

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DOMAIN SPECIFIC SELF-ESTEEM OF ADOLESCENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of the present study was to investigate the role of gender in determining the level of domain specific self-esteem in student adolescents of ages between 13 to 18 years. 512 randomly selected school/ college going adolescents (males=273 & females=239) from educational organizations situated in urban area of Karachi-Pakistan were assessed through a group administration of Pakistani version of Adolescent form (Imran & Ahmad, 2011) of Culture Free Self-esteem Inventories-3 (CFSEI-3; Battle, 2002). t-test was computed for the analysis that shows significant gender differences in the domains of personal ( $t = 4.52, p < .001$ ), social ( $t = 2.53, p < .01$ ) and academic ( $t = -5.81, p < .001$ ) self-esteem, while no gender differences have been found in general, parent/home and overall self-esteem. Findings of the present research may also have significant implication in the future interventions for enhancing adolescent's feeling of self-worth and competence, which lead them towards achievement of positive self-growth and better utilization of their potentials.*

**Keywords:** self-esteem; domain specific; adolescents; students

### INTRODUCTION

Gender differences have been of great interest to researchers in the field of Psychology. Gender has an impact on various aspects of adolescents and can also affect changes in self-esteem during the adolescent years. Gender refers to “the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis” (Health Canada, 2000). A number of factors including biological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors contribute to influence an adolescent's personal development and self-esteem (Kearney-Cooke, 1999).

Gender-based beliefs are mostly derived from gender role stereotypes existing in every society. Great consistency in standards of desirable gender-role behavior has been found, both within and across different cultures. Eagly and Wood, (1991) have highlighted some expected characteristic features related to gender role. For example, Males are expected to be objective, independent, assertive, logical and competitive while females are expected to be more passive, sensitive, illogical, dependent, accommodating and supportive. However, a little change has been seen over the past twenty years regarding such beliefs within the developed societies and apparently around the world as well. Gender socialization has created expectations for the way women and men behave, think and feel about themselves. For women, one's family, peer support, reflected appraisals and family relationships are important determinants of self-esteem. Parental support and family connectedness are especially important for girls. On other hand feelings of mastery, self-actualization and academic performance are more important for males.

Due to above mentioned differences in criteria of gender role socialization; one should expect differences in the criteria of self-evaluation for both genders. Boys and girls or men and women both have different value system by which they judge themselves. As early as in 1965, a possible interaction between gender and self-esteem was observed by Rosenberg followed by many other research findings (Epstein, 1979; Block & Robins, 1993; Harter, 1999; Cairns, McWhirter, Duffy, & Barry, 1990; Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Quatman & Watson, 2001; Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989; Harper & Marshall, 1991; Steitz & Owen, 1992; Verkuyten, 1986; West, Fish, & Stevens, 1980; Kohr, Coldiron, Skiffington, Masters, & Blust, 1988; Mullis, Mullis, & Normandin, 1992; Lerner, Sorrell, & Brackney, 1981; Osborne & LeGette, 1982; Schwalbe & Staples, 1991). The consensus is that, even in childhood (Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander & Weinstein, 1990) gender is capable of influencing self-esteem to a small but measurable degree.

Two distinct concepts related to self-esteem with reference to gender differences are important. "Global self-esteem" which is "overall positivity of the person's self-evaluation" (Baumeister, 1998) and multidimensional aspect i.e. "Domain-specific self-esteem", describes self-satisfaction in specific areas (e.g., appearance, academics, social, etc). Self-esteem may vary considerably from one domain to another. Gentile and colleagues (2009) pointed that the small gender differences found in global self-esteem (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Major Sciacchitano, & Crocker, 1999; Twenge & Campbell, 2001) may be masking larger differences among specific domains. Thus, larger gender differences may be expected in domain-specific self-esteem than global self-esteem (e.g., Sondhaus, Kurtz, & Strube, 2001; Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1997).

Previous researches reported inconsistent findings on sex differences, in relation to self-esteem in adolescents. Females report lower self-esteem in adolescence (Cairns et al., 1990; Chubb et al., 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Quatman & Watson, 2001) while males may have higher global self-esteem than females (Alpert-Gillis & Connell, 1989; Harper & Marshall, 1991; Steitz & Owen, 1992; Verkuyten, 1986), or there may be no difference between the genders (Erol & Orth, 2011; Kohr, Coldiron, Skiffington, Masters, & Blust, 1988; Mullis, Mullis, & Normandin, 1992; Osborne & LeGette, 1982; Schwalbe & Staples, 1991).

