Adolescents' True-Self Behavior and Parent-Adolescent Boundary Dissolution: The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity

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Abstract The construction of a coherent true self is one of the central processes in adolescents' lives that relates to their well-being. However, little is known about the factors that contribute to its construction. The current study explored the contribution of parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and rejection sensitivity to true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior in a sample of Israeli early to mid-adolescents ($N = 351$, *Mean* age $= 14.00$). The findings indicated that triangulation was negatively correlated with true-self behavior with mother, father, and classmates, and positively with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Psychological control and guilt induction were negatively correlated with adolescents' true-self behavior with father and positively with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates, whereas parentification was negatively correlated with adolescents' true-self behavior with father and positively with motives for false-self behavior with classmates. Adolescents' expectations of anticipated rejection were negatively correlated with true-self behavior with mother, father, and classmates, and positively correlated with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Adolescents' rejection sensitivity mediated the link between boundary dissolution and adolescents' motives for false-self behavior. The findings highlight the role of rejection sensitivity as a mechanism through which a dissolution of boundaries contributes to Israeli adolescents' false-self construction.

Keywords True self · Authenticity · Adolescents · Boundary dissolution · Rejection sensitivity

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1 The Self during Adolescence

The self is a complex, central organizing construct that expresses a nuclear entity situated within the individual. It is often characterized by a wide array of self-related constructs such as self-awareness, self-esteem, self-representations, and self-regulation (Leary and Tangney 2012; Mort and Mischel 2012). From a developmental point of view, the self is frequently described as a cognitive and social construction through which children and adolescents create and construct theories of the self to endow their experiences with their own meaning while relating to their significant adults, peers, and those in the wider socio-cultural context. These theories are continuously monitored and reflected, and are aimed at generating a stable mental configuration (Côté 2009; Harter 2012a, b).

Although factors influencing the self are present early in childhood (Kohut 1977; Winnicott 1965), during adolescence the self goes through major changes (Côté 2009) mostly because as adolescents mature, they begin to search for a solid, sophisticated, and abstract sense of subjectivity and unique selfhood separate from that of their parents and others (Steinberg & Silk 2002; Steinberg 2013). Empirically, evidence has shown that during this phase the self becomes more complex and differentiated as adolescents actively create, define, and differentiate roles, relationships, and situations related to their selves (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, and Whitesell 1997a; Harter et al. 1997b; Markus and Nurius 1986).

2 True Versus False Self

The notion that there is such a thing as a true self is a common and familiar one in Western society (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, and King 2009) and the importance of an inner core or true self in psychological functioning has a longstanding history in philosophical and clinical thought (e.g., Kohut 1977; Winnicott 1965). Recently, Harter (2002) described the true self as "a cognitive schema representing those aspects of the self that the person considers to be most emblematic of his or her true nature. The true self refers to "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs. . . . [and] further implies that one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter 2002; p. 382). Based on this definition, the current study refers to the true self as a psychological construct describing who a person really is (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, and King 2009) as manifested through the individual's behaviors.

Throughout adolescence, adolescents actively begin to be interested in and concerned about whether their behavior reflects their true selves. Adolescents' descriptions of their true selves include verbatim expressions such as "the real me inside", "my true feelings" and "behaving the way I want to behave and not how someone else wants me to be". In contrast, false selves have been described as "putting on an act" and "expressing things you don't really believe or feel" (Harter et al. 1996, 1997b). In addition, the experience of the true-self concept differs among adolescents from different age groups (Harter 2012a). In particular, while early-adolescents' (age 10–13) description of their self is relatively simple and naïve and characterized by a single abstraction, mid-adolescents (age 14–16) confront mismatches, contradictions, and search for true-self experiences in different settings and relationships (Harter 2002, 2012a).

In a study exploring the construction of false-self behavior in North-American adolescents, Harter and her colleagues (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, and Cobbs 1996) described three central motives for false-self behaviors in adolescence. The first motive, which parallels explanations cited in social psychological literature, considers false-self behaviors to be motivated by attempts to present the self in a manner that will impress or win the acceptance of others (Harter, 1999, 2002; Harter and Monsour 1992). The second motive reflects the emphasis in the developmental literature on identity experimentation and formation manifested in adolescents' attempts to try acting in different ways (Harter et al. 1996). Finally, the third motive draws on clinical literature (Winnicott 1965) and refers to one's inter-psychic split self-organization, which is accompanied by the fear that others will not like or understand one's true-self, thus forcing the person into a lifetime of contrived accommodation leading to self-alienation (Winnicott 1965).

Previous studies have systematically examined the expression of the true or false self through the construct of authenticity. These studies report positive relationships between authenticity and higher levels of self-esteem, and satisfaction with life. By contrast, a departure from authenticity is seen as involving a decrease in self-esteem and general psychological well-being, and an increase in depression and anxiety among North American adults (Lopez and Rice 2006; Neff and Harter 2002; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi 1997; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, and Joseph 2008).

With regard to adolescents, mid to late North American adolescents' true-self behaviors with parents and peers were positively correlated with their sense of hope and self-esteem (Harter et al. 1996). Late North American adolescents' ability to share their opinions with close friends, parents, teachers, and classmates was correlated with higher levels of perceived self-worth, especially with respect to close friends and same-gender classmates (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, and Kastelic 1998). Expressing thoughts and opinions in the context of various relationships was associated with a steady increase of self-esteem from 8th to 12th grade among North American adolescent girls (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, and Tolman 2008). Mid- and late- North American adolescents' suppression of personal voice and self-expression in romantic couples were positively correlated with depressive symptoms (Harper et al. 2006). Finally, self-silencing behaviors have also been linked with eating disorder symptomatology among late adolescent Canadian girls (Zaitsoff, Geller, and Srikamenswaran 2002).

