ASPECTS OF EGO-EXPERIENCE OF JAPANESE ADOLESCENCE IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY: AS SEEN IN SURVEYS FROM 1982 AND 2005

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“Ego-experience” is a subjective experience, engraved in the memory, of the awakening of the ego, and was posited by German adolescent psychologists in the early 20th century. In this study, I report on survey results for 215 respondents to a 2005 questionnaire on ego-experience, one of two I administered to students of the same girls’ school, as well as a comparison over time for 622 respondents to a 1982 questionnaire. The results showed that there was no change in the percentage of girls who recall some ego-experience, and those who recall the age of initial experience as about 10. On the other hand, some remarkable changes were observed. Particularly, fewer respondents chose experience in the “ego-consciousness” category as core experiences, suggesting that the subjective world of contemporary adolescents is characterized by less internal confrontation and dialogue. Finally, this paper examines the necessity of taking these changes into account in psychotherapy.

Key words: ego-experience, early and middle adolescent girl, comparison over time, questionnaire survey

INTRODUCTION

In the field of clinical psychology and psychiatric care, in the 1990s, researchers (Takaishi, 2000, 2009; Nabeta, 2007) began pointing out temporal changes in the micro dimensions of how pathological symptoms and effects of psychotherapy are manifested, and starting in the 2010s, there has been a series of empirical findings in fields such as sociology and self-psychology (Asano, 2014, 2015) on changes in the nature of the self in macro dimensions. With the rapid advancement of information technology, societal pressure to maintain the consistency and integrity of the self has declined, and it appears that multiple selves gradually dissociating from one another, that is, the emergence of the pluralistic self, has become an increasingly normal process.

Modern psychotherapy, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, originally intended “to provide opportunities, or safe spaces, for clients to resolve their own issues autonomously” (Kawai, 2013), and “to facilitate treatment through the relationship to the self, premised on the client’s independent self” (Kawai, 2010), meaning that the field of psychotherapy was built on the “infrastructure” (Tanaka, 2014)

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of the modern mind governed by an individual ego. It can be called an approach to transformation and growth reliant on the function of the introspective ego as postulated by Descartes. However, traditional approaches and theories are not necessarily effective for minds formed amid the interactions of so-called post-modern society, in which our belief in the solid ego has collapsed, and the image of the self is one of continuous flow and change. Calls for a fundamental reexamination of psychotherapy are a natural consequence.

How can changes in the nature of “I,” understood in sociology and the psychology of the self in the context of the “pluralized self,” be demonstrated in the field of clinical psychology, which takes the subjective world of the individual as a starting point? Accumulating empirical evidence of the changes described above is a crucial task in building psychotherapy that will remain valid into the future. As part of this endeavor, this study draws on the research on “ego-experience” I have conducted thus far, presents some of the findings from questionnaire surveys administered 23 years apart to students at the same girls’ junior high school and high school, and makes comparisons to identify what has changed and what has remained the same.

First, the meaning of “ego-experience” requires explanation. The term “ego-experience” (in German Ich-Erlebnis), introduced by early 20th-century German adolescent psychologists C. Bühler (1921) and E. Spranger (1924), means the experience of the qualitative transformation of mental-emotional structure during transition from childhood to early adolescence (psychological puberty). Also called “self-discovery” or “self-awareness,” it refers to the phenomenon of recognizing the self as a subject. It literally translates as “I-experience,” but in this study I use the translation “ego-experience,” which is listed in the Dictionary of Developmental Psychology (Iwata et al., 1995).

Bühler and colleagues collected and analyzed diaries and notes independently written during adolescence on an ongoing basis, and found that the first time young people recognize themselves as subjective actors, it is not unusual to have a highly surprising experience of the world abruptly shifting, an experience that is deeply engraved in the mind. Similar episodes are sometimes found in the autobiographical writings of authors and scholars. A typical example is given below.

What had led me astray during the crisis was my passion for being alone, my delight in solitude. Nature seemed to me full of wonders, and I wanted to steep myself in them... I immersed myself in nature, crawled, as it were, into the very essence of nature and away from the whole human world.

