1991) assert that the multiple representations of self are not integrated into an abstract, unitary self.

Differentiation of Multiple Selves During Adolescence

From a developmental perspective, there is considerable evidence that the self becomes increasingly differentiated. As stated previously, in addition to domain-specific self-evaluations, findings reveal that during adolescence there is a proliferation of selves that vary as a function of social context. These include self with father, mother, close friend, romantic partner, peers, as well as the self in the role of student, on the job, and as athlete (Bresnick, 1986, 1995; Gecas, 1972; Griffin, Chassin, & Young, 1981; Hart, 1988; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Smollar & Youniss, 1985). For example, the adolescent may be depressed and sarcastic with parents, caring and rowdy with friends, curious and attentive as a student, and flirtatious but also self-conscious with someone in whom one is romantically interested. A critical developmental task of adolescence, therefore, is the construction of multiple selves in different roles and relationships.

Developmentalists highlight both cognitive and social processes that contribute to this proliferation of selves. Cognitive-developmental advances allow the adolescent to make greater differentiations among role-related attributes (see Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Canfield, 1986; Harter, 1990; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Keating, 1990). Moreover, these advances conspire with socialization pressures, leading to the emergence of different selves in different relational contexts (see Erikson, 1959, 1968; Grotevant & Cooper, 1983, 1986; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Rosenberg, 1986). For example, bids for autonomy from parents make it important to define oneself differently with peers in contrast to parents (see also Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986; White, Speisman, & Costos, 1983). Rosenberg (1986) points to another component of the differentiation process in observing that as one moves through adolescence, one is more likely to be treated differently by those in different relational contexts. Such differentiation should produce less overlap in those role-related attributes that are identified as salient self-descriptors, which is precisely what our research reveals. In two studies from our own laboratory (Harter & Monsour, 1992; Bresnick, 1986) we have found that the percentage of overlap in self-attributes generated for different social contexts decreases during adolescence, from 25% to 30% for young adolescents to a low of approximately 10% among older teenagers.

Contradictions and conflict between attributes

The fact that adolescents perceive themselves differently in different relational contexts sets the stage for attributes to be considered contradictory. Indeed, James' "conflict of the different Me's" would appear to be particularly salient during adolescence. A certain level of intrapsychic conflict over opposing attributes in the adolescent self-portrait would appear to be normative. However, excessive conflict ex-

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perienced by particular individuals may put one at psychological risk (as will become more evident later in this article).

There has been little in the way of systematic, empirical efforts that explore the extent to which opposing role-related attributes provoke conflict in the developing adolescent. Thus, we have embarked upon a program of research to address these issues. In an initial study from our laboratory (Harter & Monsour, 1992) we focused on the phenomenological conflict provoked by the identification of opposing or contradictory role-related attributes (e.g., cheerful vs. depressed, rowdy vs. calm, studious vs. lazy, at ease vs. self-conscious) within the adolescent self-portrait. Adolescents at three grade levels (7th, 9th, and 11th) first generated lists of self-descriptors for four roles: self with friends, with parents, in romantic relationships, and in the classroom. They then transferred each attribute to a large circle, which allowed for a spatial representation of their self-portrait. They were asked to arrange their attributes in one of three concentric circles (center, intermediate, and outer) corresponding to importance of each attribute. They were then asked to identify pairs of attributes that represented *opposing* characteristics, as well as which of these opposites they experienced as conflicting or clashing.

Across five converging indices (mean number of opposites, mean number of conflicts, percent of opposites in conflict, percent of subjects reporting that at least one opposite caused conflict, and percent of subjects reporting that opposites made them feel confused), the same pattern emerged. Attributes identified as contradictory and experienced as conflicting did not appear with great frequency among young adolescents. However, they peaked for those in midadolescence, and then showed a slight decline for older adolescents. Examples of conflicting attributes included being serious at school but fun-loving with friends, being happy with friends but depressed with family, being caring with family but inconsiderate with peers, being talkative as well as shy in romantic relationships, and being both attentive and lazy at school.

From a cognitive-developmental perspective, how might an increase in contradictions and conflict within the adolescents' self-portraits be explained? Why do their self-theories not meet the criterion of *internal consistency* (Epstein, 1973)? Those of a Piagetian persuasion would argue that with the advent of formal operations in early adolescence, one should have the cognitive tools necessary to construct an integrated theory in which the postulates are internally consistent, and therefore not troublesome. However, our findings critically challenge such an expectation, and therefore demand an explanation that moves beyond classic Piagetian theory.

Thus, in interpreting the developmental data, we initially turned to Fischer's neo-Piagetian cognitive-developmental theory (Fischer, 1980; Fischer & Lamborn, 1989). Unlike classic Piagetian theory which posits the single stage of formal operations for the period of adolescence and beyond, Fischer identifies four stages through which development proceeds, beginning in early adolescence. Moreover, there are liabilities associated with the stage observed in midadolescence. According to this formulation, early adolescent thought is characterized by "single abstractions" in which one can construct rudimentary, abstract self-descriptors, for example, self-conscious, at-ease, awesome, dorky, cheerful, depressed, etc. However, young adolescents do not yet have the cognitive ability to simultaneously compare these abstractions to one another, and therefore they tend not to detect, or be concerned over, self-attributes that are potential opposites (e.g., self-conscious vs. at ease). As one young adolescent put it, when confronted with the fact that he had indicated that he was both "nice" and "mean," "Well, you are nice to your friends and then mean to people who don't treat you nicely; there's no problem. I guess I just think about one thing about myself at a time and don't think about the other until the next day." When another young adolescent was asked why opposing attributes did not bother her, she succinctly exclaimed: "That's a stupid question, I don't fight with myself!"

