Self-concept in adolescence. A study of age and gender differences in groups of normal and antisocial adolescents

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This study examines the self-concept in a group of 277 normal adolescents with respect to differences in age (12-18 years) and gender and the interaction between age and gender. As a comparison, 27 antisocial adolescents of similar age participated in the study. The adolescents completed a questionnaire based on the SASB-model. The results showed that the normal adolescent self-concept is positive and that there are no age or gender differences. A more autonomous and more negative self-concept is found in the antisocial group of adolescents. The antisocial girls seem to show more self-hate than all other groups. The conclusion from the study is that there is no evidence of a chaotic self-concept during normal adolescence, but that an antisocial way of life might be reflected in a more negative and autonomous self-concept during adolescence.

Key words: Self-concept, normal, antisocial, adolescence, gender, SASB

The self-concept, and its development over time, has been given a lot of attention both in psychological theories and in empirical research. A lot of efforts have been made to define the two most commonly used terms, the self-concept and self-esteem and difficulties have plagued self-concept research with respect to how these concepts differ from each other (Skaalvik, 1997; Skaalvik & Bong, 2003). The present study is concerned with the self-concept issue as operationalized by means of the SASB system (Structural Analysis of social Behavior) as developed by Benjamin (1974, 1987, 1996a, 1996b). This self-concept is conceptualised in behavioral terms and expressed as a cognitive perception of the individual’s treatment of him- or herself (e.g., I like myself very much and welcome and enjoy opportunities to be with myself, I accuse and blame myself, make myself feel bad, guilty, ashamed, unworthy). The self-concept in the SASB model is seen as a product of interpersonal interactions (Sullivan, 1953) and Florsheim, Henry and Benjamin (1996), have added theoretical assumptions in terms of Bowlby’s attachment theory (Bowlby, 1978). The two fundamental processes, attachment seeking (affiliation) and exploration (autonomous differentiation) involved in a child’s relations to nurturing caregivers are in the model expressed in the two dimensions affiliation and control. These two interpersonal processes are the basis for the psychological development of the child’s self-concept and constitute the prototype for the child’s interpersonal relations throughout life. The normal self-concept includes self-affirmation, active self-love and self-protection and these normative behaviors must be present most of the time” together with flexibility “to shift to any point in interpersonal space if the context requires such a change” (Benjamin, 1993).

The focus of the present paper is on the development of the self-concept in the adolescence period, the age-span from 12 through 18 years of age, and on possible gender differences. This is a period in which a lot of changes of the adolescent’s
social and interpersonal life occur. In addition, the intellectual capacity increases and the adolescent becomes more self-conscious.

The adolescence has theoretically been accounted for both as a period of heightened “storm and stress” with a change in the self-concept in a discontinuous manner (Arnett, 1999; Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1983; Sullivan, 1953) and as a stage characterized by gradual development of the self-concept rather than by disruption (Stern, 1985). Results from empirical studies of the self-concept development through the years of the adolescence period show no consistent pattern of age differences, some studies suggest stability (Monge, 1973; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1984), while other studies have found instability (Ellis & Davis, 1982; Scott & Hoffman, 2002). The inconsistency of empirical results may be dependent on differences in the variety of instruments used (Skaalvik, 1986).

Studies of gender differences in the development of the self-concept during adolescence yield quite similar inconclusive results. The results vary from general gender differences (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart & Haftron, 1996; Harper & Marshall, 1991; Marsh, 1989), gender differences in specific ages (Monge, 1973), and to no gender differences found in the self-concept during adolescence (Mboya, 1999). When gender differences are reported a common result is a lower level of self-appreciation for girls than boys. Gender related differences are also found on specific aspects of the self-concept generally consistent with sex stereotypes, e.g. higher sociability among girls than boys and a higher appreciation for own achievement among boys (Dusek & Flaherty, 1981; Monge, 1973).

Factors other than age and gender that are important in the development of the adolescent self-concept have been associated with a negative self-concept, e.g. antisocial and criminal behavior (Hay, 2000; Marsh, Parada, Yeung & Healey, 2001), psychological distress with symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996; Orbach, Mikulincer, Cohen & Stein, 1998; Overholser, Adams, Lehnert & Brinkman, 1995) and poor parental relations (Dekovic & Meeus, 1997).