I had another important experience at about this time. I was taking the long road to school from Klein-Huningen, where we lived, to Basel, when suddenly for a single moment I had the overwhelming impression of having just emerged from a dense cloud. I knew all at once: now I am myself! It was as if a wall of mist were at my back, and behind that wall there was not yet an “I”. But at this moment I came upon myself. Previously I had existed, too, but everything had merely happened to me. Now I happened to myself. Now I knew: I am myself now, now I exist.
Previously I had been willed to do this and that; now I willed...there was “authority” in me. (C. G. Jung, 1963) [italics Jung’s]

Carl Jung wrote about this episode, which occurred when he was 12 years old, in an autobiography written much later, when he was over 80, and published posthumously. When he was 11 he suffered an attack of neurosis and refused to go to school for about half a year, after which he had this revelatory experience. In his memoirs Jung also referred to the first “I” and the “myself” he encountered when it emerged from a wall of mist as “Personality no. 1” and “Personality no. 2,” and says that his experience at this time became the driving force behind his lifelong pursuit of the oppositional actions of dual selves. In other words, it appears that the ego-experience became the point of departure for the construction of his theory of psychotherapy, the objective of which is a dialectical process of ego and self, in other words individuation.

How does psychology view these important experiences, which can sometimes be crucial turning points in life? As far as I know, there have been few systematic examinations until recent years. One example is that of Herbert Spiegelberg, an émigré from Germany to the United States, who published a paper on a phenomenon equivalent to ego-experience (“I-am-me” experience) in the Japanese psychology journal Psychologia in 1961, which was reprinted in the American journal The Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, and later discovered and reappraised by a Dutch psychologist (D. Kohnstamm, 2007). Spiegelberg (1961) conducted an organizational survey of university students, using several examples taken from autobiographical writings and literary works, including Jung’s quoted above. Three in four respondents to the first survey and one in four to the second survey recalled similar experiences, indicating that ego-experience is by no means an exceptional phenomenon. However, this ended up being an isolated study, and in 20th-century psychology dominated by behaviorism, study of the subjective ego-experience never developed either in Japan or in the West. Recently, results of organizational research such as Watanabe (2009); Watanabe (2011) in the field of philosophical psychology, and Amaya (2011) in developmental psychology, have been reported in Japan.

Amid these academic trends, clinical psychology was the first field to assert the significance of ego-experience studies. The ego-experience has the character of a crisis, in which cracks appear in the self-evident “I-am-me,” which can cause an upheaval like the Copernican reversal of earth and heavens, and can be considered a key concept for examining the pathology and treatment of the psyche. Subsequent studies have shown that ego-experience occurs repeatedly, not only during the transition from childhood to adolescence but also at various milestones in the life cycle (Takaishi, 2018). In this field, in recent years results of surveys of nonclinical groups from children to middle-aged and older have begun to accumulate, but no comparisons over time have yet been conducted.

Therefore, in this paper, I (1) revise the questionnaire on ego-experience that I created in 1982 for greater validity, (2) report the results of a survey of female students at the same target school in 2005, and (3) by comparing the results of two surveys, I aim to examine aspects of the ego-experience of early and middle adolescent individuals in the
early 21st century.

**METHOD**

*Revision of ego-experience score questionnaire*

In order to study ego-experience systematically, I first prepared a questionnaire that measures the accumulation of various ego-experiences of individuals (Takaishi, 1989). I later revised it, deleting items with low factorial validity, to create the Revised Ego-Experience Score Questionnaire, with 30 items in six sub-experience categories (Isolation / Alienation; Individuality / Independence; Ego-consciousness; Nature experience; Experience of changes or turning points; Self-questioning or self-doubt). Each question sought a yes/no response, and the total number of “yes” responses, indicating the subject was experiencing a thought or feeling or had experienced it even once in the past, was designated as the “ego-experience score.”

*Preparation of other questionnaires on ego-experience*

Based on the revised ego-experience score questionnaire, I prepared some questions on ego-experience.

Initial experience: Of the “yes” answers to questions on ego-experience score, respondents were asked choose one and describe (1) the age when they experienced it, and (2) the context (situation, trigger, what happened afterward).

Experience that made most lasting impression: Of the “yes” answers to questions on ego-experience score, respondents were asked choose the one that made the most lasting impression, and describe (1) the age when they experienced it, (2) the context (situation, trigger, what happened afterward), (3) how they felt and thought about themselves and others around, and (4) whether the way they felt and thought about themselves and others around changed afterward, and if so how.

*Implementation of the survey*

Target: 215 private junior high and high school girls: 1st-year junior high (36 people), 2nd-year junior high (45 people), 3rd-year junior high (46 people), 1st-year high school (45 people), 2nd-year high school (44 people). For each school year, a single class was selected and all members surveyed.

Dates: January and February 2005

Method: Distribution and collection by homeroom teacher. Anonymous. Responses optional.

Contents: Questionnaire with four A4-size (approx. 8.5 x 11 inch) pages of questions on ego-experience.

Ethical considerations: Because participating in the survey could potentially cause psychological disturbance to students, a follow-up system with school counselors was created. In addition, the survey contents and implementation method were approved at a school faculty meeting.