Given adolescents' developmental task of establishing true-self representations beginning in early and expanding in mid-adolescence, and the links between adolescents' self-expression and greater well-being, the current study examined the factors contributing to the establishment of Israeli early and mid- adolescents' true self. Specifically, it explored the role of interpersonal and relational factors (i.e., boundary dissolution with parents) as well intrapersonal factors (i.e., rejection sensitivity) in the expression of adolescents' true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior.

3 Boundary Dissolution

Various developmental conceptualizations in the field of parent-adolescent relationship have underscored the role of adequate parent–child psychological boundaries, in which the parent provides most of the scaffolding for the development of adolescent

competence and individuation (Mayseless & Scharf 2009; Minuchin 1974). For instance, in the context of Attachment Theory, a consistent positive association has been well documented between parental warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness and healthy adolescents' socio-emotional adjustment including higher scores on social competence, self-esteem, self-concept, a coherent self-identity, and self-regulation, as well as lower scores on psychopathological somatology including depression and anxiety (Cooper, Shaver, and Collins 1998; Laible, Carlo, and Roesch 2004; Rice 1990). Similarly, in the parenting domain, Baumrind's (1971) classification of parenting practices emphasizes the provision of warmth, behavioral control, and autonomy granting to the formation of adolescents' sense of self-esteem, individuation, self-reliance, and agency, higher school achievements, less depression and anxiety and less engagement in antisocial behavior, including delinquency and drug use (for review see Baumrind 2005; Steinberg 2001).

Nevertheless, in some families substantial impairments in parent-adolescent psychological boundaries occur involving the loss of psychological distinctiveness between parents and child or a confusion of their interpersonal roles as caretakers (Kerig 2005). This kind of state is termed 'boundaries dissolution'. The which has a rich history in family systems theory, the psycho-dynamic perspective and psychopathology thinking The central organizing hypothesis behind this concept is grounded in the assumption that individuals' psychopathology and developmental deficiencies are manifestations of dysfunctional family systems (Kerig 2005; Rowa, Kerig, and Geller 2001).

Accumulating evidence from both attachment theory and the parenting style literature on the contribution of adequate parent–child relationships to children's and adolescents' adjustment shows how important it is to consider the influence of boundary dissolution on adolescents' self- development and their socio-emotional adjustment. Although there are many different ways in which the psychological boundaries between parent and child might be blurred, the literature provides evidence for four dimensions of boundary dissolution including psychological control and guilt induction, parentification, triangulation, and the blurring of psychological boundaries (Kerig 2005; Rowa et al. 2001). The current study explored the contribution of these dimensions to adolescents' true-self behavior as well as to motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates.

Psychological control refers to manipulative, intrusive, and overprotective parenting practices that deny the child's autonomous conduct, feelings, and thoughts so that the parent can maintain a power position (Barber 1996). The parent inhibits individuation by using covert strategies such as guilt induction, shame induction, over-protectiveness, instilling anxiety, invalidation of the child's perspective, and withdrawing love to control the child's activities and behaviors. These strategies impede the child's ability to develop volitional functioning and a secure sense of self, leading to disturbances in psychosocial functioning (Barber 1996, 2002; Barber and Harmon 2002; Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2010). Results from a number of countries have confirmed that such harsh parenting may convey to children a sense of guilt, culpability, and incompetence-induced passive, inhibited, or over-controlled characteristics, increases risks of low self-esteem in early to late adolescents (Bean, Bush, McKenry, and Wilson 2003; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, Duriez, and Goossens 2005), and interferes with the process of separation-individuation (Kins, Soenens, and Beyers 2011, 2012; Mayseless and Scharf 2009).

Parentification (also termed role reversal) refers to a dynamic in which the parent turns to the child for nurturance and assistance. This can involve functional and/or emotional role reversal in which children relinquish their own needs for validation, security, and guidance to fulfill the parents' narcissistic needs to an extent that surpasses their cultural developmental norms (Earley and Cushway 2002; Kerig 2005; Minuchin 1974). The child's responsibilities can vary from tangible to emotional help such as giving advice, providing validation, and serving as a parental figure (Chase 1999). The parents are seen as unable or unwilling to give the child the required care, probably because they themselves need reassurance and protection (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner 1986). In an attempt to maintain some level of emotional proximity with the parent, the child is forced to embrace a caregiving position toward the parent governed by the parent's needs. This strategy partially satisfies the child's needs for comfort, although the child's developmental needs are not adequately met (Mayseless 1996; Mayseless and Scharf 2009).

Triangulation represents a violation of the boundaries between parent and child in which the child serves as a negotiator and a mediator between the parents. Each parent becomes related to the other through the child, who consequently becomes a vehicle through which parents sustain their marital relationship. By taking the mediator role, the child is burdened with the parents' anxiety and relieves them of their unconscious and conscious anxiety (Bowen 1978; Chase 1999). However, the coalition between one of the parents and the child damages the parent's caregiving role for the child, and simultaneously detaches the child from the other parent since the child feels pressure to choose between parents (Byng-Hall 1995; Kerig 2005). Occasionally, the child is involved in a seductive-romantic relationship, termed spousification (Sroufe and Ward 1980).

The negative developmental consequences of parentification and triangulation to adolescents' self-system have been documented in numerous studies. For instance, triangulation and repeated involvement in parental discord were associated with an increase in early-to late-American adolescents' self-blame (Fosco and Grych 2008; Grych, Raynor, & Fosco 2004), and late adolescents' identity formation (Fosco & Grych 2010). Parentification among mid- to late- American adolescents was correlated with low self-perception (Godsall, Jurkovic, Emshoff, Anderson, and Stanwyck 2004; Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, and Emery 2008). Parentification among mid- to late-immigrant Israeli adolescents was associated with a low sense of self efficacy and self-esteem (Oznobishin, and Kurman 2009).