During midadolescence, the cognitive skills (namely, "abstract mappings") necessary to compare single abstractions begin to emerge. This particular substage should usher in the

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need to integrate multiple attributes into a theory of one's personality that is coherent and unified. However, the ability to "map" constructs about the self onto one another for the purposes of comparison also represents a liability since the adolescent does not yet possess the ability to integrate seemingly opposing postulates (e.g., depressed and cheerful). As a result, they are experienced as contradictions with the self-system that may also provoke intrapsychic conflict. As one 14-year-old put it, "I really think I am a happy person and I want to be that way with everyone but I get depressed with my family and it really bugs me because that's not what I want to be like." Another 15-year-old, in describing a conflict within her romantic relationships, exclaimed, "I hate the fact that I get so nervous! I wish I wasn't so inhibited. The real me is talkative, I just want to be natural but I can't." Another 15-year-old girl explained that, "I really think of myself as friendly and open to people, but the way the other girls act, they force me to become an introvert, even though I know I'm not." In exasperation, one ninth grader observed of the self-portrait she had constructed, "Its not right, it should all fit together into one piece!"

According to Fischer's theory, consolidation and coordination should be more likely in later adolescence, with the emergence of "abstract systems," since they allow one to integrate or resolve seeming contradictions within the self-theory. For example, the tendency to be both cheerful and depressed can be coordinated under higher order abstractions such as "moody" or "temperamental." As one older adolescent explained, "Sometimes I'm really happy and sometimes I get depressed, I'm just a moody person." Older adolescents also can and do (Harter & Monsour, 1992) normalize or find value in seeming inconsistency, suggesting that it would be unnatural if not weird to act similarly with everyone. Rather, they report that it is desirable to be different across relational contexts. One teenager indicated that, "You can be shy on a date, and then outgoing with friends because you are just different with different people; you can't always be the same person and probably shouldn't be." As another older adolescent put it, "There's a time you should listen and a time you should talk. You can do both."

The major developmental differences, therefore, reflect an increase in the detection of opposing attributes and the associated phenomenological experience of conflict associated with multiple role-related selves, particularly as individuals move from early- to midadolescence. Such a developmental shift can be interpreted within neo-Piagetian models that identify cognitive advances and liabilities that reflect substages during the period of adolescence. For those older adolescents who can normalize seeming contradictions or integrate them at more abstract levels of thought, there may be some reduction in the conflict experienced, although these processes can be expected to continue well into adulthood.

Are there more contradictions across or within roles? We have also extended our analysis to parameters of the conflict experienced between opposing attributes that go beyond cognitive-developmental explanations. Thus, we were curious about whether there are more opposing attributes and associated conflict within particular roles (e.g., rowdy vs. quiet with friends) or across different roles (e.g., tense with a romantic other but relaxed with friends). This issue has been briefly addressed in the adult (although not the adolescent) literature. Among those social psychologists who have focused on the adult self, it has been argued that consistency within a particular relationship is critical; therefore, perceived violations of this consistency ethic, where one displays opposing attributes within the same role, should be particularly discomforting to the individual (Gergen, 1968; Vallacher, 1980). According to these theorists, the adoption of different behaviors in different roles should be less problematic or conflictual for adults, since they represent an appropriate adaptation to different relational contexts rather than inconsistency.

From a developmental perspective, we did not expect these particular processes to be in place during adolescence. Adolescents are actively concerned with creating, defining, and differentiating role-related selves. As reported earlier, this preoccupation results in relatively

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little overlap in the self-attributes associated with different roles, particularly as one moves through adolescence. As our cognitive-developmental analysis indicated, perceived opposition between differing attributes across relational contexts should become more marked or salient, beginning in midadolescence when teenagers develop the cognitive ability to detect seeming contradictions. Thus, the salience of these differences should cause adolescents to identify more opposing attributes across roles than within roles. Perceived conflict caused by opposing attributes should also be greater across roles, particularly with the onset of midadolescence, when teenagers can begin to compare characteristics across such roles but cannot integrate these salient and seemingly contradictory self-attributes.

Findings from two different studies conducted in our laboratory (Bresnick, 1986, 1995) confirmed these expectations in that there were significantly more opposing attributes and a greater percentage of opposing attributes in conflict identified across, compared to within, roles. In the first study, which included six different roles (self with mother, father, friends, in the classroom, in romantic relationships, and on the job), across-role opposing attributes were more frequent (M = 3.68) than were within-role opposites (M = 1.56). This pattern was confirmed in a second study which included five roles, all of which represented interpersonal relationships (self with mother, father, best friend, a group of friends, and a romantic interest) as opposed to more general contexts such as the classroom or on the job. In this second study, opposing attributes across roles attributes ($M = 2.72$) were significantly more frequent than were within-role contradictions ($M = .50$). Those opposing attributes experienced as in conflict followed the same pattern.

Figure 1 presents the data for opposing attributes both across- and within-roles as a function of developmental level. Consistent with our earlier work (Harter & Monsour, 1992), young adolescents reported fewer opposing attributes than either those in mid- or late adolescence. However, the slight decline in opposing attributes and conflicts found for older adolescents in the earlier study was only obtained for the within-role characteristics. As can be seen in Figure 1, for those across-role attributes, there was a systematic developmental increase in opposing attributes, particularly noteworthy between early- and midadolescence. The fact that six roles were included in the first Bresnick study (compared to only four in the original Harter and Monsour study) may have been partly responsible for the increase into late adolescence, since the inclusion of additional roles increased the probability that opposing attributes might be detected. That is, there were 15 possible role pairs that might contain contradictions compared to only 6 role pairs in the original study. (However, as will become apparent, this increase is primarily because of the reports of female adolescents.)

