J Psychology, 1(1): 113-118 (2010)
PRINT: ISSN 0976-4224 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6292
DOI: 10.31901/24566292.2010/02.01.07

Developmental Trends in Self-concept of Urban Adolescents: Gender Differentials

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KEYWORDS Self-concept. Adolescents. Physical Changes. Sex Difference

ABSTRACT This study was conducted to assess the gender differences in the self-concept among urban adolescents (14-17 years). The study was based upon a sample of 200 adolescents (100 boys and 100 girls) drawn equally from four randomly selected schools of Ludhiana city. The results revealed that in total self-concept, gender differences were not significant because in domains like physical and intellectual self-concept males scored higher than females whereas, in domains like social and moral self-concept females were better than males. Age related differences in males were observed to be non-significant in total self-concept. In females, self-concept grew better with increasing age. Gender differences in the younger age-group were significant whereas non-significant gender differences were seen in the older age-group.

INTRODUCTION

Self-concept is an important concept of any child's development. As children develop a sense of self and interact with and gain experience in the world, their self-concept is affected. Self-concept is defined as the value that an individual places on his or her own characteristics, qualities, abilities and actions (Woolfolk 2001). Self-concept is the totality of a complex, organised and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinion that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Purkey 1988). It is composed of such elements as the perception of one's characteristics and abilities, the percept and concepts of the self in relation to others and to the environment, the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experience and objects, and the goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive or negative valence."

Self-concept has two aspects, the "I" Self and the "ME**"** Self. The **"**I" self includes Self-awareness, Self-continuity, Self-coherence and Self-agency. The **'**ME' self is a sense of self as an object of knowledge and evaluation. The 'ME' self consists of all qualities that make the self unique. These are material characteristics, psychological characteristics and social characteristics. The awareness of self comes through the gradual process of adaptation to the environment (Piaget 1969). It begins when an individual becomes aware of being a separate entity. Individuals with high self-concept tend to have confidence in their own abilities to make decision, expectations for successful outcomes and relationships that are characterized by respect and dignity (Tuttle and Tuttle 2004). Physical changes, skill developments, skill evaluations and multiple role expectations are the main sources for the development of self-concept. Thus, age is considered to be a very important factor in self-concept.

The self-concept is associated with four personal characteristics – temperament, motivation, intelligence and talents, which interact with social and physical environment changes in the individual's self-concept may occur at any time during life but specifically they occur at the beginning of each developmental phase. The period of early adolescence represents a period of turmoil and stress in terms of the self-concept. At this time, the individual tends to experience lower self-esteem, high self-consciousness and feelings of instability regarding the self (Rosenberg 1972). Later adolescence is characterised by the development of a more stable self-concept. In adolescent years, self-concept plays a critical role in general psychological adjustment among adolescents. Adolescents who have high self-image and self-concept are more likely to be accepted by their peers. Teenagers alienated from family and friends may joint cults or other extremist groups, take to alcohol and drugs and may be at a risk of depression and suicide problems that rise sharply in adolescence. Therefore, the present study intends to assess the developmental trends in self-concept among urban adolescents. Both girls and boys show very similar patterns of development. However, girls

do experience somewhat more intense and prolonged disturbance on the self-concept in early adolescence as compared to males.

RESULTS

The data given in table 1 presents the gender-wise distribution of adolescents in various levels of different dimensions of self-concept and overall total score of self-concept was also considered. The results show that more than half of the male and female respondents (76.5) occupied above average self-concept. None of the respondent from either sex was holding below average self-concept. All the respondents in this study were holding self-concept in one of three categories, i.e. average, above average or high level. The dimension of physical self-concept had a total of 56.5% respondents in the above average level in which 59% were boys and 54% girls. In the high level, there were higher number of boys (35%) than girls (26%) and the gender differences were significant (χ^2=5.86, p<0.05). The highest number of respondents in the high level were in the dimension of moral self-concept (45%) where the number of females (51%) were more than males (39%) in high level. The females having average moral self-concept were only 1% and males were 9%. This indicates that females had high moral self-concept with a significant difference (χ^2=8.16, p<0.05). The other dimension having a good number of respondents in high level (37%) and above average level (59.5%) was educational self-concept. Nearly equal number of males and females were there in high level 38% and 36% respectively and in above average level 62% and 57% respectively; thus indicating that males and females both had nearly similar educational self-concept showing non-significant difference between them (χ^2=1.55).