Studies on the self-concept in the normal adolescence based on the SASB model are few and limited to studies of late adolescence. The results of a Swedish study show that the majority of the youth in a group of adolescents of 18 to 20 years of age expressed a positive and stable self-concept. The findings indicated a pattern during adolescence where the control but not the affiliation aspect was the focus of development (Adamson & Lyxell, 1996).

The SASB model does not include any theoretical assumptions about age or gender differences in the development of the self-concept. The question of age and gender differences during adolescence is an important area of research and it seems important to add these developmental aspects to the SASB model. The purpose of the present paper is therefore to study the self-concept of adolescents with the main focus on the self-concept in a group of normal adolescent boys and girls in the age-span 12 through 18 years of age. A small group of antisocial adolescents are included in the study to examine possible deviations from the pattern found in the normal adolescent group.
Method

Participants

Normal adolescent group. A total of 277 adolescents (131 boys and 146 girls) ranging in age from 12 to 18 years participated in the study. The mean age was 14.9 years. The subjects were systematically selected to get an equal number of boys and girls in the different age groups. However, the final selection had a higher percentage of adolescents in the early adolescence (12 to 15 years) than in late adolescence. The adolescents were students in four middle and junior high schools and one high school in a small town (Umeå) in the north of Sweden. To obtain a representative distribution with respect to socioeconomic factors, subjects were drawn from schools in different socio-economics areas and from vocational and academic classes in the high schools. The students also completed the Youth Self-Report problem scales (Achenbach, 1991) and were found to have a total score of 40.1 (SD = 19.5), with scores on anxious/depressed being 5.6 (SD = 4.8), on social problems 2.2 (SD = 2.3), and on delinquent behavior 3.8 (SD = 2.8), all within the normal range and equivalent to results from other studies of normal Swedish adolescents (Broberg et al., 2001).

Antisocial adolescent group. The group of antisocial adolescents consisted of 27 adolescents (8 boys and 19 girls) from the project Psychological problems among adolescents with antisocial behavior (Armélius & Hägglöf, 1998). They were between 13 and 19 years of age and the mean age was 15.1 years. Sixty-seven percent of the adolescents in the group were found in the age range between 12 to 15 years and this was true for 100% of the boys compared to 53% of the girls. The antisocial adolescents were in residential care in four different special youth homes. Most of them were in custody without their parent’s consent, being held under the Swedish Care of Young Persons Act (LVU). When the care was voluntary, it was based on the Social Service Act (SOL). The time in custody ranged from 1 to 172 months (M = 38 months). The incidence of psychiatric problems in the group of antisocial adolescents was considerably higher than the 10 % in the normal Swedish population between the ages of 12 and 17 years where about 15% of the adolescents up to 18 years of age are seeking help from a child psychiatric clinic (Statens offentliga utredningar, 1998). Seventy-nine percent of the antisocial adolescents had been treated in a child psychiatric clinic and the most common diagnoses for the group was conduct disorder (88%), major depression (58%), phobia (58%) and anxiety (25%) defined as in DSM III-R (American Psychiatric Association, 1989). The incidence of alcohol and drug addiction was 33% and 29%, respectively. The antisocial group in the study is probably not representative of the group of antisocial adolescents in general (e.g. extremely high percentage of DSM III-R diagnoses in the group).

The age distribution for the normal and antisocial adolescent groups is shown in Table 1. The research ethics committee of the medical faculty at the University of Umeå has approved the project as a whole.
Table 1.
Age distribution in the normal and antisocial adolescent groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Normal group (n)</th>
<th>Antisocial group (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total M</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *N* = 277 (normal group (131 boys and 146 girls)) and *N* = 27 (antisocial group (8 boys and 19 girls)). *M* and total *M* are expressed in years.

Procedure
We asked teachers in selected classes in four middle and junior high schools and one high school to distribute consent forms and written descriptions of the study to their students in order to recruit participants to the normal adolescent group. The adolescents were given information about the study by research assistants. Participation was voluntary and contingent upon both parent and student consent. When the students returned the signed permission form, they were issued with a battery of questionnaires about self-concept, parental relationships, and mental health. In some classes the students filled out the questionnaires during normal school hours, but usually they were filled out at home. The questionnaires were then returned to the teacher in a sealed envelope and the adolescent was given a cinema ticket as a gratuity. The participating rate has been estimated by comparing the actual participation to the number of possible participants in the different classes at the time of the study. The rate of absence is not known and the attrition is therefore probably overestimated since it includes adolescents who did not get information about the study as well as those who chose not to participate or did not get parental
The participating rate was for the total group 67% (boys 60% and girls 74%). A higher rate was found for the older adolescents with 82% (boys 81% and girls 83%) than for the younger adolescents with 57% (boys 50% and girls 67%).

