



When men and women differ in self-esteem and when they don't: A meta-analysis [☆]



Miron Zuckerman ^{a,*}, Chen Li ^a, Judith A. Hall ^b

^a Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester, United States

^b Department of Psychology, Northeastern University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 January 2016

Revised 8 July 2016

Accepted 15 July 2016

Available online 17 July 2016

Keyword:

Gender differences in self-esteem

ABSTRACT

A meta-analysis of gender differences in self-esteem (1148 studies from 2009 to 2013; total $N = 1,170,935$) found a small difference, $g = 0.11$ (95% CI = 0.10–0.13), favoring males. Additionally, (1) the gender difference increased with age until late adolescence, and declined afterwards; (2) Whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans showed the same gender difference whereas African Americans and marginal groups (e.g., immigrants) did not show any difference; (3) the gender difference was larger in more developed countries characterized by values that espouse equality and freedom; and (4) inspection of previous reviews showed that the gender difference emerged after the 1970s, increased until 1995, and declined afterwards. A three-stage model of comparison processes was proposed to account for these results.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Gender differences in self-esteem have been studied for a long time, and multiple reviews both qualitative and quantitative have been performed on this question. While the prevailing finding of recent reviews is not under dispute—males had a small advantage over females in self-esteem—a number of issues merit another look at this topic. In the current work, we collected data for the years 2009–2013 in order to address a number of issues.

First, we examined whether the magnitude of the gender difference in self-esteem changed since the last reviews (Kling, Hyde, Slowers, & Buswell, 1999; Major, Barr, Zubek, & Babey, 1999). Second, we examined differences among age groups, including groups (adult and old ages) that received little attention before. Third, we examined the gender difference in ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanics, Asian Americans) other than those (Whites and African Americans) that have been studied before. Fourth, we looked at relevant data from countries other than the US, allowing for

cross-cultural comparisons that were not feasible before. Finally, we developed a three-stage model to account for the variations in the gender differences among the groups listed above (age groups, ethnic groups, countries, cohorts).

2. Self-esteem: definition, origins, and consequences

For most researchers, global self-esteem is defined as the positivity of “the global regard that one has for the self as a person” (Harter, 1993, p. 88). Like previous reviews, the current work addresses only the gender difference in global self-esteem; gender differences in domain-specific self-esteem were recently addressed in a review by Gentile et al. (2009).

What determines the level of one's global self-esteem has been the focus of two theoretical approaches (see Gentile et al., 2009). The first is based on James's (1890) competencies model, which is similar to Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. In this line of thought, level of self-esteem is determined by how one has performed or achieved in areas important to the self. The second approach is based on Cooley's (1902) looking-glass model and its modern counterparts, sociometer theory (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995) and the related concept of the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In this line of thought, self-esteem reflects what others think of us and whether others accept us. Thus, whereas James (1890) focused on accomplishments, Leary et al. (1995) focused on quality of relationships.

[☆] We are grateful for all those investigators who responded to our requests for sharing their data with us. We thank the following research assistants for their help in collecting, coding, and checking the data: Katherine (Katie) Brown, Jonathan Campbell, Kaiyuan Chen, Zongqi Li, Shivali Mukerji, Giulia Paris, Qiaoyu (Lynn) Qi, Sizhen Qu, Kylie Sargeant, Ellen Swanson, Timothy Tam, Sarah Vogel, Keer Wu, Xupin Zhang, and Zhuoran (Jenny) Zhang.

* Corresponding author at: Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester, Meliora 431, Rochester, NY 14627, United States.

E-mail address: miron.zuckerman@rochester.edu (M. Zuckerman).

Since its inception, self-esteem has been shown in numerous studies to have myriad beneficial effects. Despite criticism on the generality of these findings (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), recent empirical results continue to show that higher self-esteem contributes positively to health (Stinson et al., 2008), romantic relationships (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008), and affect and job satisfaction (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Such results are a main reason why the gender difference in self-esteem remains an important topic today.

3. Previous reviews of gender differences in self-esteem

To set the stage for the present work, Table 1 offers a summary of previous reviews of this topic. It shows the author(s), publication year, number of studies reviewed, range of years in which these studies were published, overall results, and results for two subgroups (children and adolescents). For qualitative reviews, overall results are the original authors' conclusions whereas for quantitative reviews, overall results are the mean effect size of the difference between males and females. Inspection of the results leads to a number of conclusions.