The dimension of temperamental self-concept had nearly similar number of respondents in both males and females. The number of males (35%) was more than females (30%) in high level of temperamental self-concept, but the difference was non-significant (÷^{2}=0.62). In social self-concept, more number of females were there in high and above average levels. Males in high level were 26% and in above average level were 56% whereas number of females in high level was 29% and in above average level was 68%. The gender difference in the domain of social self-concept was significant (÷^{2}=6.14, p<0.05).

The least number of respondents in the high level (14%) were in the dimension of intellectual self-concept. 67.5% respondents were in above average level which included 71% boys and 64 % girls. Boys held a higher intellectual self-

Table 1: Gender-wise distribution of adolescents across various levels in different dimensions of self-concept.

S.No.	*Dimensions of self-concept*	*Levels*	*Total (n=200)*	*Males (n_1=100)*	*Females (n_2=100)*	*÷^{2} value*
1.	Physical	Average	26(13)	6(6)	20(20)	5.86*
		Above average	113(56.5)	59(59)	54(54)	
		High	61(30.5)	35(35)	26(26)	
2.	Social	Average	21(10.5)	18(18)	3(3)	6.14*
		Above average	124(62)	56(56)	68(68)	
		High	55(27.5)	26(26)	29(29)	
3.	Temperamental	Average	9(4.5)	4(4)	5(5)	0.62
		Above average	126(63)	61(61)	65(65)	
		High	65(32.5)	35(35)	30(30)	
4.	Educational	Average	7(3.5)	5(5)	2(2)	1.55
		Above average	119(59.5)	57(57)	62(62)	
		High	74(37)	38(38)	36(36)	
5.	Moral	Average	10(5)	9(9)	1(1)	8.16*
		Above average	100(50)	52(52)	48(48)	
		High	90(45)	39(39)	51(51)	
6.	Intellectual	Average	37(18.5)	10(10)	27(27)	11.74**
		Above average	135(67.5)	71(71)	64(64)	
		High	28(14)	19(19)	9(9)	
	Total	Average	2(1)	0(0)	2(2)	3.25
		Above average	153(76.5)	74(74)	79(79)	
		High	45(22.5)	26(26)	19(19)	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage
* Significant at 5% level
** Significant at 1% level
The frequency of adolescents in all dimensions of self-concept in low and below average level was zero.

concept than girls with a significant difference ($\div^2$=11.74, p<0.01). Overall view of the self-concept scores showed that no male respondent was there in the average level of self-concept. Nearly three-fourth (74%) were in above average level and one-fourth (26%) in high level. This number was more than the number of female respondents in high level (19%) and above average level (79%). On the whole, 76.5% respondents had above average self-concept and 22.5 % had high self-concept. But on the whole the gender difference in self-concept was non-significant ($\div^2$=3.25)

The above results indicate that although in most of the dimensions, higher proportion of males as compared to females occupied high self-concept, yet the differences between males and females on the whole was not significant ($\div^2$=3.25). The dimensions of self-concept which showed significant differences reveal that in moral and social domain of self-concept, females had high number of respondents in high and above average levels and in physical and intellectual domains, males had a high number of respondents in high and above average levels. Therefore, the gender difference on the whole is nullified. Similarly, the findings are supported by the study of Crain and Braken (1994) in which no differences were found between males and female in their rating of global or general self-concept. However, males have higher intellectual and physical self-concept and female higher moral and social self-concept. The results were constant with the findings of Herner et al. (2004) which state male and female self-concept have differences which are minimal, accounting for small proportions of variations.

Table 2 shows the significance of differences in the mean scores in different dimensions of self-concept between males and females. There was no significant difference between the males and the females in the domains of temperamental (t=0.15) and educational (t=0.44) self-concept. The reason for educational self-concept being same can be because in subjects like English and social studies, girls have higher self-concept and in subjects like maths and science, boys have higher self-concept, so overall self-concept comes out to be almost same (Widaman et al. 1992). In physical self-concept, the mean scores of males (30.99) was higher than that of females (28.71) with a significant difference (t=2.25, p<0.05). This may be because girls at this stage are over concerned about their looks and boys on the other hand believe they have more athletic talent than girls, and they are more advanced and strong than girls in physical skills. In the dimension of social self-concept the mean score of females (32.29) was more than the males (30.07) with a significant difference (t=2.15, p<0.05). The reason for this can be because females are better than males on social relations.

