

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM COMPONENTS

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Abstract: Scientific study of gender differences and similarities is critical to understanding human behavior. In this research we focus on some key concepts of human functioning that are related to a vast number of phenomena: self-concept and its components. We included concepts about gender differences that have not been extensively examined, such as instability and contingency of self-esteem. 339 participants, aged from 19 to 63 years, filled out the following questionnaires: Adult Sources of Self-Esteem Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Instability of Self-Esteem Scale and Contingent Self-Esteem Scale. The results show that males and females do not differ in independent self-concept, self-esteem (level, stability, or contingency). Significant differences appeared mainly in the interdependent self-concept, which seems to show the effect of fundamental bio-socio-psychological influences. Other significant differences were in one aspect of independent self-concept and one aspect of contingent self-esteem.

Key words: gender, self-concept, self-esteem, contingency, instability

INTRODUCTION

Scientific study of gender differences and similarities is critical to understanding human behavior (Eagly, Diekmann, 2002). In this research we focus on some personality concepts that are central to human functioning and therefore related to a vast number of phenomena. This is self-concept and self-esteem and their components. We look at these concepts in a detailed way to get deeper insight of the differences between man and woman and to establish the current situation of these differences in central Europe. Each of these concepts is briefly described in the following paragraphs.

SELF-CONCEPT

Self-concept is an organized set of characteristics, traits, feelings, images, attitudes, abilities, and other psychological elements that a person attributes to oneself (Kobal, 2000, p. 25). In this research we used the independent/interdependent theory of self-concept. The field of independent self-concept consists of concepts of oneself that include mostly ourselves: our physical appearance, intelligence, education, abilities, possessions, achieving of goals and religion. The field of interdependent self-concept includes concepts of oneself in relation to other people: one's popularity, kindness, relation-

ships with the family, with the opposite sex and others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) presuppose that the interdependent opposite the independent concept of oneself is among the most general schemes of one's self-system. A person with interdependent self-concept actively seeks relationships with others, (s)he pays attention to the needs of others and wishes to maintain and nurture the relationships (Bakan, 1966).

Self-esteem refers to a person's beliefs about one's worth and is often accompanied by strong affect. One component of self-esteem is its level, which can vary from high to low self-esteem. High self-esteem involves positive affect and it means that an individual accepts oneself fully, values oneself and is satisfied with oneself, feels worthy of respect and so on, while low self-esteem involves negative affect, a person with negative standpoint towards oneself or low self-esteem does not value oneself, does not approve of one's own traits, one's opinion of oneself is negative and so on (Rosenberg, 1965; Leary, Downs, 1995).

Although each person can be characterized as having an overall or typical level of self-esteem, self-esteem also fluctuates over situations and time (Greenier, Kernis, Waschull, 1995; Kernis, Waschull, 1995). The extent to which self-esteem fluctuates can be described as *stability of self-esteem*. Past research showed that compared to persons with stable self-esteem, persons with unstable self-esteem: a) concentrate more on negative aspects of interpersonal events that pose threat to self-esteem (Waschull, Kernis, 1996), b) experience an increase of depressive symptoms when facing daily challenges (Kernis et al., 1998), c) their feelings towards themselves are more influenced by everyday negative and positive events (Greenier

et al., 1999), and d) possess a learning pose, which is more oriented towards protection of self-esteem and thus less oriented towards mastery (Waschull, Kernis, 1996). Other researches connected unstable self-esteem (in persons with high self-esteem) with higher proneness toward anger and hostility (Kernis, Grannemann, Barclay, 1989) and with higher proneness toward bragging about success and feeling of self-doubt after failure (Kernis et al., 1997).

Self-esteem is often *contingent*, which means that the feelings about oneself are a result of and depend on matching some standards of excellence or living up to some interpersonal or interpsychic expectations (Deci, Ryan, 1995). People differ in the extent to which their self-esteem is contingent. Areas on which people usually base their self-esteem are competence, acceptance by others, physical appearance and such. In people with contingent high self-esteem, searching and maintaining positive views of oneself becomes their main orientation, displayed through their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. They are highly motivated with desire for them to appear worthy to themselves and to others. Uncontingent self-esteem, on the contrary, marks persons whose question of self-esteem is not highlighted, especially because they perceive themselves as worthy of respect and love on the basic level. Ups and downs do not portray their own worth, even when they lead to reevaluation of activity and effort. Epstein (2006) says that while they may not agree with their behaviors and decide to improve them, they nonetheless approve of themselves. Contrary to people with contingent self-esteem, they do not have to achieve anything in order to justify their positive feelings towards themselves.

PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED
GENDER DIFFERENCES

Gender Differences in Self-Concept

Researches (Cross, Madson, 1997; Maddux, Brewer, 2005) show that one of the most significant differences between males and females is the difference in their self-concept. Eagly's (1995) meta-analytical research showed that important gender differences are quite compatible with gender stereotypes. Kimmelmeier and Oyserman (2001a) state that plenty of research shows that males and females differ in regard to how much they define themselves as autonomous agents in comparison with the views of themselves as connected with and included in relations with others. This gender difference in self-concept is elaborated in the model presented by Cross and Madson (1997), based on the work by Markus and Kitayama (1991) on cultural differences in self-concept. Cross and Madson (1997) claim that in Western societies females more often than males develop interdependent self-concept, and vice versa, males more often than females develop an independent self-concept. Moreover, they suggest that "many of the observed differences in behavior of men and women can be explained by interpersonal differences in their self-concept" (p. 8). Independent self-concept, more typical of males, refers to self-definitions such as "independent autonomous entity" (p. 6), "separated from others", following "individualistic goals", and motivated "to show uniqueness by power over others" (p. 6-7). Contrary to this, interdependent self-concept, more typical of females, refers to self-definitions such as "connec-

tion with others", where "relationships are perceived as integral parts of one's being" (p. 7).

Macoby and Jacklin (1974) already reported that social attributes are more important views of self-definition for females than for males, and this was also confirmed by subsequent research. For example, McGuire and McGuire (1988) found that children had defined themselves differently early on, depending on gender, where girls shared a more social and group sense of themselves compared to boys. Clancy and Dollinger (1993) showed that when we ask people to describe themselves by selecting pictures, females more often than males select a picture of themselves, where they are together with others, and pictures of family members, while males more often than females choose pictures of themselves where they are alone. Cross and Madson (1997) quote some studies that show that in assessing oneself by certain attributes, "males more often assess themselves positively in dimensions that are related to independence (for example, power and self-sufficiency), while females more often assess themselves positively on dimensions connected to interdependency" (p. 9). Experiments that were conducted by Josephs, Markus and Tafarodi (1992) show that a male's feeling of self-worth is closely linked to autonomy and personal achievements, while females emphasise connection and sensitivity to others. Studies published after 1997 mainly supported the hypothesis that females display higher relationship interdependence, while males display higher independence in their self-concepts (see Cross, Bacon, Morris, 2000; Gabriel, Gardner, 1999; Kashima et al., 2004; Kimmelmeier, Oyserman, 2001b). All these findings point that "gender differences in cognition, moti-

vation, emotions, and social behavior can be explained by different self-concepts of males and females” (Cross, Madson, 1997, p. 5).

Gender Differences in Self-Esteem

Meta-analyses have shown that males have higher self-esteem (Kling et al., 1999) than females. However, Patton, Bartrum and Creed (2004) did not establish statistically important differences between genders on a sample of Australian secondary school students on the self-esteem scale (RSES) nor did Kobal Grum et al. (2004) and Marčič (2006) on the sample of Slovenian secondary school students.

On a sample of 461 secondary school students Chabrol, Rousseau and Callahan (2006) found that girls have a more unstable self-esteem compared to boys, which is consistent with the longitudinal study carried out by Alsaker and Olweus (1992).

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

With this research we intended to look deeper into the gender differences in self-concept and self-esteem. For this purpose we looked at each item on the Inventory, used to measure self-concept, which represents its own area of life. We examined gender differences in level, instability and contingency of self-esteem. On the basis of past research, we assumed that males would have higher independent self-concept, while females would have higher interdependent self-concept; that males would have higher and more stable self-esteem. We wanted to show a more specific view on these differences, since item by item analyses are not usually presented in papers.

METHOD

Participants

339 people took part in the research; 110 males and 229 females, aged 19 to 63 years, with average age of 26.7 years. Most of them were students or persons with college or university degree.

Instruments

Self-concept was measured with Adult Sources of Self-Esteem Inventory – ASSEI (Elovson, Fleming, 1989). The Inventory consists of 20 items, referring to two categories of self-concept: independent self-concept and interdependent self-concept. On a ten-point Likert-type scale, the participants rate the degree of content in various areas of their lives. These areas cover several aspects of self-concept, e.g., physical, social, ethnic, family, intellectual, etc. The higher number of points indicates a better self-concept. In our research the Cronbach's α for the entire questionnaire was 0.85, for independent self-concept it was 0.83 and for interdependent self-concept it was 0.70.