**RESULTS**

*Revised ego-experience score questionnaire factor analysis*

After performing factor analysis (principal factor analysis) to examine the validity of the revised sub-experience categories and the contents of each question item, six factors were considered to be valid, and six factors were postulated for the second factor analysis (principal factor analysis / promax rotation), after which the rotation converged on eight iterations. Here, another factor analysis (principal factor analysis / promax rotation) was performed for all except five items where factor loading was under 0.4 for all factors, and the rotation converged on seven iterations. The cumulative rate of initial eigenvalues is
Table 1. Results of Factor Analysis of Revised Ego-Experience Score Questionnaire

| Item No. | sub-experience categories and questions after revision                                                                 | Factor I | Factor II | Factor III | Factor IV | Factor V | Factor VI |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| I [Isolation / Alienation]                                                                                     |           |           |            |           |           |           |
| 14       | Have you ever felt that nobody understands the real you?                                                                | 0.716     | 0.005     | -0.085     | 0.007     | -0.018    | -0.040    |
| 28       | Have you ever suddenly felt rejected by those around?                                                                   | 0.641     | 0.148     | 0.004      | -0.062    | -0.046    | -0.058    |
| 5        | Have you ever suddenly felt, “I am all alone”?                                                                          | 0.536     | 0.145     | 0.061      | -0.195    | -0.088    | -0.008    |
| 9        | Have you ever thought you can never go back to being the person you used to be?                                         | 0.484     | -0.282    | 0.161      | 0.040     | 0.028     | 0.130     |
| 23       | Have you ever suddenly felt like you were very small, floating in a vast and uncomprehending world?                     | 0.439     | 0.144     | 0.187      | -0.028    | 0.011     | -0.044    |
| 19       | Have you ever felt that who “you” are suddenly changed at a certain point?                                               | 0.426     | -0.076    | -0.187     | 0.140     | 0.290     | 0.019     |
| II [Self-questioning or self-doubt]                                                                            |           |           |            |           |           |           |
| 27       | Have you frequently found yourself wondering, “Who am I?”                                                              | -0.033    | 0.713     | -0.169     | 0.002     | 0.011     | 0.336     |
| 1        | Have you frequently wondered, “Why am I who I am?”                                                                      | 0.016     | 0.635     | -0.035     | 0.077     | 0.020     | 0.049     |
| 13       | Have you ever found it bizarre that you inhabit this time and place?                                                     | 0.241     | 0.515     | 0.046      | 0.055     | -0.006    | -0.084    |
| 24       | Have you ever wondered, “Why am I a human being with a name?”                                                           | -0.053    | 0.450     | 0.110      | 0.125     | 0.042     | -0.245    |
| 7        | Have you ever wondered, “Where did I come from, and where am I going?”                                                  | -0.005    | 0.413     | 0.332      | -0.157    | 0.017     | -0.055    |
| III [Nature experience]                                                                                         |           |           |            |           |           |           |
| 21       | Have you ever had the feeling of becoming one with nature?                                                             | -0.013    | 0.008     | 0.602      | -0.024    | 0.227     | -0.221    |
| 3        | Have you ever thought, “The natural world is so vast and wondrous compared to me”?                                     | 0.055     | -0.091    | 0.592      | 0.077     | -0.141    | 0.193     |
| 26       | Have you ever been profoundly moved by something in the natural world and noticed that you were transfixed by it?      | 0.020     | -0.035    | 0.517      | 0.090     | -0.062    | 0.150     |
| 16       | Have you often thought about various aspects of the natural world and universe you inhabit?                             | -0.008    | 0.202     | 0.465      | -0.050    | -0.007    | 0.101     |
| 10       | Have you ever thought about how the natural world around you is full of amazing wonders?                              | -0.021    | 0.074     | 0.448      | 0.258     | -0.053    | -0.022    |
54.0%. Table 1 shows the factor analysis results after rotation.

The first factor includes the four items originally prepared for the sub-experience category “Isolation / Alienation,” and two items from “Experience of changes or turning points” (from which three were omitted) thought to indicate the process of alienation of the self over time. The second factor included all five original items in “Self-questioning or self-doubt,” and the third factor included all five original items in “Nature experience”. The fourth factor includes four items (all except one omitted) originally prepared for “Individuality / Independence,” and the fifth factor includes the three items in the “Ego-consciousness” category that relate to perceptions of the duality of the self. The sixth factor includes the remaining two items in the “Ego-consciousness” category, relating to dialogue with the self. The results indicate that the sub-experience categorization I formulated can be considered valid.