Moral (t=3.44, p<0.01) and intellectual (t=4.46, p<0.01) dimensions also revealed a significant difference between the males and females. The mean score of females (32.51) was higher than the males (30.64) in moral dimension of self-concept. The reason being females in adolescent years have more social pressure to be morally good. Even parents pay greater emphasis that girls from adolescent years show good moral behaviour, so girls make it a part of their personality. Whereas, in the dimension of intellectual self-concept ,the mean score of males (29.12) was higher than the females (26.65). This may be due to the reason that males from adolescent years place more importance on their intellect. They are more career- oriented than girls at this stage and therefore have higher intellectual self-concept.

On considering the total self-concept, the mean score of males (185.45) was higher than

Table 2: Gender differences in mean scores of adolescents in different dimensions of self-concept

S. No.	*Dimensions of self-concept*	*Males (n=100)*		*Females (n=100)*		*t-value*
		Mean	*S.D. (±)*	*Mean*	*S.D (±)*	
1.	Physical	30.99	4.17	28.71	3.85	2.25*
2.	Social	30.07	4.10	32.29	4.37	2.15*
3.	Temperamental	30.22	3.94	30.13	4.08	0.15
4.	Educational	31.17	4.00	31.41	3.64	0.44
5.	Moral	30.64	4.49	32.51	2.54	3.44**
6.	Intellectual	29.12	3.69	26.65	4.12	4.46**
	Total	185.45	13.25	180.48	15.38	1.46

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

Table 3: Age differences in mean scores of male and female adolescents in different dimensions of self-concept

S. No.	Dimensions of self-concept	Males					Females				
		14-15.5 years		15.5-17 years		t-value	14-15.5 years		15.5-17 years		t-value
		Mean	S.D. (±)	Mean	S.D.(±)		Mean	S.D. (±)	Mean	S.D. (±)	
1.	Physical	31.20	4.86	30.78	3.38	0.50	29.96	3.85	30.06	3.77	1.70
2.	Social	29.86	4.27	30.58	3.93	0.87	29.14	4.88	31.12	3.58	2.30*
3.	Temperamental	30.18	4.11	31.79	3.45	2.92**	28.16	3.69	31.08	4.28	2.27*
4.	Educational	31.17	4.45	31.18	3.53	0.02	30.44	3.61	32.38	3.44	2.75**
5.	Moral	31.64	3.88	28.34	4.71	3.01**	31.92	3.36	32.10	2.54	1.97
6.	Intellectual	28.54	3.53	29.70	3.79	1.58	25.68	4.01	27.62	4.04	2.41*
	Total	185.14	13.10	184.76	13.31	1.86	175.40	15.97	184.56	13.04	3.48**

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

the females (180.48), but no significant differences were reported (t=1.46) because in some dimensions, males had higher self-concept while in the other dimensions, females had higher self-concept. A widely accepted cultural belief is that boys have much higher self-concept than girls, yet the gender difference is small. Girls may think less well of themselves because they internalize this negative cultural message (Kling et al. 1999).

Table 3 shows the differences in mean scores according to age for both males and females. In males, the mean scores in most of the domains remained relatively constant with age with no significant difference. Even the total mean score in both the age-groups was almost same (185.14 in 14-15.5 years and 184.76 in 15.5-17 years), with non-significant difference (t=1.86). The two dimensions which showed a significant difference were temperamental (t=2.92, $p<0.05$) and moral (t=3.01, $p<0.01$). In the temperamental dimension, the mean score of respondents in 15.5-17 years (31.70) was higher than those in 14-15.5 years age-group (30.18). Whereas, in the moral domain, the mean score of the respondents in 14-15.5 years (31.64) was greater than those in 15.5-17 years age-group (28.34).

So, on the basis of the above results, we conclude that self-concept in males is not much dependent on their age in adolescence. In some dimensions it's increasing, in some it's constant, while in others it's decreasing with age.

The trend in females shows that the mean score in all the domains of self-concept was increasing with age and the difference was significant in all the domains except physical and moral. The mean score of total self-concept in 15.5-17 years (184.56) was higher than in 14-15.5 years (175.40), with a significant difference (t=3.48, $p<0.01$). In the social dimension, the females in 15.5-17 years age-group had a higher mean score (31.12) than those in 14-15.5 years age-group (29.14), with a significant difference (t=2.30, $p<0.05$). The temperamental dimension also reported a significant difference (t=2.27, $p<0.05$). In the educational dimension also the females in 15.5-17 years had a higher mean score (32.38) than in 14-15.5 years age-group (30.44), with a significant difference (t= 2.75, $p<0.01$). The intellectual domain also had females in the older age-group having mean scores (27.62) higher than the ones in younger age-group (25.68), with a significant difference (t=2.41, $p<0.05$).