The blurring of boundaries (also termed enmeshment) involves a lack of recognition or acknowledgment of the differentiation between the parent, the child and others in which the psychological boundaries are distortedly enmeshed and confused in a way that the child is perceived as an extension of the parent (Green and Werner 1996; Kerig 2005; Werner, Green, Greenberg, Browne, and McKenna 2001). In such cases, children's development of individuation, especially in the functional and emotional domains, is expected to be hampered (Kerig 2005). Studies have shown the associations between the blurring of boundaries and poor psychological well-being as reflected in difficulties in identity formation (Farrell and Barnes 1993; Manzi, et al. 2006) among American and British mid- to late- adolescents as well as nurturance seeking, and separation anxiety among British mid- and late- adolescents (Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, and Scabini 2006) and Israeli late- adolescents (Mayseless and Scharf 2009).

4 Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity refers to the individual's cognitive-affective disposition to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to rejection by significant others such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and romantic partners (Downey and Feldman 1996; Feldman and Downey 1994). Grounded in Attachment Theory, rejection sensitivity theory posits that early interactions involving rejection by caregivers result in a heightened anticipatory anxiety and expectation of further rejection by significant others in future relationships (Feldman and Downey 1994; Downey et al. 1998; Romero-Canyas and Downey 2005; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk, and Kang 2010).

These expectations of rejection make individuals hyper-vigilant for signs of rejection. When they encounter rejection cues, however minimal or ambiguous, they readily perceive intentional rejection and feel rejected. The perceived rejection is then likely to foster both affective and behavioral overreactions, including anger reactions manifested in overt physical, verbal, and nonverbal aggression and hostility, as well as anxious reactions manifested in self-silencing, passive hostility, and social withdrawal (Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen, and Shoda 1999; Downey and Feldman 1996; Downey, Feldman, and Ayduk 2000). Such overreactions are likely to undermine social relationships, and ultimately lead to exclusion and rejection (Ayduk, May, Downey, and Higgins 2003; Downey et al. 1998, 2004).

Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have indicated that rejection sensitivity is a strong risk factor for psychological maladjustment among early- to late- adolescents including internal distress, loneliness, and social withdrawal (Downey et al. 1998; London, Downey, Bonica, and Paltin 2007), depression (McDonald, Bowker, Rubin, Laursen, and Duchene 2010; Marston, Hare, and Allen 2010), anxiety symptoms, and a decrease in social competence (Marston et al. 2010). It has also been associated with increased levels of aggressive behaviors (London et al. 2007). With regard to the self, rejection sensitivity was associated with low levels of self-esteem and self-regulation during early- and mid-American adolescence (Ayduk et al. 2000) as well with low levels of self-concept clarity when conflicts with partners occur in young American adult couples (Ayduk, Gyurak, and Luerssen 2009). Finally, in terms of authenticity, friendship or romantic self-silencing mediated the association between rejection sensitivity and depression in early- (Thomas and Bowker 2013) and late- American adolescents (Harper et al. 2006). The researchers attributed these findings to major impairments in the self-system resulting from a negative internal working model of the self (Downey et al. 1998).

5 The Place of Culture

The search for the true self is rooted and develops in the individual's social and cultural milieu (Côté 2009). Because a central part of true-self exploration is related to individualistic strivings, the process of establishing a sense of the true self may take a fairly different developmental course in collectivistic societies such as Israeli society which emphasizes aspects of interdependence over independence and separateness (Scharf & Mayseless 2010a, b).

Several characteristics of Israeli society may be related to the formation of the true self among Israeli Jewish adolescents. First, an important characteristic of Israeli society is the prominence of communal values and practices and the high value of the family (Mayseless and Salomon 2003). Another feature is related to the continuous feeling of danger and stress in Israeli society (Weller, Florian, and Mikulincer 1995). Israel is a relatively young country, and most of its citizens are descended from post-Holocaust Europeans or immigrants from Middle Eastern countries. Israel has fought numerous wars with its Arab neighbors. Hence, themes of trauma and risks contribute to chronic anxiety and threats to individuals' security (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz 2008). Taken together, the predominant experience of danger and stress along with the high value of the family and connectedness may heighten the importance of the family among Israeli adolescents and the negative effects of dissolution of boundaries on their establishment of true-self behaviors.

6 The Current Study

Developmental theories and empirical findings suggest that the construction of a coherent true self is one of the central processes in adolescents' lives. However, most findings have dealt with North American young adults and have not focused on the factors that promote the construction of the true self among adolescents. Therefore, to better understand the factors facilitating the ways in which the true self is constructed among Israeli early- to mid-adolescents, four hypotheses were formulated: (1) Higher levels of boundary dissolution with mothers and fathers should be associated with lower levels of true-self behavior and with higher levels of motives for false-self behavior; (2) Higher levels of rejection sensitivity should be associated with lower levels of true-self behavior and with higher levels of motives for false-self behavior; (3) Higher levels of boundary dissolution with mothers and fathers should be associated with higher levels of rejection sensitivity; (4) Rejection sensitivity is likely to mediate the relationship between levels of boundary dissolution with mothers and fathers and the level of true-self behavior and motives.