Regarding the fact that “Ego-consciousness” divided into two factors (Factor 5 and Factor 6), it is interesting that the experience of “ego-consciousness,” which I
hypothesized to be a single aspect of sub-experience, is actually two types of experience, namely the experience of observing (from a somewhat removed perspective) of two selves in a tense and conflicted relationship, and the experience of the self as a subjective being observing and questioning the self as subject. I drew on the original sub-experience category names to designate these “Ego-consciousness 1” and “Ego-consciousness 2.” Based on the factor analysis results, I reconfigured the survey so there are 25 items in six sub-experience categories: I: Isolation / Alienation, II: Self-questioning or self-doubt, III: Nature experience, IV: Individuality / Independence, V: Ego-consciousness 1, and VI: Ego-consciousness 2, and the total number of “Yes” responses as the “ego-experience score.”

Next, to examine the internal consistency of the ego-experience score questionnaire, the averages and SD of the total score for each factor were calculated, and the Cronbach’s α calculated, with the results shown in Table 2. The α coefficient of each factor was almost sufficient, except for factor 5 (Ego-consciousness 1) and factor 6 (Ego-consciousness 2). Even for factors 5 and 6, the values are not so far off as to be called inconsistent. Correlations between factors were generally found to be weak, and there was almost no correlation between the “Individuality / Independence” and “Ego-consciousness 1 and 2” factors. From these results I judged that this ego-experience score questionnaire, with the six factors identified as six sub-experience categories, was appropriate in terms of content. Thus, the quantitative analysis of the following ego-experience scores covered 25 items, with five items omitted as a result of factor analysis. The excluded items and their sub-experience categories are as follows.

Isolation/ Alienation 18. Have you ever suddenly perceived the furniture or objects in your own room as unfamiliar or alien?

Individuality/ Independence 15. Have you ever thought, “It is up to me to decide what is important and what is worthwhile?”

Table 2. Factor Correlation and α coefficient of Revised Ego-Experience Score Questionnaire

| Factor | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | Mean | SD  | α  | Number of items |
|--------|---|----|-----|----|---|----|------|-----|----|-----------------|
| I      |   | .383** | .333** | .211** | .289** | .211** | 0.52 | 0.321 | 0.731 | 6               |
| II     |   |      | .388** | .182** | .227** | .222** | 0.48 | 0.330 | 0.705 | 5               |
| III    |   |      |       | .375** | .245** | .207** | 0.52 | 0.327 | 0.707 | 5               |
| IV     |   |      |       |       | .165* | .061  | 0.61 | 0.347 | 0.69  | 4               |
| V      |   |      |       |       |      | .274** | 0.24 | 0.296 | 0.598 | 3               |
| VI     |   |      |       |       |      |       | 0.14 | 0.288 | 0.568 | 2               |

**p<.01    *p<.05
Table 3. Means and SDs of ego-experience scores for each grade

| Grade     | N  | Mean | SD  |
|-----------|----|------|-----|
| Junior-high | 1  | 30   | 8.5 | 5.94 |
|           | 2  | 42   | 10.4| 5.29 |
|           | 3  | 45   | 13.11| 3.56 |
| High      | 1  | 43   | 10.12| 4.41 |
|           | 2  | 42   | 13.86| 4.00 |
| Total     | 202*|      | 11.38| 4.96 |

* Valid responses

Experience of changes or turning points

4. Have you ever felt like the “me” of today is different from the former “me”? 
25. Have you ever felt like the person you think of as “yourself” had been reborn? 
30. Have you ever felt that at a certain point, you began perceiving yourself in a different way?

Developmental change in ego-experience score

Table 3 shows the means and SDs of ego-experience scores for each grade.

For the ego-experience score for each grade, a one-way analysis of variance was performed and it was significant when $F (4, 197) = 8.858, p < .001$. This indicates that the ego-experience score differs according to grade, increasing from the first to the third year of junior high, dropping during the first year of high school and rising again in the second year of high school.

Aspects of the start of ego-experience

Age of initial experience. The percentage of respondents recalling the age of initial experience is 52.6%. Table 4 shows the means and SDs for each grade. As the number of respondents citing each age in each grade is small, the distribution obtained by summing all grades is shown in Fig. 1.

The results showed the ages junior high and high school girls recalled as the time of first ego-experience, as in the earlier survey of 1982 (Average: 8.8 to 10.3 years old, most frequent response: 10 years old), as averaging within the 8.0 to 10.2 year old range, with 10 being the most common response.