Level of self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale – RSES (Rosenberg, 1965). It consists of 10 items by which the level of global self-esteem is measured. An example of positive item: “In general, I am satisfied with myself” and an example of a negative item “Sometimes I feel totally useless”. Participants rate items on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The higher score indicates higher self-esteem. Scale reliability in our research was 0.85.

Instability of self-esteem was measured using the Instability of Self-Esteem Scale – ISES (Chabrol, Rousseau, Callahan, 2006). It contains 4 items based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale that refer to opposing thoughts or feelings towards one's own worth. The participants rate the degree these items are true for them on a Likert-type scale from 1 (absolutely not true) to 4 (absolutely true). The higher score indicates a more unstable self-esteem. In our research the Cronbach's α was 0.92.

Contingency of self-esteem was measured with the Contingent Self-Esteem Scale – CSES (Paradise, Kernis, 1999). The scale contains 15 items measuring the degree to which an individual's self-esteem depends on reaching certain standards, achievements and/or approval of others. The participants give their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (absolutely not typical of me) to 5 (absolutely typical of me). The higher score indicates a more contingent self-esteem. Kernis and Goldman (2006) report that the scale has internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.85$); the same coefficient was established for our research, and a considerable test-retest reliability ($r = 0.77$) as well.

Procedure

Participants filled out the questionnaires on a train, in the classroom, or over the

internet. Gender differences in average scores and their significance were calculated by nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test, since the distribution of scores was not normal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the field of self-concept, statistically significant difference between genders emerged only in interdependent self-concept (Table 1). The difference in independent self-concept was not significant. The detailed analysis of each item shows that there are some exceptions in this general finding.

The results show that in the area of self-concept males and females statistically differ especially in interdependent self-concept. Females have better interdependent and consequently, overall self-concept. There are no prominent gender differences in independent self-concept. Therefore, compared to males, females are more satisfied with themselves in the areas of relationships with others: partners, family, social environment, which is consistent with findings of many authors (Markus, Kitayama, 1991; Cross, Madson, 1997; Macoby, Jacklin, 1974; Clancy, Dollinger, 1993; Josephs, Markus, Tafarodi, 1992; Cross, Bacon, Morris, 2000; Gabriel, Gardner, 1999; Kashima et al., 2004; Kimmelmeier, Oyserman, 2001b). Higher interdependent self-concept can also be attrib-

Table 1. Median rank and statistical significance (p) of differences between men and women in self-concept calculated by Mann-Whitney U test

	Scale	Median rank		Z	p
		males	females		
Self-concept	Independent	160.63	174.50	-1.22	.222
	Interdependent	135.55	186.55	-4.49	.000
Overall		145.05	181.98	-3.25	.001

uted to higher agreeableness (as conceptualized in the Big Five factors of personality) in women, which was established by, i.e. a meta-analytical study of Guo, Wang, Rocklin (1995). Agreeableness includes the dimensions of altruism and affection, which encompass traits such as tender-mindedness, trust and modesty, and implies a prosocial and communal orientation toward others (John, Stivastava, 1999). These personality traits very likely contribute to better and more satisfying interpersonal relationship of women, which reflect on their higher interdependent self-concept.

The second finding of these previous research studies that males have a more developed independent self-concept was not confirmed on our sample. Males and females are equally satisfied with themselves in the areas of their individuality: appearance, physical fitness, intelligence, talents, etc. Maybe the reason for this lies in equal opportunities for males and females that allow both genders to become financially, socially and emotionally independent, encouraging them to set and pursue their own professional and personal goals. At the same time, females preserved their sensitivity and care for others, which makes their relationships with others more satisfying. A great number of opportunities in the modern world might be offering females more satisfaction than before, and, at the same, confusing males, making them more insecure in comparison to past historical periods, resulting in greater equality between the sexes.

In Table 2 one can see the significance of differences between males and females on specific items of the self-concept measure. They reveal in a greater detail in which areas of life the difference in their self-concepts exists.

Table 2 shows that males and females differ significantly in social skills, being a good person, being a responsible citizen, honesty with others, family responsibility, spiritual convictions and education. There are no gender differences in looks and attractiveness, physical condition, clothing and appearance, firm convictions, intelligence, cultural knowledge, money and possessions, goal attainment, influence, love relationships, family relationships and social position.