7 Method

7.1 Participants and Procedure

Three hundred and two ($N = 351$) early (34 %) and middle adolescents (66 %) took part. The sample was composed of 8th and 9th graders drawn from three middle schools in the central part of Israel. Of the participants, 53 % were girls and 47 % were boys. The mean age of the adolescents was 14.00 (range 12.50–15.5; $SD = .69$). Of the participants, 84 % came from two-parent families and 16 % were from divorced families; 95 % of the participants were born in Israel, and the others were immigrants (mostly from the Former Soviet Union). All participants spoke Hebrew. Of the participants, 301 (86 %) adolescents reported on their mothers' level of education and 297 (85 %) reported on their fathers'. The data indicated that 10 % of the mothers and 8 % of the fathers had a Ph.D. degree, 31 % of the mothers and 25 % of the fathers had an M.A.

degree, 26 % of the mothers and 25 % of the fathers had a B.A. degree, 14 % of the mothers and 18 % of the fathers finished technical school, and the remainder had a high school education.

After receiving ethical approval from both the Ministry of Education and from the Committee to evaluate Human Subject Research of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Social Welfare of the University of Haifa (#(938 consent letters were sent to parents and adolescents. A questionnaire booklet was administered in the school setting during a 60 min session. The second and the third authors introduced the project, read a few sample items out loud, and demonstrated how to fill in the questionnaires. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. All measures were independently translated into Hebrew from the English original by three translators who are experts in the field of developmental psychology and are native speakers of Hebrew. Then, their translations were compared, disagreements were discussed, and a final version was constructed. All measures were previously used in the context of the Israeli culture.

7.2 Missing Data

Eleven adolescents did not complete the different study subscales. The missing values were not compensated for statistically in the SPSS analyses exploring the first two analyses. However, these missing variables were dealt with using full information maximum likelihood estimation when examining the third hypothesis using SEM analyses. The first three hypotheses were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 and the forth hypothesis was analyzed using SPSS AMOS version 21.0.

7.3 Measures

Boundary Dissolution Adolescents completed the *Inadequate Boundaries Questionnaire* (IBQ; Mayseless and Scharf 2009), which assesses different types of boundary dissolution within the family on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5, with higher ratings indicating higher levels of boundary dissolution: *guilt induction* (eight items; "It is very important for the parent that I thank him/her for everything he or she has done for me"), *blurring of psychological boundaries* (five items, "The parent relates to my problems as if they were his or her own"), *parentification* (eight items, "Sometimes I feel that I'm the only person to whom the parent could turn"), *triangulation* (five items, "When disagreements develops between the parents I restoes peace"), and the use of *psychological control* (eight items, "The parent tries all the time to change what I feel or think about things"). Internal reliabilities in the original study, which was conducted in Israeli context, were consistently high, ranging from .67 to .85. The Cronbach alphas in current study were .73 for psychological control with the mother and .74 with the father, .74 for guilt induction with the mother and .71 for the father, .73 for triangulation with the mother and .72 for the father, .66 for blurring boundaries with the mother and .69 for the father, and .74 for parentification with both the mother and the father.

Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients indicated that psychological control and guilt induction were highly correlated ($rs = .70$ with the mother and .69 with the father). Thus, we constructed a guilt-psychological control scale by averaging across

the two scales. The Cronbach alphas for the averaged guilt-psychological scale with the mother scales were .86 and .85 with the father. Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients indicated higher correlations between the constellations of boundary dissolution with mothers and fathers (*rs* ranged from .73 to .85). The profile of correlations with the true-self and rejection sensitivity variables was highly similar for the mothers' and fathers' scales. Hence, for purposes of data reduction we created a general scale for each constellation, averaging across mothers' and fathers' scales.

True/False-Self Two parts of the *True/False-Self Questionnaire* (Harter et al. 1996) were used to assess adolescents' true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior. The first part (nine items, three items for each of the subscales) tapped levels of true-self behavior around parents (mother and father separately) and around classmates. The items were cast into the "four-structured alternative format" developed by Harter (1982), with scores ranging from 1, representing the maximum false-self behaviors, to 4, representing the maximum true-self behaviors (e.g., "Some kids feel that they can be their 'true self' around their mothers BUT other kids feel that they can't be their 'true self' around their mothers."). Internal reliabilities were consistently high, ranging from .88 to .91 (Harter, et al. 1996). The Cronbach alphas in current study were .78 for true-self behavior with the mother, .89 with the father, and .70 with classmates. The measure was previously used in the Israeli context (Berenstein-Dagan 2009).

The second part of the questionnaire explored adolescents' motives for engaging in false-self behaviors. A list of 10 reasons for engaging in false-self behaviors (parents and classmates, separately) was presented to tap adolescents' motives. Seven items were adopted from the original inventory. Three additional items were added for the current study. The adolescents' responses were coded into three categories of motives. The first category (4 items) corresponded to motives cited in the clinical literature and included fear that others will not like or understand them, uncertainty about one's true-self, and dislike of one's true-self (e.g., "I'm afraid that they won't like or understand the 'real me'"). The second category (4 items, paralleling the motives cited in the social-psychological literature included the desire to be accepted by others, acting a certain way to please others, and acting that way to impress others (e.g., "I act that way to please them"). The final category (2 items), reflected the emphasis in the developmental literature on role investigation (e.g., "I want to try a different way of acting around them to see what it feels like"). The decision to incorporate the three items was made to strengthen the reliability (Tavakol and Dennick 2011) of the three subscales based on the three categories of motives as was previously done in the Israeli context by Berenstein-Dagan (2009). With regard to the clinical motive, the item "This will improve my relationships with them" was added. With regard to the social-psychological motive the item "They encourage and want me to act like this" was added, and with regard to the experimental motive the item "I'm not sure or know who I really am".