Trigger for initial experience. I classified descriptions of specific circumstances of first ego-experience in the following eight categories. The results are shown in Table 5. As in the earlier survey, I focused on “who or what the experience is described in relation to” as a criterion of classification, and when descriptions span multiple categories, they
are classified into respective categories. Classifications was made through consultation between the author and a graduate of a master’s program in clinical psychology, with reference to category criteria and examples of past descriptions.

The most common response cited “interactions with older people, especially parents and teachers” as the trigger. In the earlier survey, the highest percentage of respondents cited interactions (especially conflicts) with “peers, especially friends” (23.3%), but this time the percentage citing interactions with adults was higher. Specifically, these interactions mainly consisted of reprimands and lack of understanding from parents and teachers.

Descriptions of experiences occurring in situations without an external trigger, such as “At home when it is quiet,” “While spacing out by myself,” “Before going to sleep,” and “Suddenly while on my way to school,” (categories V–VII) were, as in the previous survey, somewhat less common than those describing external triggers (categories I–IV) and there was no significant change in the contents of descriptions. Overall, the responses to the later survey were characterized by greater vagueness about the identities of others who triggered ego-experiences, with expressions such as “everyone,” “those

Fig. 1. Distribution of the age of initial ego-experience (N=113)
Table 5. Trigger for initial ego-experience

| Grade | Category* | J1 (n)% | J2 (n)% | J3 (n)% | H1 (n)% | H2 (n)% | Total (n)% |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|
| I     | (7)       | 17.95   | (8)     | 17.02   | (5)     | 10.20   | (6) 13.04 | (2) 4.44 | (28) 12.39 |
| II    | (12)      | 30.77   | (6)     | 12.77   | (8)     | 16.33   | (7) 15.22 | (4) 8.89 | (37) 16.37 |
| III   | (5)       | 12.82   | (4)     | 8.51    | (6)     | 12.24   | (9) 19.57 | (8) 17.78 | (32) 14.16 |
| IV    | (1)       | 2.56    | (1)     | 2.13    | (0)     | 0.00    | (1) 2.17  | (1) 2.22 | (4) 1.77 |
| V     | (4)       | 10.26   | (5)     | 10.64   | (8)     | 16.33   | (4) 8.70  | (4) 8.89 | (25) 11.06 |
| VI    | (2)       | 5.13    | (3)     | 6.38    | (13)    | 26.53   | (2) 4.35  | (4) 8.89 | (24) 10.62 |
| VII   | (2)       | 5.13    | (5)     | 10.64   | (2)     | 4.08    | (1) 2.17  | (4) 8.89 | (14) 6.19 |
| VIII  | (5)       | 12.82   | (12)    | 25.53   | (6)     | 12.24   | (13) 28.26 | (15) 33.33 | (51) 22.57 |

Missing value (1) 2.56  (3) 6.38  (1) 2.04  (3) 6.52  (3) 6.67  (11) 4.87

Total (39) 100.0  (47) 100.0  (49) 100.0  (46) 100.0  (45) 100.0  (226)** 100.0

*Experience trigger categories
  I. Interactions with peers, especially friends
  II. Interactions with older people, especially parents and teachers
  III. Interactions with nature, the universe, God, etc.
  IV. Interactions with books, paintings, music, etc.
  V. Respondent’s own specific state (emotions, actions)
  VI. Respondent’s own specific thoughts (not including involvement with others)
  VII. Respondent’s own ambiguous state
  VIII. Other (do not know / No response)

**When descriptions span multiple categories, they are classified into respective categories, so the total number is larger than respondents.

around me,” and “lots of people,” and the category “other (do not know / no answer)” accounted for more than 20% of the total (previous survey: 11.0%).

Aspects of core ego-experience (making most lasting impression)

Age when undergoing core experience. 59.5% of respondents recalled the age when they had the ego-experience that made the most lasting impression. Table 6 shows the means and SDs for each grade. As in the previous survey, many people recalled experiences they had within the past one or two years, but some recalled ones from early childhood.

Trigger for core experience. Table 7 shows the results of classifying descriptions of triggers for experiences that made the most lasting impressions, in the same categories as those for “Initial experience.”

In the earlier survey, the number of respondents described interactions with “peers, especially friends” (29.7%) stood out as the highest, but this time, although the percentage for this category was somewhat higher than others, the difference was not as
significant and there was more diffusion across all categories. Also, as with the descriptions of initial experience, few respondents cited specific relationships with specific others, and vague expressions such as “everyone” and “my group of friends” were notable. Here, as well, the category “other (do not know / no answer)” accounted for more than 20% of the total (previous survey: 9.5%). “Other” included statements such as “Do not want to say,” “Cannot write about it specifically,” and “Do not remember,” indicating a significant group that recall some sort of ego-experience but find it difficult to, or feel conflicted over, putting it into specific words.

