

No difference in women's and men's self-esteem in youth and early adulthood, study finds

July 14 2011

Self-esteem increases during adolescence, then slows in young adulthood, but contrary to popular belief, there is no significant difference between men's and women's self-esteem during either of those life phases, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

In addition, the researchers found that in adolescence, Hispanics had lower self-esteem than blacks or non-Hispanic whites, but Hispanics' self-esteem increased more strongly so that by age 30, they had higher self-esteem than whites. Indeed, at age 30, whites also trailed blacks in self-esteem, according to the study, published online in APA's [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#).

Researchers at the University of Basel in Switzerland looked at data from the Young Adults section of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a U.S. national probability survey that was started in 1979 and included an oversampling of blacks and Hispanics. The sample consisted of 7,100 individuals age 14-30. Forty-nine percent were female; 37 percent were white, 32 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic; and 11 percent other ethnicities. The participants were assessed every two years from 1994 to 2008.

The researchers, led by Ruth Yasemin Erol, MSc, tested how five personality traits -- openness, conscientiousness, extraversion,

[agreeableness](#) and neuroticism -- affect self-esteem. In addition, they looked at subjects' sense of life mastery, risk-taking tendencies, gender, ethnicity, health and income.

"We tested for factors that we thought would have an impact on how self-esteem develops," Erol said. "Understanding the trajectory of self-esteem is important to pinpointing and timing interventions that could improve people's self-esteem."

Consistent with prior research, Erol and her colleague Ulrich Orth, PhD, found that blacks have higher self-esteem than whites in both adolescence and [young adulthood](#). Even when they controlled for a sense of mastery, or the perception of control over one's life, the researchers found ethnic differences remained. The same was true regarding mastery when they compared the self-esteem of men and women.

"The converging evidence on gender similarity in self-esteem is important because false beliefs in gender differences in self-esteem may carry substantial costs," Erol said. "For example, parents, teachers and counselors may overlook self-esteem problems in male adolescents and young men because of the widespread belief that men have higher self-esteem than women have."

Mastery had a strong positive effect on the subjects' level of self-esteem, according to the study. In contrast, income did not influence the level or shape of the self-esteem trajectory in adolescence and young adulthood, the researchers found.

"The present research suggests that, in particular, emotional stability, extraversion, conscientiousness and a sense of mastery are important predictors of the self-esteem trajectory in adolescence and young adulthood," they wrote.

More information: "Self-Esteem Development From Age 14 to 30 Years: A Longitudinal Study," Ruth Yasemin Erol, PhD, and Ulrich Orth, PhD, University of Basel; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 101, No. 3.

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: No difference in women's and men's self-esteem in youth and early adulthood, study finds (2011, July 14) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-07-difference-women-men-self-esteem-youth.html>

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