The antisocial adolescents received information about the study from both the staff at the detention centre and from the two researchers of the project. Their participation was voluntary and contingent upon both parental and adolescent consent. Each adolescent was given a closed envelope with questionnaires and returned them in the same envelope after completing the task. Some of the adolescents used a computer-based variant of the questionnaires with assistance from the project staff. A cinema ticket was given as a gratuity. The participation rate for the total antisocial adolescent group was 66% (boys 60% and girls 68%). About half of the attrition consisted of those who chose not to take part and the other part was in severe psychiatric conditions (like psychosis) or unable to understand the questions (adolescents with mental retardation).

**Instruments**

**Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB).** Participants completed the Swedish long form version of the SASB-Intrex Introject Questionnaire (36 statements) based on the SASB model (Armelius, Lindelöf & Mårtensson, 1983).

The SASB model was introduced by Benjamin (1974) and will briefly be summarized here. The model consists of a circumplex that incorporates different degrees of affiliation and interdependence as describe in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB) Introject circumplex (simplified cluster model). The horizontal axis represents the affiliation dimension (self-love – self-reject) and the vertical axis represents the interdependence dimension (self-autonomy – self-control).](image-url)
By means of the Intrex questionnaires it is possible to measure the position of the self-concept in terms of the two dimensions of the model. In the questionnaires the participants are instructed to rate how well each statement describes their perception of their own behavior against themselves. The questionnaire items are rated on a scale from “do not agree” (scale point 0) to “perfect agreement” (scale point 100). It should be noted that the aim of the SASB is to capture the person’s perception of him- or herself and not the actual behavior.

All aspects of the SASB model that are of interest in this study can be organized at different levels of aggregation. At the lowest aggregated level, there are the 8 individual clusters, which on the next level may be aggregated to the attachment group of clusters, AG (clusters 2, 3, 4) and the disruptive attachment group of clusters, DAG (clusters 6, 7, 8). The cluster groups emphasize the affiliation dimension of the model (Benjamin 1996a).

At the next level of aggregation there are a number of coefficients, which are based on patterns of clusters. These include the attack (ATK) and the control (CON) pattern coefficients. Values are expressed in the range from $-1.00$ to 1.00 and values $\leq -0.71$ and $\geq 0.71$ are described as high. The attack coefficients indicate endorsement of items relative to the horizontal axis expressing affiliation. High ratings around clusters 6, 7, and 8 (see Figure 1) indicate a high positive attack pattern or negative affiliation (self-reject). High ratings around clusters 2, 3, and 4 indicate a high negative attack pattern or affiliation (self-love). The control coefficients indicate endorsement of items relative to the vertical axis expressing control-autonomy. High ratings around clusters 4, 5, and 6 produce a positive control coefficient indicating high interdependence and high ratings around clusters 8, 1, and 2 produce a negative control coefficient indicating self autonomy. All levels of aggregation can in principle be used for all aspects of the SASB model, which gives an abundance of measures. In the present study we have concentrated our analyses to the cluster groups and the coefficients.

The test–retest reliability is $r = .87$ for both the American version (Benjamin, 1987) and the Swedish version (Armelius, 2001) of the SASB Introject Questionnaires for adults. Factor analyses show that the Swedish translation is consistent with the model (Armelius & Öhman, 1990; Armelius, 2001). In the present study satisfactory internal consistency was obtained for the two attachment clusters. The split-half (correction with Spearman-Brown) for the self-concept was $r = .75$ for AG and $r = .83$ for DAG.