*Emotional response to experience making most lasting impression.* Responses to
Table 8. The rate of describing respondent’s emotions at the time of the core ego-experience and the percentages of positive/negative/neutral in each grade

| Category* | Positive  | Negative  | Neutral  | Total     | Description Rate |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------------|
| Grade     | (n) %     | (n) %     | (n) %    | (n) %     | (n) %            |
| Junior- |          |           |          |           |                  |
| high      | 1         | 2         | 3        |           |                  |
|           | (2) 11.76 | (6) 35.29 | (9) 52.94 | (17) 100.00 | (35) 48.57       |
| High      | 1         | 2         |          |           |                  |
|           | (4) 17.39 | (8) 34.78 | (11) 47.83 | (23) 100.00 | (45) 51.11       |
| Total     | (16) 14.68 | (40) 36.70 | (53) 48.62 | (109) 100.00 | (215) 50.70      |

*Categories of emotions at time of experience  (**indicates new categories):  Positive: Ecstatic response to perceptions of nature / Positive emotions toward others / Positive emotions toward self / Vague positive feelings / Other
Negative: Negative feelings toward others / Lack of understanding of others, or sense of impossibility of mutual understanding / Sense of alienation from others in immediate surroundings / Negative feelings toward self / Sense of confusion about self / Vague negative feelings / Sense of isolation from humanity in general / Negative feelings toward humanity in general / Others
Neutral: Sense of one’s own insignificance in the context of the natural world / Some negative feelings toward self, but accompanied by the desire to improve / Some negative feelings toward self, but swiftly resolved / Practical sense of live-and-let-live / Objective observation of self and others / Heightened awareness of the self's individuality and independence / Vague sense of wonder ** / Comparison of self with people around** / Other

the question “How did you think and feel about yourself and those around you [when you had the experience that made the most lasting impression]?” were placed in categories created for the earlier survey, but because there were responses that did not fit these, two new categories were added. This resulted in a total of 24 categories, and Table 8 shows the result of classifying these into three broader categories (positive / negative / neutral) and the percentages of respondents in each grade that clearly described their emotions at the time of the experience (description rate).

From the above, it is evident that the emotions felt during the core ego-experience are more negative than positive. However, it is notable in the earlier survey, the number of descriptions classified as “negative” were more than twice as common as “neutral,” while in the more recent survey “neutral” descriptions outnumbered “negative” ones. Also, the addition of the new categories “Vague sense of wonder” and “Comparison of self with people around” to the “neutral” category represents a characteristic of the newer survey, namely the presence of a group that do not clearly interpret their own emotions but rather have a vague sense of them as “weird” or think of them in terms of how they compare to others in their vicinity.

Aspects of change in experience making most lasting impression. Descriptions of changes in emotions and ways of thinking about the self and people around caused by the
Table 9. The rate of describing respondent’s changes caused by the core ego-experience and the percentages of positive/negative/neutral in each grade

| Category* | Positive (n) % | Negative (n) % | Neutral (n) % | Total (n) % | Description Rate (n) % |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Junior-high |               |               |               |             |                        |
| 1         | (6) 46.15     | (2) 5.38      | (5) 38.46     | (13) 100.00 | (35) 37.14             |
| 2         | (4) 40.00     | (1) 10.00     | (5) 50.00     | (10) 100.00 | (45) 22.22             |
| 3         | (15) 50.00    | (7) 23.33     | (8) 26.67     | (30) 100.00 | (46) 65.22             |
| High      |               |               |               |             |                        |
| 1         | (7) 41.18     | (2) 11.76     | (8) 47.06     | (17) 100.00 | (45) 37.78             |
| 2         | (7) 46.67     | (1) 6.67      | (7) 46.67     | (15) 100.00 | (44) 34.09             |
| Total     | (39) 45.88    | (13) 15.29    | (33) 38.82    | (85) 100.00 | (215) 39.53            |

*Categories of emotions at time of experience (**indicates new categories):

**Positive:** Hope for the future / Efforts to improve / Positive change in personality, confidence in self / Deepened understanding of self / Consideration, respect, appreciation, and recognition of the importance of others / Smoother interpersonal relationships / More objective or different viewpoint (described positively) / Other

**Negative:** Negative change in personality, confusion about self / More negative attitude or perception of others / Difficulty with interpersonal relationships / Other

**Neutral:** Practical sense of live-and-let-live / Focus of awareness on self and others / Individuation and independence of self / Differentiation of interpersonal relationships / Increased objectivity

No change **/ other

experience making the most lasting impression (core ego-experience) were classified based on categories from the earlier survey, but as descriptions not fitting any of these categories were observed, one new category was added. Table 9 shows the results of classifying those 19 categories into three larger categories (positive, negative, neutral) and the percentages clearly describing the changes caused by these experiences (description rate) for each grade.