In the current study, the Cronbach alphas were .85 for the clinical motive with parents and .86 with classmates, .70 for the social motive with parents and .77 with classmates, and .50 for the developmental motive with parents and .55 with classmates. The low alphas may be attributed to the small number of items composing the developmental scale. Due to high intercorrelations between the motives scales (*rs*

ranged from .57 to .77), composite scales for motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates were constructed by averaging across the three motive scales. The Cronbach alphas for the composite scales of motives for false-self behavior with parents were .88 and .90 for classmates.

Rejection Sensitivity *The Children's Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire* (CRSQ; Downey et al. 1998) measures the defensive expectations of rejection from peers and teachers. Participants responded to 12 short scenarios such as: "Imagine you want to buy a present for someone who is really important to you, but you don't have enough money. So you ask a kid in your class if you could please borrow some money. The kid says, "Okay, wait for me outside the front door after school. I'll bring the money." As you stand outside waiting, you wonder if the kid will really come." Next, they were asked to indicate, on a 6-point scale, how nervous (anxious expectations) and how mad (angry expectations) they would feel about whether the child would show up. Finally, they were asked if they thought the child would show up (expectation of rejection). The CRSQ has good psychometric properties with Cronbach alphas ranging from .79 to .90 (Downey et al. 1998; Harper et al. 2006); high test-retest reliability, stability and predictive validity (Downey et al. 1998). The Cronbach alphas in the current study were .85 for angry expectations, .76 for anxious expectations, and .72 for expectation of rejection. The measure was previously used in Israel (Scharf, Oshri, Eshkol, and Pilowsky 2014).

8 Results

8.1 Preliminary Analyses

The correlation between the adolescents' background variables and the study variables was tested using *t*-test analyses and Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients. The correlation between the adolescents' background variables and the study variables revealed a gender effect for motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Boys had a higher level of motives for false-self behavior with parents $\{t(346)=2.03, p<.05$; the mean difference was .24 with a 95 % confidence interval ranging from .007 to .472; *Mean* boys=2.29, $SD=1.11$, *Mean* girls=2.05, $SD=.76\}$ and classmates $\{t(345)=2.03, p<.05$, the mean difference was .24 with a 95 % confidence interval ranging from .006 to .472; *Mean* boys=2.29, $SD=1.19$; *Mean* girls=2.05, $SD=1.01\}$.

Girls had a higher level of anxious expectations $\{t(348)=2.97, p<.01$; the mean difference was -.33 with a 95 % confidence interval ranging from .549 to .112; *Mean* boys=2.97, $SD=1.04$; *Mean* girls=3.30, $SD=.08\}$ and rejection sensitivity $\{t(348)=2.28, p<.05$; the mean difference was .19 with a 95 % confidence interval ranging from.027 to .357; *Mean* boys=3.03, $SD=.06$; *Mean* girls=2.84, $SD=.06\}$. Hence, we controlled for the gender effect when examining the hypotheses. By contrast, *t*-test analyses did not reveal any difference in the variables across adolescents from single versus two-parent families. Similarly, Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients did not reveal any correlations between adolescents' age and the study variables. Therefore, we examined the hypotheses for the entire sample by treating it as a single group.

8.2 Associations Between Parents-Adolescent Boundary Dissolution, True-Self Behavior and Motives of False-Self Behavior

In order to examine the first hypothesis, a series of partial Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients was conducted between the parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior variables while controlling for gender. As shown in Table 1, guilt-psychological control was negatively correlated with adolescents' true-self behavior with the father and positively with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Parentification was negatively correlated with adolescents' true-self behavior with the father and positively with motives for false-self behavior with classmates, whereas triangulation was negatively correlated with true-self behavior with the mother, the father and classmates and positively with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Surprisingly, the blurring of psychological boundaries was negatively correlated with motives for false-self behavior with parents.

8.3 Associations Between Rejection Sensitivity and True-Self Behavior and Motives for False-Self Behavior

Similarly, to examine the correlations between rejection sensitivity and true-self behavior, and motives for false-self behavior a series of partial Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients were conducted between the various rejection sensitivity variables and true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior variables while controlling for gender. As shown in Table 1, adolescents' anger expectations were negatively correlated with their true-self behavior with the father and positively with adolescents' motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates. Adolescents' anxious expectations were positively correlated with their motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates, and adolescents' expectations of rejection were negatively correlated with their true-self behavior with the mother, the

Table 1 Correlations between adolescents' boundary dissolution and rejection sensitivity and true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior controlled for gender

	True-self behavior – Mother	True-self behavior - Father	True-self behavior - peers	Motives for false-self behavior - parents	Motives for false-self behavior - classmates
Guilt - psychological control	-.09	-.12*	.00	.41***	.26***
Triangulation	-.15**	-.18***	-.10*	.22***	.15**
Parentification	-.03	-.10*	.03	.08	.14**
Blurring of boundaries	-.02	-.04	-.04	-.10*	-.04
Angry expectations	-.07	-.13*	-.03	.32***	.37***
Anxious expectations	-.03	-.02	-.02	.32***	.26***
Expectations of rejection	-.14**	-.18***	-.11*	.27***	.28***

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. $N = 330$–339

father, and classmates, and positively correlated with motives for false-self behavior with parents and classmates.

8.4 Associations Between Parents-Adolescent Boundary Dissolution and Rejection Sensitivity

Again, a series of partial Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients was conducted between levels of parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' rejection sensitivity while controlling for gender. As shown in Table 2, guilt-psychological control and triangulation with parents were positively correlated with adolescents' anger and anxious expectations for rejection as well as with adolescents' expectations of rejection. Parentification with parents was positively correlated with adolescents' anxious and anger expectations for rejection, but negatively with expectations of rejection. Similarly, the blurring of psychological boundaries was positively correlated with adolescents' levels of anger expectations, but negatively with expectations of rejection.