Closer look at dimensions of self-concept thus reveals that women more than men are satisfied with their popularity, ability to get along with others, their friendliness and helpfulness, but also honesty and truthfulness in dealing with others. Women rate themselves higher on law abiding, being a good parent, spouse, daughter, sister or similar. These differences in interdependent self-concept resemble the stereotypes that people have about males and females. For the Slovenian population these stereotypes are shown precisely in a research study by Avsec (2002). The compatibility of stereotypes with real differences in self-concept of males and females was already established by Eagly's (1995) meta-analytical research. We can connect the greater satisfaction of women in these areas with altruism and affection as personality traits (agreeableness in the Big Five), which have proven to be higher in females.

Although the majority of the significant differences are in the interdependent self-concept, men and women do not differ in satisfaction with love and family relationships and the influence that they have over the events or people in their lives. The satisfaction with relationships is not so much dependent on one person, so the character-

Table 2. Median rank and statistical significance (p) of differences between men and women in facets of self-concept, calculated by Mann-Whitney U test

	Median rank		Z	p
	males	females		
<i>Independent self-concept</i>				
Looks and attractiveness	169.60	170.19	-0.05	0.957
Physical condition	182.92	163.79	-1.71	0.088
Clothing and appearance	163.26	173.24	-0.90	0.370
Firm convictions	159.79	174.90	-1.36	0.174
Intelligence	159.08	175.24	-1.47	0.142
Education	145.58	181.73	-3.25	0.001
Cultural knowledge	158.77	175.40	-1.48	0.138
Talents and abilities	167.52	171.19	-0.33	0.744
Money and possessions	174.57	167.81	-0.60	0.549
Goal attainment	157.03	176.23	-1.72	0.085
<i>Interdependent self-concept</i>				
Social skills	149.22	179.98	-2.76	0.006
Being a good person	139.39	184.70	-4.14	0.000
Love relationship	157.07	176.21	-1.72	0.086
Responsible citizen	131.81	188.34	-5.09	0.000
Honesty with others	134.32	187.14	-4.90	0.000
Family relationships	162.08	173.81	-1.06	0.287
Family responsibilities	142.68	183.12	-3.68	0.000
Social position	173.66	168.24	-0.48	0.630
Influence	166.24	171.81	-0.50	0.618
Spiritual convictions	143.48	182.74	-3.49	0.001

istics of both sexes shape the relationship. Social status and influence on people and events are quite individualistic areas, even though they include other people.

Gender differences in the areas of independent self-concept are not significant, except for level of education, with which women are also more satisfied than men. This can be a consequence of more women getting a higher education, which in Slovenia is dependent on the high school achievements, where females on average

reach higher scores (Kobal Grum, Lebarič, Kolenc, 2004).

In the area of self-esteem there are no important gender differences, although we assumed that there would be. This is true for the level of self-esteem as well as for contingency and instability of self-esteem.

Males value themselves, are proud of themselves and feel worthy and useful just as much as females do. The same was already established on a sample of Slovenian secondary school students by Kobal Grum

et al. in 2004 and by Marčič in 2006. However, meta-analyses of other researchers (i.e., Kling et al., 1999) showed that many studies report higher self-esteem in males. The absence of important differences in self-esteem may be the consequence of previously mentioned equal opportunities for males and females, at least in central Europe, that has influenced their independent self-concept and also self-esteem, since the level of self-esteem and independent self-concept are strongly correlated ($r = 0.55$; $p < .000$; this research). Many people base their self-esteem on satisfaction with certain areas of their lives. This is also shown by the extent to which participants' self-esteem is contingent. On average, people base their self-esteem on satisfying certain criteria or standards (e.g., success, popularity with others, good looks, etc.) to a medium extent ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.60$, this research). Males and females did not differ significantly in overall contingency of self-esteem, so both sexes base their self-esteem on reaching certain standards to the similar extent. More specific look at these contingencies showed that there are important differences

between males and females only in basing their self-esteem on their physical appearance (women more than men). Their self-esteem does not, however, differ in depending on acceptance from others and the satisfaction with their own competence (see Table 3). These results seem sensible, since socialization and portrays of females in the media still give great attention to female's physical appearance.

Closely related to socio-economic factors are also the gender schemas, which are becoming more similar, with intertwined feminine and masculine characteristics in both sexes. Antill and Cunningham (1979) discovered that the masculinity in both sexes is correlated with self-esteem and as females are developing more masculine characteristic, the level of their self-esteem is becoming more similar to males. Avsec (2000), therefore, concludes that self-esteem is more dependent on masculine gender orientation than on biological sex. The absence of differences between sexes can also be attributed to relatively young and highly educated sample, so these differences could be more prominent in older population.