Rosenberg (1986) points to a feature of the socialization process during adolescence that may contribute to the greater number of contradictory attribute pairs, coupled with conflict, that were reported across roles. He observes that as the individual moves through the adolescent years, he/she is more likely to be responded to differently by those in different relational contexts. Thus, significant others across varying relationships increasingly pull for the display of different personal attributes, leading to what Rosenberg labels the "barometric self" of the adolescent. This volatility, in turn, should contribute to the perception that one's differing characteristics are in conflict. Thus, it would appear that a combination of cognitive and social factors lead to developmental increases in the number of opposing and conflicting attributes identified across role-related, multiple self-representations.

Are more opposites and conflicts reported across some roles compared to others? The demonstration that opposing attributes, accompanied by conflict, may be more frequent across *particular* role pairs would suggest the need to move beyond mere cognitive-developmental explanations. Since the original study (Harter & Monsour, 1992), we have broadened the range of roles and focused on whether some role combinations are more problematic than others. In increasing the number of roles, we separated reports of self-

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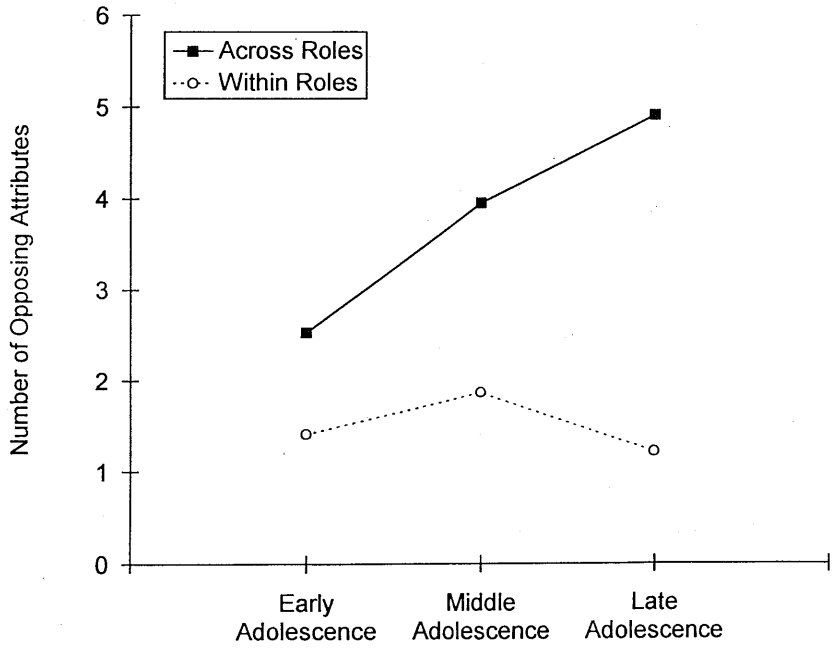


Figure 1. Mean number of opposing attributes across and within roles at three periods of adolescence.

attributes with mother and with father (whereas initially we merely enquired about self with "parents"). The separation of attributes with each parent thus enhances the likelihood that characteristics with each may contradict attributes in roles with peers; it also creates the potential for attributes with mother versus with father to be in opposition to each other. Along with increasing the number of roles, we have modified our procedure somewhat to facilitate adolescents' understanding of the task and their ability to manage more roles. A sample protocol from an older female adolescent is presented in Figure 2. Adolescents are first asked to generate six attributes for each role, writing them on the lines associated with each interpersonal context. They then, as in the previous procedure, identify any pairs of attributes that are perceived to reflect opposites by connecting them with lines. Next they indicate whether any of these opposites are experienced as clashing or in conflict with each other, by putting arrowheads on the lines connecting those pairs of opposites.

Across three different studies (Bresnick, 1986, 1995; Carson, 1985) we have consistently found that opposing attributes were most frequent for the combination of self with mother versus self with father. Examples have included being close with mother but distant with father, stubborn with mother versus respectful with father, open with mother but not open with father, at ease with mother but defensive with father, hostile with mother but cheerful with father. Opposing attributes with mother versus father greatly contributed to the developmental differences in across-role opposites depicted in Figure 1, as well as to gender differences that will be discussed.

Also contributing to increases in opposing attributes and conflicts with age was the tendency for opposites between attributes involving self with a given parent to conflict with attributes in peer relationships. Examples included being short-tempered with mother versus a good listener in romantic relationships, respectful with father but assertive with friends, distant from my father but attentive with a romantic interest. Adolescent bids for autonomy from parents (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983), coupled with the increasing importance of the peer group (Brown, 1990; Savin–Williams & Berndt, 1990), would lead

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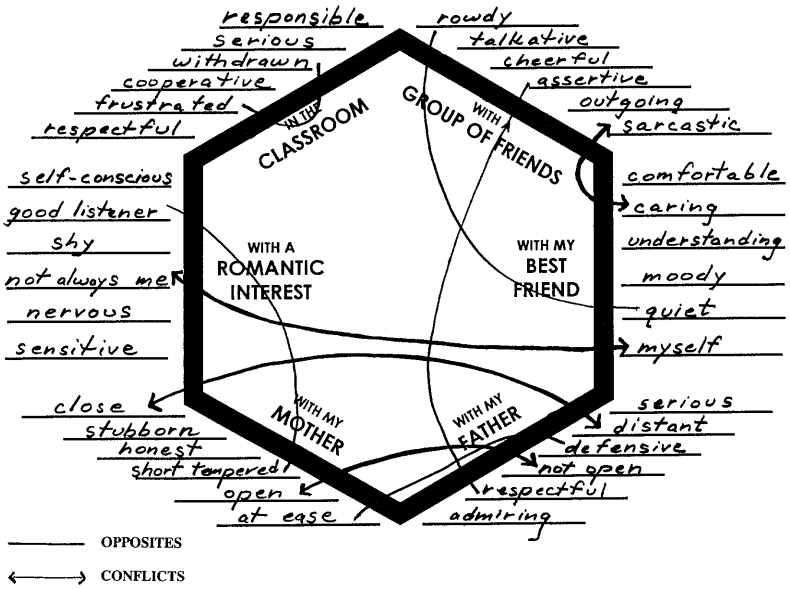


Figure 2. Sample protocol of an older adolescent female.

to the expectation that attributes expressed with mother and father might well differ from those displayed with peers (namely, friends and romantic partners), leading to a greater potential for contradictions.