8.5 The Mediating Role of Rejection Sensitivity

To test the hypotheses concerning the relationship between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and motives for false-self behavior, while taking into account the role of adolescents' rejection sensitivity as a mediating variable, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS followed by bootstrap analyses (Preacher and Hayes 2008) were applied. To build the model, several latent variables reflecting the constructs assessed in this study were created. These consisted of one latent exogenous variable as the predictor (boundary dissolution with mother and father), composed of the original scales of the IBQ questionnaire. In addition, we created one latent endogenous variable as a possible mediator composed of adolescents' reports on their angry expectations, anxious expectations, and expectations of rejection. *Finally, for the predicted variables*, we constructed two latent exogenous variables; one variable reflected adolescents' motives for false-self behavior composed of their motives for false self-behavior with parents and peers, and the other reflected adolescents' true-self behavior with parents composed of their true-self behavior with the mother and father. We estimated a regression model in which all direct paths from the predictor (boundary dissolution with parents) and the mediator (rejection sensitivity) to the explained constructs (adolescents' motives for false-self behavior and true-self behavior with parents) were

Table 2 Correlation between adolescents' rejection sensitivity and true-self behavior and motives for false-self behavior controlled for gender

	Angr expectations	Anxious expectations	Expectations of rejection
Guilt - psychological control	.29***	.21***	.14**
Triangulation	.22***	.12*	.15**
Parentification	.20***	.21***	-.10*
Blurring of boundaries	.11*	.08	-.26***

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. $N = 334$

included. We included gender in the model as a control variable (for inter-correlations of the variables of the model see Table 3).

A reasonable fit of the model is considered to be present if the χ^2/df is approximately 3 or less. The CFI should vary between 0 and 1 and values of .90 or higher indicate an acceptable fit. For the RMSEA, a value of .06 or lower is acceptable (Hu and Bentler 1999). The model provided a fairly good fit with the data ($\chi 2/df = 2.30$, CFI = .95, NFI = .92, TLI = .93, and RMSEA = .06) and is presented in Fig. 1, which includes the standardized estimates of the parameters in the structural model. Estimation of this model showed that levels of parents-adolescent boundary dissolution were positively associated with adolescents' rejection sensitivity. In turn, this significantly and positively correlated with adolescents' motives for false-self behavior. Moreover, the direct path between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' motives for false-self behavior did not significantly correlate. This indicates that adolescents' rejection sensitivity fully mediated the correlation between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' motives for false-self behavior. Results from 2,000 bootstrap sample computations (which were all un-standardized) showed that the 95 % CI for the indirect effects did not include zero, indicating that the indirect effect was statistically significant. Specifically, the bias-corrected bootstrap estimate of the indirect effect had a 95 % confidence interval of .095–.255. In contrast, rejection sensitivity did not moderate the link between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' true-self behavior, whereas the direct path between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' true-self behavior significantly and negatively correlated, implying a direct association between the variables.

9 Discussion

The current study was designed to shed light on the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the construction of true-self behavior during early and mid-adolescence by exploring the contribution of parent-adolescent boundary dissolution as well as adolescents' rejection sensitivity in a sample of Israeli adolescents. Although factors promoting adolescents' true-self behavior have been examined in the context of parental and peer support (e.g., Harter et al. 1996), our examination may provide further developmental and clinical insights into the shape of true-self behavior and motives of false self-behavior through early- and mid-adolescence. Note, however, that most of our findings derived from Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients with relatively small to medium effects, and should be addressed with caution.

The findings indicated that psychological control, guilt induction and parentification were negatively correlated with adolescents' true-self behavior with the father and positively with motives for false-self behavior with parents or classmates, whereas triangulation was negatively correlated with true-self behavior with both parents and classmates and positively corrected with motives for false-self behavior with parents and peers. These findings regarding the place of an inadequate parent–child relationship in shaping early- and mid-adolescents' true self behaviors and motives for false-self behavior are especially interesting given the dramatic decrease in emotional investment in the parent–child relationship over the course of adolescence (Larson et al. 1996).

Table 3 Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients between the model variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Guilt - psychological control	1									
2	Triangulation	.47***	1								
3	Parentification	.43***	.36***	1							
4	Blurring of boundaries	.21***	.18***	.65***	1						
5	Angr expectations	.28***	.22***	.19***	.10*	1					
6	Anxious expectations	.19***	.10*	.20***	.07	.61***	1				
7	Expectations of rejection	.15**	.16**	-.10*	-.25***	.34***	.27***	1			
8	True-self - mother	-.08	-.14**	-.03	-.02	-.05	-.02	-.14**	1		
9	True-self - father	-.12**	-.17**	-.10*	-.04	-.11*	.00	-.17**	.74***	1	
10	Motives for false-self - parents	.41***	.23***	.07	-.10*	.32***	.35***	.28***	-.03	-.10*	1
11	Motives for false-self -classmates	.25***	.15*	.10*	-.05	.28***	.24***	.27***	-.02	-.03	.59***
	X	2.27	1.80	2.82	2.50	2.48	2.17	2.16	2.41	3.40	2.93
	SD	.68	.82	.81	.96	.97	1.11	1.10	.95	1.05	.79