As shown above, 45.9% of respondents perceived the change as “positive,” almost the same rate as the earlier survey (45.0%). However, in terms of emotions accompanying these core experiences, the percentage of “neutral” emotions (38.8%) increased compared to the earlier survey (29.8%), and clear and objective assessments of changes in the self after the experience seem to be on a downward trend. Also, the response “No change” was added to the “neutral” category on the recent survey, and the multiple respondents (19 people) who intentionally described “no change” was a new trend not seen in the earlier survey. It seems to represent a reduction in the motivation to clarify or assign meaning to one’s own inner changes due to ego-experience.

Comparison of ego-experience over time

As the questionnaire was revised between the two surveys, not all aspects can be compared over time. However, in terms of specific questions contributing to the ego-experience score, there are five items with completely identical phrasing and ten more
Have you ever thought, “I could never be anyone but myself”?

- Yes: 2005 = 99, 1982 = 456
- No: 2005 = 112, 1982 = 166

**[Individuality / Independence]**

$p<.001$

Have you ever felt like the “me” of today is different from the former “me”?

- 2005 = 176, 1982 = 478
- 2005 = 39, 1982 = 144

**[Isolation / Alienation (Consciousness of change)]**

*n.s.

Have you ever suddenly felt, “I am all alone”?

- 2005 = 139, 1982 = 434
- 2005 = 74, 1982 = 188

**[Isolation / Alienation (Loneliness)]**

*n.s.

Have you ever spoken to yourself internally, as if speaking to someone else?

- 2005 = 34, 1982 = 260
- 2005 = 181, 1982 = 362

**[Ego-consciousness]**

$p<.001$

Have you ever thought, “I am different from anyone else”?

- 2005 = 152, 1982 = 421
- 2005 = 63, 1982 = 201

**[Individuality / Independence]**

*n.s.

Have you ever felt that you have two different selves that are in conflict?

- 2005 = 96, 1982 = 341
- 2005 = 119, 1982 = 281

**[Ego-consciousness]**

$p<.05$

*Fig. 2-(1).* Comparison of the each score of “yes” responses between 1982 and 2005
[Individuality / Independence]  
Have you ever thought, “It is up to me to decide what is important and what is worthwhile?”

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 126 | 89 |
| 1982 | 397 | 225 |

[Ego-consciousness]  
Have you ever felt that there is another “you” inside you, instructing you to do this and that?

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 18  | 197|
| 1982 | 121 | 501|

[Isolation / Alienation (Loneliness)]  
Have you ever suddenly perceived the furniture or objects in your own room as unfamiliar or alien?

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 24  | 191|
| 1982 | 98  | 524|

[Isolation / Alienation (Consciousness of change)]  
Have you ever felt that who “you” are suddenly changed at a certain point?

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 78  | 137|
| 1982 | 220 | 402|

[Individuality / Independence]  
Have you ever thought, “I have a unique personality that is mine alone”?

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 144 | 70 |
| 1982 | 492 | 130|

[Nature experience]  
Have you ever had the feeling of becoming one with nature?

| Year | Yes | No |
|------|-----|----|
| 2005 | 62  | 153|
| 1982 | 331 | 291|

**Fig. 2-(2).** Comparison of the each score of “yes” responses between 1982 and 2005
that are the same except for the addition of commas or quotation marks, meaning that comparison over time is possible for 15 items. Thus, I conducted a comparison over time for each grade for the total score of “yes” answers to those questions, and found that there were significant differences across all grades for nine questions. Almost all declined in number of responses between 1982 and 2005.

Next, I compared the total score of “yes” responses from 1st-year junior high through 2nd-year high school. A $\chi^2$ test was conducted for the 15 completely or nearly identical questions, and significant differences were found for eight of them. Fig. 2 shows the results.