However previous researches, especially in Pakistan (Rizwan & Zaidi, 2006; Khan, Imran & Rizwan, 2010) mostly addressed the differences in the level of global self-esteem but not in domain specific self-esteem, which is related to self-satisfaction in specific areas. There are also some evidences found in a recent meta-analysis of the literature related to domain specific self-esteem, by Sahlstein and Allen (2002) that women scored higher than men on comprehensive measures and on the cognitive aspect of self-esteem, but men scored higher than women on social and physical aspects, reflecting the significance of domain specific self-esteem. Thus the focus of this study was on highlighting the differences between male and female adolescents in various dimensions of self-esteem.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

512 randomly selected adolescents of age between 13 to 18 years (Mean age = 14.5 yrs) from the registered schools and colleges of Karachi with the Ministry of Education of the province of Sindh-Pakistan were assessed. Only those participants who were regular students, Muslims, Pakistani nationals, had both parents alive and living together, whose period of stay in same school/college was at least 1 year were included. Educational level of the sample ranged from 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Instrument

### Culture Free Self-esteem Inventories (Battle, 2002)

Adolescent form (age 13-18 yrs) of Urdu version of CFSEI-3 (Imran & Ahmad, 2011) was used in the present study. Responses are simply in “yes or no” format and have reverse scoring criteria. Its 67 items are grouped to create five subscales: Academic, General, Parental / home, Social and Personal. The subscale standard scores are summed to create GSEQ. Reliability estimate of original version of CFSEI-3 (Adolescent form) is .98 in test retest and .92 for cronbach’s alpha. Reliability of Urdu version of Adolescent form of CFSEI-3 in present study is .819 (test retest) and .851 (Cronbach’s alpha).

## Procedure

After survey of educational organizations, authorities of 20 schools and colleges allowed and gave their consent for data collection. Personal, academic and family related information of participants were obtained through brief interview and demographic form was filled in by the examiner. Adolescent form of Urdu version of Culture Free Self-esteem Inventories-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (CFSEI-3; Imran & Ahmad, 2011) originally developed by Battle (2002) was administered in group setting in classrooms.

## Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics and t-test was computed to explore gender differences on the variable of domain specific self-esteem were used.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Frequency distribution of sample characteristics**

<i>Sample Characteristics</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	273	53.32
Females	239	46.67
<i>Age groups</i>		
13 years	168	32.81
14 years	129	25.19
15 years	101	19.72
16 years	71	13.86
17-18 years	43	8.39
Mean age	14.46 years	

N=512

**Table 2. Independent sample t-test showing mean differences among male and female adolescents on the specific domains and overall self-esteem**

<i>Domains</i>		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Personal</i>	Male	7.272	2.85	4.521	.000**
	Female	6.141	2.78		
<i>Social</i>	Male	8.470	2.26	2.530	.012*
	Female	7.991	2.01		
<i>Academic</i>	Male	6.301	2.62	-5.811	.000**
	Female	7.541	2.20		
<i>General</i>	Male	7.540	2.04	.082	.935
	Female	7.525	2.23		
<i>Parent/home related</i>	Male	9.411	1.86	-.369	.712
	Female	9.470	1.73		
<i>Overall</i>	Male	38.99	7.77	-.473	.636
	Female	38.67	7.75		

N = 512, df = 510, \*\* = Significant at .001 Level , \* = Significant at .05 Level

## DISCUSSION

Analyses of the results indicate that males scored higher on the domains of *personal* and *social self-esteem* as compared to female participants, while on the domain of *academic self-esteem* females outperformed male participants in the present study. However no gender differences were found on the domain of *general* and *parent/home related self-esteem*.

These gender differences in various domains of self-esteem could be understood in the light of models relevant to the theoretical construct of self-esteem, for example Reflected Appraisal Model (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), Competence Model (James, 1890), and Social Comparisons Model (Festinger, 1954).

Reflected appraisal model predicts that “other people’s perception of us .... or of a gender as a whole, is a key component of self-esteem”. Gender differences exist in the areas where societal and cultural standards are based on specific gender based themes or gender role stereotypes. People mostly generate self-views by the endorsement of feedback from others in their interactions or relationship. Gentile and his colleagues (2009) stated that: *If someone's interactions with others around a particular domain are positive than they would have high self-esteem in that domain. If they are negative and judgmental however, self-esteem would suffer.* In traditional societies like Pakistan girls are less positively appraised in comparison to boys. Boys are encouraged more on even minor achievements due to stereotypic thinking pattern of the environment that males need more motivation and encouragement as they have to face future challenges in outside world in order to handle obstacles of life. Whereas,

females are usually expected and trained to adapt feminine traits like tolerance, flexibility and warmth to prepare them for a more compliant and submissive gender role. Impact of these practices lead them to a limited confirming roles; as it was found that girls tend to limit their expansive and authentic selves to be limited to socially ascribe female roles, which led to plummeting self-esteem (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1993). Conformity to the expected feminine role may itself be counterproductive to the development of a positive self-evaluation. Evidence pertinent to gender differences in self-views is suggestive that girls are more reactive than boys to evaluation by others (Nolen-Hocksema, 1990) and reflected appraisals are more important to adolescent girls than to boys (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1975; Rosenberg, 1986).