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$, $N = 338$–345
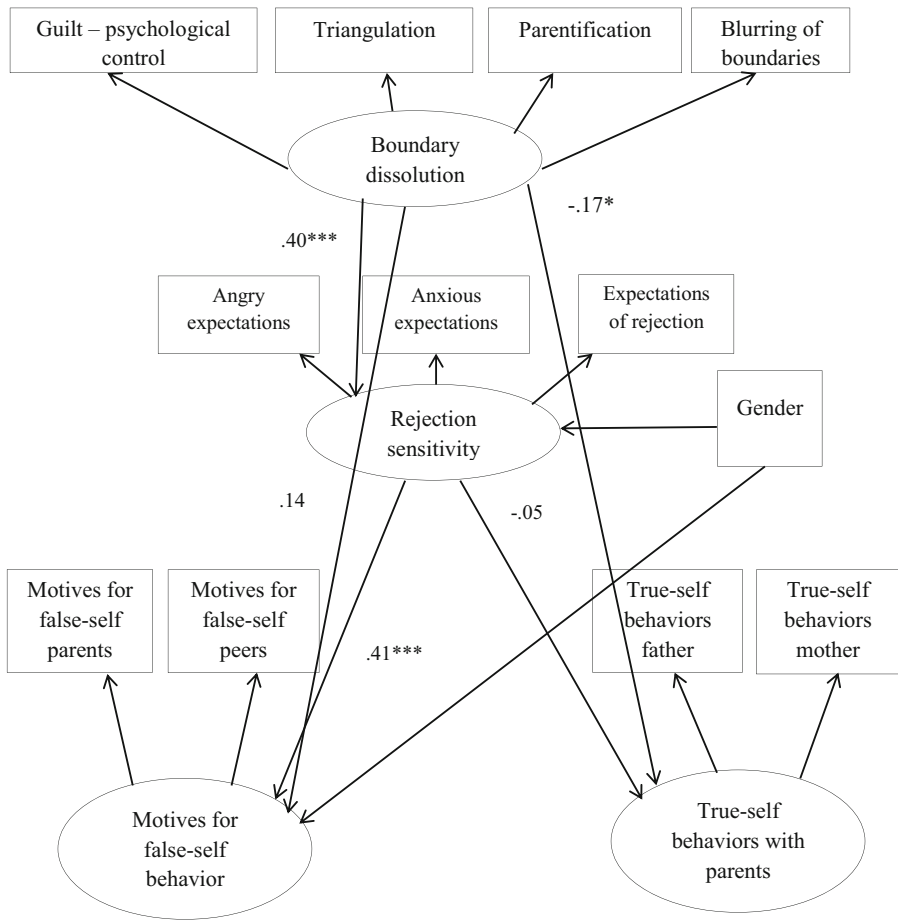
Note. *p< .05. **p< .01. ***p< .001. N=351.

Fig. 1 The final estimated model based on the structural equation modeling analysis

Nevertheless, these findings corroborate previous studies that have demonstrated a link between close adolescent parental relationships and adolescents' true-self behavior (Harter et al. 1996).

Thus, the experience of psychologically controlling and guilt inducing techniques may prevent early- and mid-adolescents from cultivating their true-self behavior with the father and may encourage them to exhibit false self-behavior with parents and peers. These adolescents are obliged to comply with their parents' self-absorbed needs and are pressured to think, feel, or behave in specific contingent ways rather than through their inner self (Deci and Ryan 2000). Moreover, with regard to triangulation, it is possible that when early- to mid-adolescents are triangulated into their parents' conflicts, their self needs are known to be compromised in an attempt to stabilize the unstable family system (Bowen 1978). By directing their internal resources toward the construction of their parents' dyadic relationship they relinquish their quest for their own true self and authenticity. Regardless of whether adolescents undergo psychologically controlling,

guilt inducing, or triangulating techniques, the organization of their self becomes heteronomous and split into false and true-self constructions that alienate them from their sense of a real and validated core-self (Kohut 1977; Winnicott 1965).

This study also found moderate associations between adolescents' expectations of rejection and adolescents' true self-behaviors and motives for false-self behavior, as well as between angry expectations and anxious expectations and motives for false-self behavior. These associations are consistent with previous findings that reported negative associations between rejection sensitivity and genuine self-esteem and authentic pride (Tracy, Cheng, Robins, and Trzesniewski 2009). Thus, early- and mid-adolescents who are highly sensitive to rejection, and those who score high on measures of motives for false-self behavior and low on true-self behavior with parents are likely to share a similar psychodynamic system that guides their habitual cognitive-emotional appraisal strategies in an attempt to avoid feelings of rejection. In addition, angry overreactions may indicate inner protests related to these adolescents' false-self construction.

Contrary to expectations, we did not find negative associations between inadequate psychological boundaries (except for triangulation) and adolescents' true self-behavior with the mother and classmates. This lack of association may imply that adolescents' perceived their parents' boundary dissolution differently, and reinforces previous empirical evidence that underscores the unique contribution of fathers and mothers to adolescents' functioning (Paquette 2004; Stevenson and Crnic 2013). Specifically, it can be attributed to the caretaking role of mothers as manifested in taking responsibility for their children's needs and security in times of distress (Russell and Russell 1987; Stevenson and Crnic 2013). Thus, these mothers' use of these techniques might be perceived as a form of caring involvement rather than intrusiveness or criticism. Nevertheless, future studies should explore whether this lack of association relates specifically to gender (i.e., mother versus fathers) or to the primary role of the caregiver. The absence of correlation as regards adolescents' true-self with classmates may imply that among early- and mid-adolescents, other contextual factors besides the family, such as peer pressure and social norms, operate in realizing adolescents' true-self endowment.

Contrary to expectations, the blurring of psychological boundaries was only associated with motives for false-self behavior with parents, and negatively. Similarly, parentification and the blurring of psychological boundaries were negatively correlated with adolescents' rejection sensitivity. These findings are consistent with reports of enmeshed relationships that have also identified qualities of warmth, self-disclosure, emotional involvement, physical proximity, and support-seeking (Werner et al. 2001). These qualities may provide adolescents with a sense of security that encourage them to use the blurred relationship for self-exploration.