However, why should adolescents report increasingly different characteristics with mother and father? Here, we can only speculate. Family therapists observe that children and adolescents typically develop different relationships with each parent, which in turn may cause the salient attributes in each relationship to vary considerably. Contributing to these dynamics is the fact that each parent may have a different set of expectations about those child characteristics that he or she values and therefore attempts to foster. Thus, the adolescent may become caught in a struggle between two parents who are encouraging and reinforcing different facets of his/her personality, provoking opposing attributes and resulting conflict. Secondly, both of these roles, self with mother and self with father, occur within the same general context, namely the family; however, behaviors across other multiple roles are not as likely to simultaneously occur, since they are typically displayed in different situational contexts. Thus, these particular conditions may exacerbate the contradictions and conflicts that adolescents experience in their respective roles with mother versus father. Finally, in one study (Bresnick, 1995) we included two contexts that contrasted self with a group of friends and self with one's best friend. Attributes in opposition and conflict were relatively frequent across these two roles as well. Examples included being sarcastic with a group of friends but caring with a best friend, and being rowdy with a group of friends but quiet with a best friend. If a best friend is also part of one's larger circle of friends, behaving differently toward each in the same potentially overlapping contexts may be particularly distressing.

In this study we also asked participants to rate the importance of being consistent across each of the role pair combinations ("how important is it to you to act the *same* with _____ and _____?"). Adolescents reported that it was significantly more important to be consistent with mother and with father ($M = 3.0$), as well as with a best friend and a group of friends ($M = 3.0$), than in all other role pairs ($M = 2.3$, combined). Thus, more opposites and associated conflict may be experienced because adolescents feel they are violating their goal of acting consistently across these contexts.

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Are there gender differences in opposites and conflicts? Although no gender differences were initially anticipated, we have documented the fact that females report significantly more opposites and conflicts than do males, a finding obtained in every study we have conducted (Bresnick, 1986, 1995; Carson, 1985; Harter & Monsour, 1992). In addition to highly significant main effects for gender, the pattern reveals that gender differences increase during mid- and late adolescence. In our more recent studies in which we have separated the roles of mother versus father, we find that the developmental increases in the opposites and conflicts reported for this particular role pair were significantly greater for females compared to males. Moreover, we have recently documented (Bresnick, 1995) that females become more upset over conflicting attributes across early, mid-, and late adolescence, whereas males systematically become less upset.

To date, we have offered only a general interpretation of these gender differences, drawing upon those frameworks that emphasize the greater importance of relationships for females than males (Chodorow, 1989; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1991; Miller, 1986; Rubin, 1985). These theorists posit that the socialization of girls involves far more embeddedness within the family, as well as more concern with connectedness to others. Boys, in contrast, forge a path of independence and autonomy in which the logic of moral and social decisions takes precedence over affective responses to significant others. In extrapolating from these observations, we have suggested that in an effort to maintain the multiple relationships that girls are developing during adolescence, and to create harmony among these necessarily differentiated roles, opposing attributes within the self become particularly salient as well as problematic. Boys, in contrast, can move more facilely among their different roles and multiple selves to the extent that such roles are logically viewed as more independent of one another. However, these general observations require further refinement, including an empirical examination of precisely which facets of the relational worlds of adolescent females and males are specifically relevant to gender differences in opposing attributes displayed across different contexts.

Closer examination of gender effects reveals that it is a subset of female adolescents who report more opposites and greater conflict, compared to males (Bresnick, 1995). In another recent dissertation (Johnson, 1995), we have determined that adolescent females who endorse a feminine gender orientation may be particularly vulnerable to the experience of opposing attributes and associated conflict. Feminine adolescent females, compared to females who endorse an androgynous orientation, report more conflict, particularly in roles that involve teachers, classmates, and male friends (as compared to parents and female friends). Several hypotheses are worth pursuing in this regard. Is it that feminine girls report more contradictions in contexts where they feel they may be acting inappropriately by violating feminine stereotypes of behavior? Given that femininity on sex-role inventories is largely defined by caring, sensitivity, and attentiveness to the needs and feelings of others, might female adolescents who adopt this orientation (and eschew masculine attributes) be more preoccupied with relationships, making opposing attributes and accompanying conflict more salient? Moreover, might it be more important for feminine girls to be consistent across relationships, a stance that may be difficult to sustain? These are new directions in which this work needs to proceed.

True Versus False Self-Behavior

The construction of multiple selves in which different attributes are perceived as contradictory should understandably provoke some concern over which of the opposing attributes in a given pair reflects one's "true self." Our own work has revealed that this proliferation of selves does engender problematic questions for adolescents about which is "the real me," particularly when attributes in different roles appear contradictory (e.g., cheerful with friends but depressed with parents). During our multiple-selves procedure, a number of adolescents spontaneously agonized over

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which of the attributes represented their "true self." The salience of this issue has been further documented by our subsequent findings demonstrating that adolescents can readily distinguish true and false self-behaviors.

When asked to define true self-behavior, adolescents' descriptions include the "real me inside," "saying what you really think," "expressing your opinion." In contrast, false self-behavior is defined as "being phony," "not stating your true opinion," "saying what you think others want to hear" (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996). These observations converge with what Gilligan and colleagues (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1989) have referred to as "loss of voice," namely the suppression of one's thoughts and opinions. In developing questionnaires that specifically address the extent to which adolescents engage in false self-behavior, we have found that many sixth graders do not embrace this concept. They will enquire into what it means, or state that it doesn't make sense because they are always their true selves. The distinction between true and false self behavior is, however, well understood by seventh graders, and becomes increasingly salient among those in midadolescence and beyond.