Another point of view related to gender differences in personal and social domains of self-esteem is the concept of "Physical Appearance" where females are often more scrutinized and discussed than males. Generally there are high set standards held for physical appearance especially for girls in most of societies, promoted by media messages as well as from family and friends (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Harter, 1993; Wertheim, Paxton, Schultz, & Muirs, 1997). Although the importance of this concept is crucial for both genders in terms of "how we are looked at by others", but appearance is more central to girl's self-esteem than boys as reflected by the findings of different researches where body image is found to be a stronger predictor of self-esteem in females than males (Allgood-Merten, Lewinsohn, & Hops, 1990; Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kilmartin, Forssmann-Falck, & Kliewer, 1998).

During adolescence, maintenance of stable and high self-esteem appears as a challenging task particularly for girls. Harter, (1990) mentioned about some of specific concerns that add burden to the task of self-development for girls, like concerns with peer acceptance, sensitivity to the conflicting social role expectations and effects of school change etc. Opportunity of socialization with peer group, freedom of expression, a long list of Do's and Don'ts after attainment of puberty actually bring almost a major switch in the life style of females. Thus a constant ongoing struggle within the self for adjustment in this new phase of life and maintenance of that image which is imposed by the societal and cultural values may often clash with the needs and values of the females of this age group and resulting in lower self-esteem in comparison to their counterparts.

In present study, females have higher academic self-esteem than males. The competencies model proposes that "*People draw self-esteem from accomplishment in certain areas*" and extension of this view indicated that gender differences would exist in those areas where actual performance of males and females differs. Thus, domains of Self-esteem which are performance oriented are more likely to reflect gender differences. Previous researches of different cultures indicate that an average girl earns better grades than the average boy and perform comparatively better in the area of academic achievement (Pomerantz, Altermatt, & Saxon, 2002; Stetsenko, Little, Gordeeva, Grasshof, & Oetlingen, 2000; Richardson & Woodley, 2003; Smith & Naylor, 2001; Tinklin, 2003).

No significant gender differences were found in the domain of general and parent / home self-esteem in this study consistent to the findings of Marsh (1990) and Burnett (1996). This can be explained by referring to the onset of "identity vs. confusion" stage (Erickson, 1968), where independence and increased reliance on and closeness to peers occur at the expense of parent relationship. Therefore both genders equally encounter similar problems related to this developmental stage thus reflecting no gender differences in this domain. Sample of the study consisted of school and college going children and self-worth of this group is reflected in the domains of academic, personal and social self-esteem because these are the domains where

adolescents prove their competence and generate realistic external feedbacks whereas the other domains are not emphasized at this stage. This point can be better understood in the light of “trait framework of self-esteem”. Turner and Turner (1982) categorized characteristic aspects of self-esteem as Private-domain traits and public-domain traits; the former refer to ‘domestic-supportive characteristics relevant to intimate interactions, while later to public-productive characteristics including those pertinent to occupational competence and success. Domains of self-esteem which reflect gender differences in this study are related to public domain traits. Thus the importance of other domains may not be contingent to their self-worth and may not be relevant to both males and females of this age group, thus reflecting no gender differences.

No gender differences were found on overall self-esteem of the sample which is contradictory to the findings of pre-existing literature (e.g., Chubb et al., 1997; Martinez & Dukes, 1991; Pipher, 1994; Quatman & Watson, 2001; Rizwan & Zaidi, 2006; Khan, Imran & Rizwan, 2010). The measure used in this study was multidimensional in nature and evaluated self-views in different domains of life. While most of the studies reflecting gender differences in favor of boys used measures that assess global self-esteem (e.g., Rosenberg self-esteem scale) items of the scale are more general and mostly associated with concept of masculine trait which might lead to response biases. Beside this, another important thing to consider is the fact that on CFSEI-3, overall self-esteem constitutes the scores of domains. As in present research, half of the domains represent gender differences while half were not, thus the total self-esteem may not depict any difference. We may conclude it as “Differences exists between the relative importance of information from different source models, which differ male and female self-evaluation criteria”

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