Overall, males' advantage in self-esteem is small; the largest gender difference is $d = 0.20$ (Kling et al., 1999), meaning that the male and female means differ by 1/5 standard deviation—a small effect size by Cohen's (1969) definition. Comparisons among the reviews show two consistent trends. First, the results of the quantitative reviews indicate an increase in the gender difference from 1958 to 1995. The qualitative portion of the table also shows this trend. Wylie (1979), reviewing studies that were published in 1961–1975, concluded that there was no gender difference whereas Skaalvik (1986), reviewing studies published in 1975–1985, concluded that there was a difference (Maccoby & Jacklin's, 1974, qualitative review concurs with these conclusions but their results were also summarized quantitatively by Feingold, 1994, and are included in our summary of the quantitative section). Taken as a whole, the available data indicate that the gender difference in self-esteem started to emerge in the mid-1970s. A number of factors lend confidence to this conclusion, including (a) the consistency in results between the qualitative and the quantitative reviews, (b) the consistency in results between Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) conclusions based on a qualitative review and Feingold's (1994) conclusions based on a quantitative review of approximately the same studies, (c) the relatively large number of studies (30 studies reviewed by Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, plus 57 studies reviewed by Wylie, 1979) showing no gender difference in self-esteem prior to 1975, and (d) publication bias, which would favor publishing papers that showed a significant gender difference. It is also difficult to argue that because reviews of studies conducted before 1975 were qualitative, inferences of no gender differences are suspect. This is because, first, a qualitative review of studies conducted after 1975 (Skaalvik, 1986) did find gender differences; second, as noted above, quantitative (Feingold, 1994) and qualitative (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) reviews of roughly the same studies reached identical conclusions of no gender difference.

A second trend shown in Table 1 is that the gender difference is bigger in adolescence than in younger ages (Feingold, 1994; Kling et al., 1999; Major et al., 1999). The table does not provide information on the gender difference among adults because only Kling et al. (1999) reported effects for this age group, and even in their work, there were only 22 studies for ages greater than 22; Kling et al. (1999) called for research that focuses on these older ages.

One other effect does not appear in Table 1 but was reported by both Kling et al. (1999) and Major et al. (1999); both reviews found that the gender difference in self-esteem appeared in studies of Whites but not in studies of African Americans.

4. Interpreting the gender difference in self-esteem

The findings of males' advantage in self-esteem triggered a multitude of explanations (see summaries by Kling et al., 1999, pp. 472–473, and by Major et al., 1999, pp. 225–229). Most of these explanations are tied to the different roles of males and females in Western societies (e.g., Bem, 1983; Egan & Perry, 2001; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). The stereotypic male role (e.g., agentic, confident, assertive) is more highly evaluated by society than is the stereotypic female role (e.g., communal, warm; see meta-analysis by Taylor & Hall, 1982). Furthermore, females who try to behave in an agentic manner are evaluated less favorably than their agentic male counterparts (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Rudman, 1998). A person's self-esteem might well be tied to the evaluation accorded to that person's role.

Related to gender roles is the greater cultural pressure on females' appearance relative to that of males (e.g., Brumberg, 1997; Kilbourne, 1994). This difference, particularly when coupled with the almost impossible standards for female beauty (Wolf, 1991), led to the consistent finding in studies from the 1980s to the present that females are less satisfied with their appearance than are males (see meta-analysis by Gentile et al., 2009). In addition, appearance satisfaction is related to self-esteem and, consistent with the greater emphasis on females' beauty, the relation is stronger for females (Allgood-Merten, Lewinsohn, & Hops, 1990).

According to Kling et al. (1999), the difference in appearance satisfaction makes adolescence a critical period for the development of a gender difference in global self-esteem. The physical maturation in puberty starts earlier among females and shows marked gender differences—girls gain twice as much body fat as do boys (Warren, 1983). Because thin is beautiful in Western culture, girls at puberty prefer to be thinner than what they are whereas boys prefer a body type larger than their own. Therefore, the discrepancy between cultural ideals and reality during adolescence increases for females but, if anything, declines for males. Indeed, Gentile et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis showed that, relative to females, males' advantage in appearance satisfaction is particularly pronounced in puberty. Next to physical appearance, Kling et al. (1999) mentioned higher male athletic participation as another reason for male advantage in self-esteem. In support of this assertion, athletic participation is in fact related to global self-esteem (Taylor, 1995; Wilkins, Boland, & Albinson, 1991), and males' athletic self-esteem is higher than that of females (Gentile et al., 2009).

Major et al. (1999) covered most of the perspectives reviewed above but added some new ones. For example, they noted women's greater susceptibility to depression, the strong relation that exists between depression and lower self-esteem, and the similarity between their antecedents. They also described various social restrictions (fewer job opportunities, more household responsibilities) that deny women opportunities to acquire skills that are necessary for controlling the environment as well as for building one's self-esteem.

Last, both Major et al. (1999) and Kling et al. (1999) listed a number of factors that can be loosely connected under the rubric of gender discrimination. Major et al. (1999) listed the negative stereotypes of women that might be self-fulfilling, the minority status to which women are relegated, limitations in the job market, etc. Kling et al. (1999) mentioned the different treatment of males and females in schools and evidence of violence directed toward women (e.g., sexual violence). Major et al. (1999) proposed that gender inequality is translated to lower self-esteem in females via the reflected appraisal process (Cooley, 1902; Leary et al., 1995). If people's self-esteem is based on how others see them

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/951209>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/951209>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)