Our contextual approach to adolescent self-processes has prompted us to enquire, in recent studies of the multiple selves that adolescents construct, whether they display more false self-attributes in some contexts compared to others. Across these studies, each of which has addressed slightly different roles, there is a general pattern. The highest levels of false self-behavior (30% to 40% of attributes) are displayed with one's father and (for female adolescents from an all-girls school environment) with boys in social situations (Johnson, 1995). (We have not yet asked male adolescents to report on females in social situations.) Lower levels of false self-behavior (20–25%) are reported with classmates, teachers, and one's mother. The least false self-behavior is reported in relationships with close friends (10–15%). Thus, true self-behavior (the reciprocal of false self-behavior) increases across these three types of relational contexts. A similar pattern is obtained in our studies of the extent to which adolescents are able to voice their opinions (Harter et al., in press).

Does the perceived authenticity of attributes predict conflict? In two recent studies of multiple self-representations across roles, we have asked adolescents to indicate whether each attribute they generate represents true or false self-behavior. With these evaluations, we have been able to address the authenticity of attributes in pairs judged to be conflictual. We were curious about whether conflicts were more frequent between pairs of attributes in which one was judged true and the other false, between two true self-attributes, or between two false self-attributes. In both studies (Bresnick, 1995; Johnson, 1995) the pattern was the same. Conflict is significantly more likely to occur among attribute pairs in which one characteristic of the self was judged to be true self-behavior, whereas the other was deemed false self-behavior (58% and 60% of all conflicts, respectively, across the two studies). Less common were conflicts between two attributes both judged to reflect true self-behavior (29% and 34%). Conflicts between two false self-attributes were negligible (13% and 6%). Thus, it is those opposing attribute pairs representing one false and one true self-behavior that are particularly problematic in provoking conflict within the adolescent's self-theory.

We have also, in some studies, enquired into the *reasons* that adolescents report for why opposing attributes cause conflict, and these reasons parallel the findings cited above. In two such studies (Bresnick, 1986; Harter & Monsour, 1992) the largest reason category included explanations in which a behavior violated the adolescent's perception of who he/she was or wanted to be (53% and 44% of all reasons, respectively). As one adolescent put it, "I really think of myself as a happy person and I want to be that way with everyone because I think that's my true self, but I get depressed with my family and it bugs me because that's not what I want to be like or who I am." Another subject explained that "I hate the fact that I get so nervous on a date, so inhibited. The real me is talkative, I just want to be natural." Another observed: "I am

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a patient person, particularly with friends, and want to be, but then I get impatient with my mom." In these reasons it would appear that the conflicts represent a behavior experienced as "false," which clashes with an attribute that is perceived to reflect more true self-behavior.

A second category of reasons offered for conflict seems to reflect opposing attributes where each member of the pair represents true self behaviors; the frequency across the same two studies was 36% and 29%, respectively. As one adolescent explained, "I'm close with my family and fun-loving with my friends, and that's how I want to be, but sometimes these work against each other." Another observed, "I'm glad I can be emotional with my mother but I'm more naturally reserved with my father."

A third category of reasons offered for why opposing attributes conflict is that the significant others in each relational context expect or elicit different behaviors (11% and 20%, respectively). For example, one adolescent noted that "My teachers expect me to be serious but my friends want me to be rowdy." Another explained how "On a date I get withdrawn and self-conscious and just the opposite with my friends where I can get very sarcastic, but I don't like being either way, that's not me." Although adolescents providing such reasons do not always explicitly indicate that each opposing attribute represents a form of false self-behavior, the implication in their explanations is that they are behaving in ways that others call for, rather than how they feel they really are, or would prefer to act.

In a recent study (Bresnick, 1995), in which adolescents were asked to rate each attribute with regard to whether it reflected true versus false self-behavior, we also included a checklist of reasons for why attributes conflicted. One reason specified that "How I act isn't how I really am, it isn't my true self." We found that adolescents checked this reason for 69% of the conflicts that involved one true and one false self-behavior, suggesting their awareness of why these attributes clashed. A second reason in the checklist was that "One part of me wants to be one way and another part wants me to be a different way." This reason was endorsed for 77% of the conflicts that involved two true self-attributes, suggesting at least their preference that these be manifestations of their true self. Finally, a third reason specified that "Certain people expect me to be one way and other people expect me to be different." This reason was checked for 65% of the conflicts involving two false self-attributes, suggesting that attributes elicited by the demands of others are more likely to be experienced as false. Thus, the findings for the reasons offered for conflict provide converging evidence that dimensions involving the authenticity of one's behavior are quite salient.

How Much do Adolescents Like the Attributes They Display Across Roles?

We have recently extended our contextual approach to multiple self-representations by enquiring into whether adolescents *like* their attributes more in some relationships compared to others. Thus, in two studies (Bresnick, 1995; Johnson, 1995) we asked participants to rate how much they liked each attribute, on a 4-point scale (where a score of 4 reflected the most positive evaluation and a score of 1 represented the most negative evaluation). The roles varied somewhat across the two studies. In the first (Bresnick, 1995), self-attributes with father were rated most negatively (M = 2.78), self with mother as well as with a group of friends was given slightly higher ratings (M = 2.90), whereas self-attributes with close friend were rated the most desirable (M = 3.27). In the Johnson dissertation, where female subjects from an all-girls high school were polled, the attributes they liked least (M = 2.64) were displayed with boys in social situations. Attributes with classmates, parents (no distinction between mother and father), and teachers were rated more positively (M = 3.10, combined), and attributes with close friends were evaluated the most positively (M = 3.55). This pattern directly parallels that obtained for the percentage of true and false self-attributes reported in that the greater the percentage of true self-attributes displayed, the more positively the attributes were evaluated. More direct confirmation for this link is documented by the correlations be-

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tween the percentage of true self-behavior and the liking ratings. In the Bresnick study, these correlations ranged from .47 to .58 across relational contexts; in the Johnson study, the range was from .53 to .60. Thus, adolescents find their true self-attributes to be more desirable, while they devalue those judged to reflect false self-behavior.