In accordance with sub-experience categories, items with a significant difference are divided into [Isolation / Alienation (Loneliness, Consciousness of change)] (1 out of 5 items), [Individuality / Independence] (2/4 items), [Nature experience] (1/1 item), [Ego-consciousness 1 and 2 (Ego-consciousness)] (4/4 items), [Excluded items (Consciousness of changes)] (0/1 item) (phrases in brackets are sub-experience categories from earlier survey). What we see here is that in junior high and high school students, the number of “yes” responses decreased between 1982 and 2005 for the majority of individual sub-experiences considered to be comparable over time, and among these, the rate of positive responses to questions related to “ego-consciousness” is decreasing. There are slight differences in the implementation method of the earlier and the later survey, and the possibility that these affected the decline in recalling ego-experience cannot be denied.
However, even if these influences are taken into account, the observation of a downward trend seems to be valid. Also, for the four items in the “Nature experience” category that could not be compared over time due to revision, the ratio of total scores for 1st-year junior high through 2nd-year high school students showed a decline in positive responses. Taken together, these results indicate that between 1982 and 2005, early and middle-adolescent girls’ ego-experience score trended downward, and especially the percentage recalling ego-experiences with the aspects of “ego-consciousness” and “Nature experience” appeared to be decreasing.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on the above findings, here I would like to examine changes in the manifestation of ego-experience in contemporary early and middle adolescent girls in the early 21st century, and the characteristics of the subjective “I” of today that these illustrate.

The primary finding of the survey is that today, among girls, at least, in the early and middle adolescent stages, there tends to be less experience or memory of ego-experience compared with in the past. Second, their descriptions of these experiences decreased in volume and were simpler. Even when recalling core ego-experiences in specific terms, few descriptions went into feelings of crisis and confusion in depth. Examining changes in the content of descriptions in more detail, we find a decrease in the percentage of “friends” triggering experiences. As discussed in the Introduction, this seems to be because the relative importance to an individual’s life of oppositional conflict with any particular friend has relatively declined among contemporary early and middle adolescent individuals, for whom the self is diversified and involves a larger number of friends and a pluralistic self via social media. In relationships involving numerous friends and various aspects of the self, even if a relationship with one person does not go well, there are still many relationships with others. Even if an oppositional conflict with someone occurs, it may not lead directly to decisive “Isolation / Alienation” or to objectivizing and viewing the self as a whole. Also, regarding emotions accompanying experiences and respondents’ perceptions thereof, there is an increase in the neither positive nor negative but “neutral” category, and this may point to a zeitgeist involving decreased need to explain things clearly according to any one factor. A notable feature of the later survey as compared to the earlier survey was the appearance of those describing themselves and those around as “not changing” before and after the ego-experience, but for those who are able to change “the self” on an everyday basis depending on the situation, changes in viewpoint in and of itself may be commonplace (in other words, they may not be engraved in the memory as “experiences”). A third category of change is in the sub-experience categories of the core ego-experiences recalled. These can be seen from the comparison over time of responses to individual question items, with an especially marked decline in “Ego-consciousness” and “Nature experience.”

The decline in “Nature experience” can first of all be seen as “the fruits of our
educational efforts,” as pointed out by D. Kohnstamm (2007). Today, many children learn about nature and living things before they directly experience them. Also, the environments of junior high and high school students in the early 1980s and the mid-2000s include a dramatic expansion of living space and experiential world, including progress in information technology. Children born after 1990 or so have been able to experience various aspects nature indirectly but in a highly realistic manner, through images, from early childhood onward. It seems valid to say that nature, once already “experienced,” is less likely to act as a trigger for ego-experience.

The decrease in “ego-consciousness” is clearly related to the change of the structure of the mind toward a pluralistic self. Comparison of answers to individual questions shows four items for which significant differences were found, illustrating a subjective experience of the ego according to the contemporary structural model of the mind, in which the “single ego” possesses an integrative function, i.e., the capacity for dialogue between two selves. On the other hand, in a subjective world where the sense of plural selves has become commonplace, it is not surprising that the perceived need to distinguish among multiple selves and integrate them has been diluted.

To give a final summation and conclusion, it appears that the percentage of those recalling some ego-experience, and the age of the initial experience recalled, among early and middle adolescent subjects did not change significantly over 23 years. In the process of ego development, in which an abstract world with aspects such as death and infinity opens up, the ego-experience of a child encountering the self as a subject is not likely to change significantly, even as the world evolves. On the other hand, there were many changes in the core ego-experience (experience making the most lasting impression) cited. Perceptions of emotions experienced, and changes to the self due to experiences, have become more vague, and especially the ego-consciousness aspect of ego-experience is on a downward trend, indicating that ego-experience is becoming less effective as a trigger for subsequent self-observation.

Research on change over time in ego-experience among men and other older populations remains as a future task, but these survey results indicate that people encountered in the context of contemporary psychotherapy will also exhibit similar self-formation, and it seems safe to assume that they will inhabit a subjective world where inner confrontation and dialogue are diminished. It seems necessary for psychotherapy, which involves the subjective world of individuals and supports individuation, to explore practices adapted to such changes in the times.

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