Statistical analyses
The results were analyzed by means of two-way MANOVAs on the different aggregation levels separately and with the cluster groups combined with the clusters 1 and 5, as suggested by Pincus, Gurtman, and Ruiz (1998). The separate analyses were undertaken since there are relatively strong dependencies between many of the dependent variables. When the MANOVA showed at least one significant difference, univariate ANOVAs were performed on each dependent variable. Bonferroni corrections were generally applied to adjust for the many comparisons. Since the antisocial group included only 8 boys we decided to exclude group comparisons involving antisocial boys on the individual clusters, except for cluster 1 and 5, which represent the control dimension on the cluster group level of aggregation. We have shown $\eta^2$ values to give an idea about the amount of variance accounted for in addition to the F-values.
Results

Self-concept of normal adolescents
In order to answer the question if there are age and/or gender related differences in self-concept among normal adolescents MANOVAs for clusters, cluster groups and coefficients with 7 age groups (12-18 years of age) and gender (boys and girls) were applied to the self-concept ratings. With an alpha level of .05, there were no significant effects, neither for age ($F(48, 1566) = .79, p < .84, \eta^2 = .02$ for clusters, $F(12, 526) = .67, p < .79, \eta^2 = .02$ for cluster groups, and $F(12, 526) = .63, p < .82, \eta^2 = .01$ for coefficients), nor for gender ($F(8, 256) = 1.13, p < .34, \eta^2 = .03$ for clusters, $F(2, 262) = .18, p < .84, \eta^2 = .001$ for cluster groups, and $F(2, 262) = .22, p < .80, \eta^2 = .002$ for coefficients), or the interaction between age and gender ($F(48, 1566) = .84, p < .78, \eta^2 = .03$ for clusters, $F(12, 526) = 1.10, p < .35, \eta^2 = .03$ for cluster groups, and $F(12, 526) = 1.04, p < .42, \eta^2 = .02$ for coefficients). The mean for ATK was -.74 (SD = .33) and 78 % of the normal adolescents had a positive self-concept (ATK < -.71) while the mean of CON was -.02 (SD = .27) indicating a balance between control and autonomy. A paired t-test ($t (276) = 28.1, p < .001$) revealed a significantly higher mean value for AG (M = 67, SD = 15.93) than for DAG (M = 20, SD = 15.54). The average results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Mean and standard deviation for the SASB pattern coefficients and clusters in the normal adolescent group and for boys and girls separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>ATK</th>
<th>CON</th>
<th>AG</th>
<th>DAG</th>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
<th>Cluster 5</th>
<th>Cluster 6</th>
<th>Cluster 7</th>
<th>Cluster 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>-.75</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ATK = attack pattern coefficient, CON = control pattern coefficient, AG = attachment group of clusters, DAG = disrupted attachment group of clusters, Cl = cluster. N = 277 (131 boys and 146 girls).

In figure 2 the average cluster values of the age groups are plotted in order to permit a closer look at the self-concept pattern. It is evident that the normal adolescent group expressed self-acceptance, love and care with a low degree of hostility and blame in their perceptions of themselves. In fact, only 1 % of the normal adolescents showed a negative self-concept with a value of ATK > .71. The cluster curve of these four adolescents was the opposite of the group with a positive
self-concept with low values on the positive clusters and high on the negative clusters.

Figure 2. Group means on SASB clusters for self-concept ratings for seven different age groups of normal adolescents.

The responses to the individual items of the Intrex questionnaire were analyzed in order to see if there might be differences between age groups and/or gender groups (ANOVA). The results showed that the younger adolescents of 12-13 years of age rated themselves higher than older adolescents of 18 years of age on an item indicating more autonomy “I am happy-go-lucky, content with “here today, gone tomorrow” (F (6, 259) = 3.049, p < .01). Girls rated themselves higher than boys on an item indicating negative affiliation “I am very unsure of myself because I tell myself I do things all wrong. I feel others can do better” (F (1, 259) = 7.810, p < .01) and boys rated themselves higher on an item indicating autonomy “I just let important choices, thoughts, issues, options slip by me without paying much attention” (F (1, 260) = 4.615, p < .03). There was also a significant interaction effect between age and gender on the item “I let myself feel glad about and pleased with myself just as I am” (F (6, 258) = 2.417, p ≤ .03) indicating that girls of 14-16 years of age rated themselves lower in positive affiliation than boys during this age period but not during other periods.