Table 3. Median rank and statistical significance (p) of differences between men and women in components of self-esteem, calculated by Mann-Whitney U test

	Scale	Median rank		Z	p
		males	females		
Self-esteem	Level	176.82	166.72	-0.89	.373
	Instability	155.30	177.06	-1.93	.054
	Contingency				
	Overall	158.34	175.60	-1.52	.129
	Appearance	150.86	179.19	-2.504	.012
	Acceptance	163.85	172.95	-.803	.422
	Competence	163.79	172.98	-.814	.416

A tendency that females have a more unstable self-esteem than males can be seen. Female's feelings of self-worth might shift more than male's due to daily events. Charbol, Rousseau and Callahan (2006) also found that girls have a more unstable self-concept compared to boys on a sample of 461 secondary school students, which is in line with the longitudinal study by Alsaker and Olweus (1992). This might be correlated to emotional stability or neuroticism (as conceptualized in the Big Five factors of personality), which was often found to be higher in females (Guo, Wang, Rocklin, 1995). Another potential explanation is a more contingent self-esteem of females in the aspect of physical appearance. Satisfaction with physical appearance can vary from day to day, and those whose self-esteem is more dependent on this satisfaction can have a more unstable self-esteem.

CONCLUSIONS

This contributing piece shows that males and females mostly do not differ in important personality categories like self-concept and self-esteem. Exception is the interdependent self-concept, where women reach higher scores on most of the facets. But even in interdependent self-concept, gender differences were not significant in satisfaction with close relationships, such as love and family, with social status and with the influence on other people and events. Although higher satisfaction of women with interdependent areas of their lives might be connected to their more altruistic and caring personality, the lack of significant differences in some areas show that satisfaction in certain areas of interdependent self-concept is related to actions of both, males as females, as is in

relationships. In the area of independent self-concept no differences between males and females were significant, except in years of education, where women reached higher scores. We attributed this to the structure of the participants, who were mostly young and well educated and to the fact that enrolment in university programs in Slovenia is dependent on high school achievements, where females reach higher scores (Kobal Grum et al., 2004). Lack of significant differences between males and females in independent self-concept we attributed to the equal opportunities that both sexes have, which enable females as much as males to reach their personal goals, develop their talents, work on their physical appearance, their financial situation and so on. This facilitates similar behavior, experiences and attitude towards oneself and the world. As a consequence the differences between sexes in self-esteem were also not significant. The exception was contingent self-esteem, where women reached higher score in establishing their self-esteem more on physical appearance than men.

We can conclude that the research confirmed only the most traditional and also fundamental bio-socio-psychological differences between genders in interdependent self-concept, whereas in other areas the gender roles might be more important than the biological sex, and these gender roles are becoming more and more androgynous, thus incorporating masculine and feminine characteristics in males and females. In order to make conclusions relevant for the whole adult population, the structure of the sample should be more representative in terms of age and education in future research.

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GENDEROVÉ ROZDIELY V KOMPONENTOCH SEBAHODNOTENIA A SELF-KONCEPTU

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Súhrn: Pre pochopenie ľudského správania je rozhodujúce vedecké skúmanie genderových rozdielov a podobností. V našom výskume sme sa zamerali na niektoré kľúčové koncepcie ľudského fungovania, ktoré súvisia s nespočetným množstvom fenoménov: self-koncept a jeho komponenty. Do výskumu sme zahrnuli koncepcie týkajúce sa genderových rozdielov, ktoré ešte neboli veľmi preskúmané, ako nestabilita a kontingencia sebahodnotenia. 339 respondentov vo veku 19 – 63 rokov vyplňalo nasledujúce dotazníky: Adult Sources of Self-Esteem Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Instability of Self-Esteem Scale and Contingent Self-Esteem Scale. Výsledky ukázali, že muži a ženy sa nelíšia v nezávislom sebahodnotení a self-koncepte (úroveň, stabilita, alebo kontingencia). Signifikantné rozdiely sme našli vo vzájomne závislom self-koncepte, pri ktorom sa prejavovali účinky fundamentálneho bio-socio-psychologického vplyvu. Ďalšie signifikantné rozdiely boli v jednom z aspektov nezávislého self-konceptu a v jednom aspekte kontingentného sebahodnotenia.