Relational self-esteem

The fact that adolescents evaluate their attributes more positively in some relational contexts than others converges with other evidence (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, in press) that adolescents report differing levels of *self-esteem* across different relationships. In this study, we examined high school students' perceptions of their worth as a person across four contexts, with parents, teachers, male classmates, and female classmates. We obtained a clear, four-factor solution with negligible cross-loadings, reflecting the fact that older adolescents make distinctions among their feelings of self-esteem in these relationships. Across the sample, the average discrepancy between adolescents' highest and lowest self-esteem scores was 1 (where the maximum could be 3). In the extreme, some adolescents did report the maximum. For example, one subject reported the lowest possible self-esteem (1.0) with her parents in contrast to the highest possible value (4.0) with female classmates. More recently, we have examined our relational self-esteem construct in a middle school population, where the contexts included mother, father, siblings, peers, and close friends. Once again, a very clear factor structure emerged, revealing that younger adolescents also make distinctions in their perceptions of worth as a person, across relational contexts.

Why should adolescents evaluate their attributes differently across contexts? With regard to factors that might be responsible for why individuals evaluate both their specific attributes as well as overall self-esteem differently across contexts, we have adopted Cooley's (1902) looking-glass self-perspective as one framework for explaining these differences. According to this model, the opinions of significant others, who serve as social mirrors into which one gazes, become incorporated into evaluations of self. Considerable evidence now reveals that perceived approval or validation from significant others, notably parents and peers for adolescents, is a powerful predictor of global self-esteem (Harter, 1990, in press-a; Rosenberg, 1979). We reasoned that context-specific support should be even more predictive of adolescents' perceptions of worth, as well as the evaluation of specific attributes, in the corresponding context compared to other contexts. The findings clearly confirm this expectation (Harter et al., in press). The correlations between validation support and relational self-esteem in the corresponding contexts range from .49 to .64 ($M = .54$). In contrast, the correlations between validation support in given contexts and the relational self-esteem in different contexts range from .22 to .41 ($M = .33$).

Similar links between support and self-evaluations have been demonstrated when we ask adolescents to rate how much they like their specific attributes across multiple roles. In one such study (Johnson, 1995) participants were also asked to rate the level of support that they received from others in each context. Across six different contexts, the pattern was the same. Those reporting low support liked their attributes least well ($M = 2.64$ across contexts, combined). Those acknowledging moderate support evaluated their attributes more positively ($M = 3.01$), and those reporting high levels of support found their attributes to be the most favorable ($M = 3.27$). As would be expected, given the correlation between the positivity of evaluations and the percentage of true self-attributes, higher levels of support are associated with more true self-behavior. A similar pattern has been obtained in other studies of true self-behavior (see Harter et al., 1996) as well as in our examination of the ability to voice one's opinions where higher levels of "voice" are associated with higher levels of support (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997). However, these studies do not speak directly to the directionality of these effects. Is it that displays of true self-behavior and voice garner more approval, or is it that if one receives support, one is

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more likely to display true self-behaviors, including the expression of one's opinion? It is likely that both processes are operative and reinforce each other within a given context, perpetuating differences in the level of true self-behavior as well as the evaluation of attributes and self-esteem across contexts.

Self-Organization During Adolescence: Normative and Pathological Implications

Given normative cognitive-developmental advances as well as socialization pressures during adolescence, it is inevitable that multiple context-dependent selves will become differentiated during adolescence. As our findings have revealed, there is decreasing overlap among those attributes that adolescents identify as most salient across relational contexts. Differences in the attributes associated with different contexts, in turn, introduce the potential for some to be viewed as contradictory, leading to perceived conflict between attributes in the adolescent self-portrait. Such conflict will be exacerbated as one moves into midadolescence, where the emerging cognitive-developmental structures allow one to detect but not resolve such contradictions.

Thus, a certain level of conflict will be normative, particularly during midadolescence. That is, teenagers at this level of development do not yet possess the skills necessary to integrate those opposing attributes that come to define the loose confederation of multiple selves that have proliferated. However, certain individuals, as well as subgroups, may be more vulnerable to conflict. For example, we have identified a subset of girls, namely those with a feminine gender orientation, that are more prone to conflict, particularly among attributes that are displayed in public arenas such as in the classroom, as well as with boys in social situations.

The challenges posed by the need to create different selves are also exacerbated for ethnic minority youth in this country who must bridge "multiple worlds," as Cooper and her colleagues point out (Cooper, in press; Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1995). Minority youth must move between multiple contexts, some of which may be with members of their own ethnic group, including family and friends, and some of which may be populated by the majority culture, including teachers, classmates, and other peers who may not share the values of their family of origin. Rather than assume that all ethnic minority youth will react similarly to the need to cope with such multiple worlds, Cooper and colleagues have highlighted several different patterns of adjustment. Some youth are able to move facilely across the borders of their multiple worlds, in large part because the values of the family, teachers, and peers are relatively similar. Others, for whom there is less congruence in values across contexts, adopt a bicultural stance, adapting to the world of family, as well as to that of the larger community. Others find the transition across these psychological borders more difficult, and some find it totally unmanageable. Particularly interesting is the role that certain parents play in helping adolescents navigate these contextual waters, leading to more successful adaptations for some than others.