Self-concept of the antisocial adolescents
A series of analyses were performed in order to study the difference between the self-concept of the normal adolescents and the antisocial adolescents. Unfortunately, the antisocial group was very small and did only allow for certain comparisons. There were no more than a few age groups present and the distribution of boys and girls in the different age groups was skewed. It was however possible to compare the normal and antisocial groups in general and with respect to gender differences.
MANOVAs were conducted across the two coefficients ATK and CON, cluster groups AG and DAG and clusters 1 and 5 to test for differences between the normal and antisocial groups and for gender differences. The results showed a significant main effect of groups ($F(2, 299) = 16.39, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .10$ for coefficients, and $F(4, 297) = 4.46, p < .002, \eta^2 = .06$ for cluster groups), of gender ($F(2, 299) = 6.55, p < .002, \eta^2 = .04$ for coefficients, and $F(4, 297) = 3.41, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04$ for cluster groups) and for the interaction effect of groups and gender ($F(2, 299) = 5.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$ for coefficients, and $F(4, 297) = 2.60, p = .04, \eta^2 < .03$ for cluster). The univariate ANOVAs on each coefficient, cluster group and individual cluster for group, gender and the groups and gender interaction are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of ANOVAs of SASB clusters, pattern coefficients and cluster groups for the self-concept ratings in the normal and antisocial adolescent groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group x gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F(1, 300)$</td>
<td>$\eta^2$</td>
<td>$F(1, 300)$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cl 1</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>3.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cl 2</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 3</td>
<td>7.21**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 4</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 5</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 6</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>16.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 7</td>
<td>10.84***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.72*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl 8</td>
<td>7.19**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>6.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATK</td>
<td>20.12***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>12.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON</td>
<td>6.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAG</td>
<td>7.09**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>11.03***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. 
The main effects of groups were significant for the ATK and CON coefficients and the cluster group DAG indicating that in general the self-concept of the antisocial adolescents were more negative and autonomous than that of the normal adolescents. Only 41 % of the antisocial versus 78 % of the normal adolescents showed a positive self-concept and a larger part (11 %) of the antisocial adolescent group compared to the normal group (1 %) showed a negative self-concept. The mean values for the coefficients, cluster groups and individual clusters for the antisocial adolescent group are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Mean scores and standard deviations for the SASB pattern coefficients and clusters in the antisocial adolescent groups and for boys and girls separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>ATK</th>
<th>CON</th>
<th>AG</th>
<th>DAG</th>
<th>Cl 1</th>
<th>Cl 2</th>
<th>Cl 3</th>
<th>Cl 4</th>
<th>Cl 5</th>
<th>Cl 6</th>
<th>Cl 7</th>
<th>Cl 8</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>- .64</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>23.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>.69</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* ATK = attack pattern coefficient, CON = control pattern coefficient, AG = attachment group of clusters, DAG = disrupted attachment group of clusters, Cl = cluster. \( N = 27 \) (8 boys and 19 girls).

The differences in self-concept pattern between the normal and antisocial adolescents are shown in figure 3, where the average cluster scores are plotted for the two groups. In figure 3 it can be seen that there is a significantly higher incidence of self-reject and self-neglect together with less self-love in the group of antisocial adolescents.
The main effect of gender showed a more negative self-concept (ATK, DAG) for girls than boys. Since there were no such differences between boys and girls in the normal group, however, these differences were attributed to differences in the antisocial adolescent group. The analysis of interaction effects confirmed a more negative self-concept for girls in the antisocial group than for both boys and girls in the normal adolescent group and for boys in the antisocial group (ATK, DAG).

The differences in self-concept pattern between the normal and antisocial adolescent boys and girls are shown in figure 4. In Figure 4 it can be seen that the antisocial girls tend to be more self-critical (cluster 6) and more self-neglecting (cluster 8) than all other groups.
Discussion

In contrast to expectations in many theories proposing a discontinuity in the self-concept during adolescence we found no differences between normal adolescents in age groups ranging from 12 through 18 years of age on any of the measures of the SASB. Thus, this finding adds support to other research (Chubb, Fertman & Ross, 1997; Harter, 1998) and research reviews (Steinberg, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2000) which found the self-concept stable over time in the adolescent period.

The absence of differences between age groups on the control dimension is a little surprising since the ability for internal control could be expected to vary with age. Normally, the level of external or parental control is higher for young adolescents and is gradually replaced with internal control until adulthood. Thus, a parallel development could be expected for the self-concept, but we found no evidence for such a difference with respect to internalized control. One possible explanation is that the SASB control dimension does not capture all important aspects of control behavior in the adolescent period.