With regard to parentification, Jurkovic (1997) suggested that this commonly occurs in intimate relationships and its implications are not necessarily pathological if the child's responsibilities are limited in time and do not extend beyond his/her competencies. Given the collectivistic nature of Israeli society that emphasizes homogeneousness and family interconnectedness (Mayseless and Solomon 2003; Scharf and Mayseless 2010) in addition to an enduring experience of threat (Weller, Florian, and Mikulincer 1995), the formation of enmeshed and role-reversed relationship with parents might not be seen as problematic and might even be somewhat expected in Israeli society which

highlights connectedness among its members, particularly with adult caregivers. This suggestion is consistent with findings reporting positive associations between parentification and empathy (Herer and Mayseless 2000) and negative associations between parentification and anxiety (Mayseless & Scharf 2009) in Israeli samples. Finally, from methodological point of view, it is possible that the measure of true-self/false-self behavior which was designed and administrated in the North-American society is not sensitive to other cultures.

9.1 The Meditating Role of True-Self Behavior With Parents

The data indicated that adolescents' rejection sensitivity mediates the association between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and early- and mid-adolescents' motives for false-self behavior. Thus, the enforced demands of adolescents to comply with their parents' emotional needs are manifested in adolescents' higher levels of rejection sensitivity, which in turn hinders their ability to search for and express their inner authentic voice. On the other hand, adolescents' rejection sensitivity did not mediate the link between parents-adolescent boundary dissolution and adolescents' true-self behavior with parents; rather, the association between these variables was direct.

These different correlational paths may be suggestive of the internal mechanisms promoting true and false-self behavior. In both cases boundary dissolution can be viewed as a risk factor. However, while parent-adolescent boundary dissolution is transformed in the case of false-self behavior into a cognitive-emotional approach for interpreting ambiguous rejection cues, which subsequently turns into an inner construct of motives for false-self behavior, the influence of parent-adolescent boundary dissolution on true-self behavior can occur directly.

9.2 Gender Differences

This study found gender differences in levels of motives for false self and rejection sensitivity, with boys demonstrating a higher level of motives for false self-behavior and girls demonstrating a higher level of rejection sensitivity and in particular anxious rejection sensitivity. These differences may reflect environmental influences in modifying the expression of negative emotions such as anxiety and anger and self-presentation. In particular, while female adolescents are permitted and encouraged to express various negative emotions such as sadness and fear more intensely than males, boys are forced to hide their vulnerable emotions to present a more socially acceptable impression and personal achievements (Elliott 1982; Klimes-Dougan et al. 2007). This tendency might be enhanced by the emphasis in Israeli culture on aspects of masculinity among male adolescents which may shape their ego identity (Tzuriel 1984).

The gender differences in rejection sensitivity are akin to female adolescents' preponderance of anxiety disorders (Lewinsohn, Gotlib, Lewinsohn, Seeley, and Allen 1998) which tends to be attributed to a biological anxiety sensitivity (Stein, Jang, and Livesley 2002) as well as to girls' greater sensitivity to socially-transmitted threat information and a developmental period marked by separation issues that may be more difficult for girls (McLean, and Anderson 2009).

9.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The current study has several theoretical and practical implications for early- and mid-adolescents. From a theoretical point of view, it sheds light on environmental (i.e., boundary dissolution in parent-adolescent relationships) as well as intrapersonal factors (i.e., rejection sensitivity) that relate to the existence of true-self behavior and motives for false self-behavior. Although the associations between boundary dissolution, rejection sensitivity, and true-self behavior, and motives for false self-behavior were rather moderate, these associations hint at the significance of these factors for early- and mid-adolescents in achieving their sense of true-self. The mediation model emerging from this study may lead to a more comprehensive scientific and clinical view concerning the significance of rejection sensitivity in the construction early- and mid-adolescents' motives for false-self behavior and underscores the relevance of psychoanalytic interpretations of self-organization (Kohut 1977; Winnicott 1965) to present-day developmental research.

From a practical point of view, the identification of boundary dissolution and rejection sensitivity as central factors that promote the existence of true-self behavior among early- and mid-adolescents is important for clinicians intervening with adolescents characterized by high levels of false-self behavior. In particular, an intervention within the family system may help develop true-self behavior and decrease adolescents' need to exhibit a false-self. Clinicians should be alerted to the importance of the family system as a factor contributing to the appearance of true or false-self behavior. In particular, clinicians should be aware of the potential threat of parent-adolescent boundary dissolution and the formation of true-self behavior when examining adolescents' active attempts to achieve sense of security within the family and fulfilling their attachment needs with their parents rather than developing sense of authenticity. With regard to rejection sensitivity, clinicians can help adolescents explore the sources of their constant concerns with regard their hostile or anxious cognitive-emotional fears of anticipated rejection by focusing on boundary dissolutions and deficiencies in parent–child attachment security. In addition they should explore the contribution of these dispositions to the shaping of false-self behaviors.

9.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has some limitations that call for caution in interpreting the results. First, the effect sizes of the correlations were rather moderate, indicating that other confounding variables such as the impact of mental health/wellbeing attachment security, cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, and family circumstances such as divorce or lone-parent families could contribute to accounting for the findings. Future studies should examine the hypotheses by taking these variables into account. Second, the results reflect the responses of an early- and middle-school age sample in Israel. Replications of the present study with diverse samples (e.g., with clinical samples, other ages) is necessary before the results can be generalized to other cultures. Finally, the present study was limited to adolescents' self-report measures. Future studies would benefit from the inclusion of data obtained from additional respondents to decrease possible self-report biases.

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