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AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF DAYDREAM CONTENT, SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION CONCERNS, AND SELF-CONCEPT DURING ADOLESCENCE

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Research suggests that numerous stereotypes regarding adolescent development, behavior, and personality persist. For example, adolescents are thought to be egocentric and self-absorbed, moody, and angst-ridden. Another popular stereotype is that adolescents are wildly idealistic, and tend to live only for the moment. In this study, we analyzed the content of early, middle, and late adolescents' daydreams in order to explore these commonly held stereotypes further. We also examined the relations among aspects of daydream content, age, sex, separation-individuation concerns, and aspects of self-concept as a way of investigating whether and how daydreaming contributes to self-concept and identity development during adolescence. Early, middle, and late adolescents ($N = 300$) were asked to respond in writing to the question "*When you daydream, what do you daydream about?*" Six aspects of daydream content were then coded into the following categories: Context, Temporal Orientation, Reality Orientation, Emotional Quality, and the Self-Focused nature of responses. The apparent Emotional Tone of the daydreamer was also coded. Generally speaking, the majority of adolescents' daydreams were about interpersonal/relational or identity issues, were set in the present time, were self-focused, realistic, and were about positive topics and scenarios. The apparent tone of the daydreamer was also largely positive. Facets of daydream concept were related to perceived competence and progress on parent-adolescent separation-individuation, demonstrating that adolescents' private thoughts may be related to their progress on key developmental tasks of adolescence. The findings also allude to the importance of daydreaming for positive adjustment during adolescence.