Furthermore, the results show no evidence of differences between boys and girls in the self-concept, only on a few individual items. In contrast to results proposing more autonomy in the self-concept of the normal adolescent boys (Douvan & Adelson, 1966) and less self-love in the normal adolescent girls (Harper & Marshall, 1991) our results show no such differences. Similar results, no gender differences, have been found in groups of late adolescents (high schools and college students) and in normal and clinical groups of adults examined with the SASB (Armelius, 2001). The predominantly positive self-concept for both boys and girls is in line with the general theoretical assumptions of the SASB model (Florsheim, Henry & Benjamin, 1996) assuming that the early parenting are the source for the self-concept.
development (Bowlby, 1978; Sullivan, 1953). According to these theories the early “good-enough” mother and father behavior constitute the base for a positive self-concept and become internalized to similar behavior towards the self regardless of the gender of the child.

The inconsistency between the results of this study and studies reporting gender and age differences might be due to the fact that two different aspects of the self-concept are measured. In SASB the focus is on how the individual relates to himself and treats himself in behavioral terms, whereas in the other studies the focus is on the subjective evaluation of the self, the self-esteem. This aspect of the self-concept is probably more dependent on the present context than the aspect of the self-concept that is measured with SASB and could for that reason vary with age and gender. Some support for this interpretation is found in the fact that the girls agreed significantly more to an item with an obvious evaluative component: “I am very unsure of myself because I tell myself I do things all wrong. I feel others can do better”. A further possible explanation for the lack of differences between age and gender groups in the present study might be that the self-concept of the SASB-model is insensitive to such differences in adolescence. However, the results clearly show that there were some differences between the normal and the antisocial adolescents with respect to the self-concept.

The antisocial adolescents had a more negative and autonomous self-concept and antisocial girls had much more self-hate than all other groups of adolescents. This might reflect the pattern of treatment they have received from important others which has become internalized patterns of attack and neglect in line with the results suggested in studies by Dekovic and Meeus (1997), Florsheim, Tolan and Gorman – Smith (1996) and Ruchkin, Eisemann and Hägglöf (1998) and with the theoretical assumptions connected to the SASB model (Benjamin, 1996a; Henry, 1994). It is also probable that the negative self-perceptions are reinforced in the adolescents’ actual present relations with their parents. The behavior of the antisocial adolescents is likely to elicit negative actions from the parents resulting in an increase of the already negative self-perception of the adolescents.

A contextual explanation to the increased autonomy in the group of antisocial adolescents may be found in the fact that they were incarcerated in a restricted environment at the time of the study, which might have increased their need for autonomy. A higher level of autonomy has been found in groups of adolescents with problematic behavior (Sussman, McCuller & Dent, 2003) and has been associated with deficiencies in attachment (Lee & Bell, 2003) and personality (Unnever & Cornell, 2003).

In general, many of the girls with an antisocial way of life have been exposed to sexual assaults and physical/psychical abuse (Statens institutionstyre, 2000), which might well result in a negative self-concept with more self-hate and rejection of the self. They also suffer from psychological distress due to their present antisocial way of living and several studies have shown that psychological suffering is closely related to a negative self-concept (Harper & Marshall, 1991; Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart & Halfon, 1996).

We do not know if the restricted environment, the sexual and physical abuses and psychological distress have similar effects on the self-concept of antisocial boys and girls. Interesting enough, the boys in the antisocial group showed self-love to nearly the same extent as the boys and girls in the normal adolescent group. The self-concept of the antisocial boys may be elevated by compensatory self-enhancement and self-protection processes aiming at avoidance of loss of self-esteem (Baumeister,
Boden, & Smart, 1996). Perceptions of superiority in the group of the antisocial boys may have been expressed as perceived self-love. Bushman and Baumeister (2002) found that a sense of superiority is connected to aggressive antisocial behavior. The self-concept of the antisocial boys may be gratified and reinforced by the peer-group to a larger extent than the self-concept of the antisocial girls (Hay, 2000).

The conclusion drawn from the results from the normal adolescent group, that there are very small differences in the self-concept between boys and girls in the age range 12-18 years of age, seems to be reliable since it is based on a relatively large and representative sample. However, the results from the comparison between the normal and antisocial adolescent groups do not allow for general conclusions but should be considered as an interesting result that needs further empirical study.
References