The differentiation of multiple selves will be of particular concern to developmental psychopathologists to the extent that it is associated with a number of negative correlates and outcomes. These include excessive conflict between attributes in multiple roles, high levels of false self-behavior, and the devaluation of those characteristics that define one's role-related behavior. Moreover, each of these variables is, in turn, associated with lower levels of social support as well as low relational self-esteem in the corresponding context. In addition, we know from previous studies (see Harter, in press-a; Harter et al., 1996) that low self-esteem and high levels of false self-behavior are predictive of depressive reactions including depressed affect, low energy level, and hopelessness. The perception that certain self-attributes are false would seem to be very central to this constellation of liabilities.

A basic claim of theorists concerned with false self-behavior is that lack of authenticity has negative outcomes or correlates. Gilligan and colleagues (Gilligan et al., 1989; Gilligan, 1993), as well as others (see Jordan, 1991;

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Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Lerner, 1993; Miller, 1986, 1991) observe that suppression of the self leads to lack of zest which, in the extreme form, will be manifest as depressive symptoms and associated liabilities such as low self-esteem. In our own studies of self-reported level of false self-behavior (e.g., Harter et al., 1996), we have demonstrated that adolescents highest in false self-behavior reported the lowest level of global self-esteem and were the most likely to report depressive affect. Moreover, they acknowledged that they were much less likely to be in touch with their true self-attributes. With adults, we have demonstrated that those reporting lack of authenticity with a spouse or partner also report lower self-esteem and more depressed affect than those who were able to be their true selves (Harter, Waters, Pettitt, Whitesell, Kofkin, & Jordan, 1997). Thus, the pattern reveals that those who experience greater levels of false self-behavior are at risk for negative outcomes than can be quite debilitating, from a mental health perspective.

Origins of false self-behavior

In a previous section it was observed that the very proliferation of multiple selves during adolescence, including the detection of contradictory attributes in different roles, raises concerns for the adolescent about which attributes are the "real me." Gergen (1991) echoes this theme in noting that the need to craft different selves to conform to the particular relationship at hand leads to doubt about one's true identity. That is, the sense of an obdurate, core self is compromised in playing out one's role as "social chameleon." These processes would appear to reflect normative developmental change, against a sociocultural structure that contributes to the concern over behaviors that may lack authenticity. Thus, normative processes highlight the salience of false self-behaviors. However, individual differences in the level of perceived false self-behavior are of particular concern to developmental psychopathologists since the higher this level, the greater the potential for conflict between multiple selves. As we have demonstrated, the majority of perceived conflicts involve clashes between true and false self-behaviors.

It becomes critical, therefore, to enquire into the causes of individual differences in the *level* of false self-behavior that is displayed. There is considerable evidence that the origins of inauthenticity involve socialization practices that begin in childhood (see Harter, in press-b, in press-c). For example, attachment theorists (see Bowlby, 1980; Bretherton, 1991; Crittenden, 1994) and those who study the early construction of autobiographical memory in the form of narratives (see Eisenberg, 1983; Hudson, 1990; Nelson, 1993; Snow, 1990) identify certain early seeds of false self-behavior. They observe that the narratives that are initially constructed by young children are highly scaffolded by parents who dictate which aspects of the child's experience the parents feel are important to codify in the construction of his/her autobiographical memory. Children may receive subtle signals that certain episodes should not be retold or are best "forgotten" (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991). Such distortions may well contribute to the formation of false self-behavior, if a child accepts the altered version of his/her experience.

False self-behavior will also emerge to the extent that caregivers make their support primarily contingent upon the child's living up to their particular standards, since the child must adopt a socially implanted self (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Harter et al., 1996). Our own findings reveal that the causes of high levels of false self-behavior not only involve low levels of parent and peer support but "support" that is perceived as conditional upon meeting the demanding and often unattainable expectations of others. Moreover, parenting practices that constitute lack of attunement to the child's needs, empathic failure, lack of validation, threats of harm, coercion, and enforced compliance all cause the true self to go underground (Bleiberg, 1984; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1965). In Sullivan's (1953) terminology, they lead to "not me" experiences.

Severe and chronic sexual and/or physical abusive treatment by caregivers also places the child at serious risk for suppressing his/her true self and displaying various forms of false self-behavior (Harter, in press-b). More-

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over, such early trauma leads to extremely negative self-evaluations, and serves to exacerbate the fragmentation of multiple selves, rendering them unpredictably inaccessible to consciousness, thereby preventing their integration. For example, secrecy pacts around sexually abusive interactions lead the abused child to defensively exclude such episodic memories from awareness. Moreover, the sexual and physical abusive acts themselves at the hands of family members cause the child to split off experiences, relegating them to either a private or inaccessible part of the self. The very disavowal, repression, or dissociation of one's experiences, coupled with psychogenic amnesia and numbing, as defensive reactions to abuse, therefore set the stage for the loss of one's true self. Herman (1992) describes a more conscious pathway in that the abused child comes to see the true self as corroded with inner badness and therefore it is to be concealed at all costs. Persistent attempts to be good, in order to please the parents, lead the child to develop a socially acceptable self experienced as false or inauthentic.

The persistence in abuse victims of their sense of inner badness, namely that they are fundamentally bad or "rotten to the core," has been documented by numerous other abuse experts (e.g., Briere, 1992; Terr, 1990; van der Kolk, 1987; Westen, 1995). Fischer and his colleagues (Calverley, Fischer, & Ayoub, 1994; Fischer & Ayoub, 1994) have explored the implications of such abuse for the subsequent organization of self-constructs in documenting the sense of profound negativity that female adolescent sexual abuse victims experience with regard to their core self. Their sexual abuse victims had diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder. These investigators built upon our multiple selves procedure (Harter & Monsour, 1992) in which adolescents arranged spontaneously generated self-attributes into a self-portrait by identifying attributes that were the most important or central, less important, and least important. Adolescents in our normative sample displayed a positivity bias, placing the majority of favorable attributes at the core of the self, relegating negative attributes to the periphery of their self-portrait in judging them to be their least important characteristics. Fischer and colleagues found that their sexually abused adolescent girls not only reported considerably more negative self-attributes compared to our normative sample but identified their unfavorable characteristics as far more central to their self-concepts, namely, the defining features of the core self.

