

Self-esteem gender gap more pronounced in western nations

4 January 2016

People worldwide tend to gain self-esteem as they grow older, and men generally have higher levels of self-esteem than women, but this self-esteem gender gap is more pronounced in Western industrialized countries, according to research published by the American Psychological Association.

"During the past two decades, a large number of studies on age and [gender](#) differences in [self-esteem](#) have found that [men](#) have higher self-esteem than women and that both men and women show age-graded increases in self-esteem. These robust findings would appear to provide a solid empirical foundation upon which researchers can develop their understanding of the mechanisms driving age and gender differences in self-esteem," said lead author Wiebke Bleidorn, PhD, of the University of California, Davis. "However, one issue potentially undermines this conclusion: Virtually all previous studies have only examined samples from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic countries. Our research aims to provide the first systematic cross-cultural examination of gender and age effects on self-esteem."

The study was published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Bleidorn and her colleagues analyzed survey data from over 985,000 men and women ages 16-45 from 48 countries. The data were collected from July 1999 to December 2009 as part of the Gosling-Potter Internet Personality Project. The researchers compared self-reported self-esteem, gender and age across the 48 nations in their study.

In general, the researchers found that self-esteem tended to increase with age, from adolescence to adulthood, and that men at every age tended to have [higher levels](#) of self-esteem than women worldwide. When they broke the results down by

country, they found some interesting results.

"Specifically, individualistic, prosperous, egalitarian, developed nations with higher gender equality had larger gender gaps in self-esteem than collectivist, poorer, developing nations with greater gender inequality," said Bleidorn. "This is likely the result of specific cultural influences that guide self-esteem development in men and women."

For instance, the [gender differences](#) were small in many Asian countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia and India, but were relatively larger in countries like the United Kingdom or the Netherlands.

What surprised the researchers most was, despite the cultural differences, the general trend across all the countries suggests that gender and age differences in self-esteem are not a Western idiosyncrasy, but can be observed in different cultures across the world.

"This remarkable degree of similarity implies that gender and age differences in self-esteem are partly driven by universal mechanisms; these can either be universal biological mechanisms such as hormonal influences or universal cultural mechanisms such as universal gender roles. However, universal influences do not tell the whole story," said Bleidorn. "The differences in magnitude and shape of gender and [age](#) differences in various [countries](#) provide strong evidence for culture-specific influences on the development of self-esteem in men and women."

These findings are important because up until now the bulk of research on self-esteem has been confined to industrialized, Western cultures where the gender gap is significantly greater, said Bleidorn. "This new research refines our understanding of how cultural forces may shape self-esteem, which, when worked out more fully, can help inform self-esteem theory and design interventions to promote or protect self-esteem."

More information: 'Age and Gender Differences in Self-Esteem - A Cross-Cultural Window,' by Wiebke Bleidorn, PhD, University of California, Davis, and Tilburg University; Ruben Arslan, MSc, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; Jaap Denissen, PhD, Tilburg University; Peter Rentfrow, PhD, University of Cambridge; Jochen Gebauer, PhD, University of Mannheim; and Jeff Potter, BSc, Atof Inc., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, published online Dec. 21, 2015.

Provided by American Psychological Association

APA citation: Self-esteem gender gap more pronounced in western nations (2016, January 4) retrieved 7 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-01-self-esteem-gender-gap-pronounced-western.html>

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