Moreover, the abuse literature reveals that such core negative attributes are not well integrated with those positive attributes deemed less central, and therefore the more favorable evaluations cannot offset core evaluations of badness. The very dissociative symptomatology mobilized by abuse victims seriously interferes with the integration of self-attributes (see Briere, 1992; Harter, in press-b; Putnam, 1993; Westen, 1995). Splitting, fragmentation, and compartmentalization, the staples in the abuse victim's dissociative armamentarium, all, by definition, preclude a sense of the coherence of the self. These tendencies are further exacerbated among multiple personality disorder victims of severe and chronic sexual abuse. Multiple identities are created to compartmentalize traumatic memories and affects, and these dissociated alters or personality states function as separate entities capable of independent volitional activities. By necessity, they will lead to a fragmented and incoherent self-portrait. The hallmark of such fragmentation among those with multiple personality disorders is that there is little or no awareness or coconsciousness on the part of some personalities for other personalities. In contrast, what we have referred to as the normative differentiation of multiple selves in the adolescent repertoire represents consciously experienced contradictions, typically between one's behaviors and conflicting ideals or intentions. In the concluding section to follow, we return to the more normative processes of differentiation and the possibilities for integration.

Is it possible and/or desirable to integrate the multiple selves that are inevitably constructed? Our cognitive-developmental analysis has suggested that normative limitations during the period of midadolescence will preclude the integration of those attributes that define the multiple selves that are constructed across different contexts. Contradictory attributes are particularly problematic. Advances

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that begin to emerge in late adolescence and are further developed in adulthood may allow for one type of integration. As observed in an earlier section, older adolescents begin to normalize seemingly opposing attributes, viewing them as appropriate if not desirable.

For example, older adolescents asserted that "it wouldn't be normal to act the same way with everyone, you act one way with your friends and a different way with your parents, that's the way it should be"; "It's good to be able to be different with different people in your life; you'd be pretty strange and also pretty boring if you weren't." Such normalization of different attributes in different roles increased with age suggesting that, developmentally, adolescents come to adopt the stance observed in the adult literature (Gergen, 1968; Vallacher, 1980), namely that consistency across roles may not be appropriate.

With increasing age, adolescents were also more likely to avert conflict by constructing higher order abstractions that serve to integrate seemingly contradictory attributes (e.g., happy and sad don't conflict because they are both part of being moody). The older adolescent can also resolve potentially contradictory attributes by asserting that he/she is flexible or adaptive, thereby subsuming apparent inconsistencies under more generalized abstractions about the self. As a result of these cognitive strategies, seemingly contradictory attributes may persist in the self-portrait; however, they no longer cause conflict.

Another solution for creating some sense of a unified self can be found in the efforts of those theorists who have emphasized the role of autobiographical narratives in the construction of the adult self (Freeman, 1992; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; McAdams, in press; Oyserman & Markus, 1993). In developing a self-narrative, the individual creates a sense of continuity over time as well as coherent connections among self-relevant life events. In constructing such a life story, experiences are temporally sequenced into an integrated self-narrative that provides meaning and future direction. Moreover, narrative construction is a continuous process since we not only craft but revise the story of our lives, creating new blueprints that facilitate further architectural development of the self. This type of narrative integration does not require that one display similar attributes across different relational contexts; thus, seeming inconsistencies can not only be tolerated but may be retained as desirable facets of the self-system.

Multiplicity, as exemplified by the displays of different attributes in different contexts, may well be very adaptive to the extent that characteristics are experienced as more positive in some roles than in others. As was demonstrated, adolescents value their attributes in some contexts over those in others. Thus, an individual may well opt to spend more time in those life niches where favorable self-appraisals are more common. The same point applies to the concept of relational self-esteem. Multiplicity, in the form of the ability to construct different perceptions of one's worth as a person in different relationships, may have similar protective benefits. Our evidence reveals that for the majority of adolescents, there are particular contexts in which individuals experience higher self-esteem, contexts in which they also receive greater support. Thus, an adaptive strategy is to inhabit such domains, either in action or in thought, with greater frequency than contexts in which there is less support and therefore a more negative appraisal of personal worth.

Moreover, one can come to value those more positive contexts, allowing one's sense of worth in those domains to generalize to perceptions of global self-esteem. It is important to appreciate the fact that the concept of global self-esteem is not to be laid to rest in the contemporary shift to contextual and multidimensional frameworks. Such an internment is unlikely given that global self-esteem remains a phenomenological reality in the lives of individuals. Moreover, there is a voluminous literature on its numerous and meaningful correlates. Of interest in our own data (Harter et al., 1996) is the finding that for the vast majority of individuals, self-esteem in one particular relational context is much more predictive of global self-esteem than are relational self-esteem scores in all other contexts. The specific domain occupying this position varies from adolescent to adolescent. Moreover, the relational self-esteem score in that particular context is higher than in other domains. Thus, psychological occupancy in that

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particular context would appear to be very adaptive in that it should promote more positive feelings of global self-esteem. From this perspective, global self-esteem does not subsume more context-specific evaluations of one's worth as a person; that is, it is not at the apex of an integrated hierarchy of self-constructs. Rather, the more adaptive strategy is to discount contexts where self-evaluations are less favorable.

In summary, the period of adolescence represents normative challenges to the harmonious organization and integration of self-constructs. However, with increasing development, further skills emerge which equip the individual with strategies that normalize the construction of multiple selves, that allow one to selectively occupy those contexts in which self-evaluations are more favorable, and that provide for a phenomenological sense of unity through the construction of a meaningful narrative of one's life story.

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