Table 4 presents the different dimensions of self-concept among respondents in the age group of 14-15.5 years and 15.5-17 years as a whole

Table 4: Age difference in mean scores of adolescents in different dimensions of self-concept

S. No.	Dimensions of self-concept	14-15.5 years (n=100)		15.5-17 years (n=100)		t-value
		Mean	S.D. (±)	Mean	S.D. (±)	
1.	Physical	30.13	4.50	30.57	3.58	0.77
2.	Social	29.50	4.58	30.85	3.76	2.28*
3.	Temperamental	30.78	4.22	30.58	3.89	0.35
4.	Educational	30.80	4.05	30.78	3.52	1.82
5.	Moral	31.93	3.62	31.22	4.22	1.28
6.	Intellectual	27.11	4.03	28.66	4.03	2.72**
	Total	180.27	15.34	185.66	13.25	2.67**

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

Table 5: Gender differences in mean scores of 14-15.5 and 15.5-17 years old adolescents in different dimensions of self-concept

S.No.	*Dimensions of self-concept*	*14-15.5 years*					*15.5-17 years*				
		Males		*Females*		*t-value*	*Males*		*Females*		*t-value*
		Mean	*S.D.(±)*	*Mean*	*S.D.(±)*		*Mean*	*S.D.(±)*	*Mean*	*S.D.(±)*	
1.	Physical	31.20	4.86	29.96	3.85	2.43*	30.78	3.38	30.06	3.77	0.59
2.	Social	29.86	4.27	29.14	4.88	0.78	30.58	3.93	31.12	3.58	0.72
3.	Temperamental	30.18	4.11	28.16	3.69	4.14**	31.79	3.45	31.08	4.28	1.03
4.	Educational	31.17	4.45	30.44	3.61	0.89	31.18	3.53	32.38	3.44	1.72
5.	Moral	31.64	3.88	31.92	3.36	0.03	28.34	4.71	32.10	2.54	4.88**
6.	Intellectual	28.54	3.53	25.68	4.01	3.78**	29.70	3.79	27.62	4.04	2.65**
	Total	185.14	13.10	175.40	15.97	3.33**	184.76	13.31	184.56	13.04	1.44

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

without considering the gender. It is evident that the mean score of self-concept in 15.5-17 years was higher (185.66) than in 14-15.5 years (180.27), and the difference between them was significant ($t=2.67$, $p<0.01$). Out of six dimensions of self-concept only social ($t= 2.28$, $p< 0.01$) and intellectual ($t= 2.72$, $p=<0.01$) dimension showed a significant difference. As the mean score in 15.5-17 years was higher, so the self-concept gets better with age. The reason for this may be because cognitive development affects the changing structure of the self. Children in late adolescence also gain a clearer understanding of traits as linked to specific desires and therefore as a cause of behaviour (Yuill and Pearson 1998).

Table 5 depicts the gender differences of the two age groups. A highly significant difference in self-concept of males and females in the age group of 14-15.5 years was noted ($t=3.33$, $p<0.01$). In all the dimensions males scored higher than females but the categories showing significant differences were physical ($t=2.43$, $p<0.05$), temperamental ($t=4.14$, $p<0.01$) and intellectual ($t=3.78$, $p<0.01$). The finding is supported by the study of Marsh et al. (1998) which revealed that males score higher than females in all areas of physical self-concept. In temperamental and intellectual self-concept also the mean scores of males (30.18 and 28.54) were higher than the females (28.16 and 25.68 respectively). Concluding the above results, males in 14-15.5 years age-group have a better self-concept than the females. This may be because girls in early adolescence are more concerned about their physical appearance and more self-conscious than boys. The results were consistent with the study of Oliva (1999) that young girls find it difficult to create a stable self- image and therefore tend to have difficulties during the process. The table further shows non- significant gender difference in the self-concept of adolescence in the age group of 15.5-17 years ($t=1.44$). This may be because the females' self-concept grew better with age and became similar to males. In all the dimensions of self-concept mean score were nearly same except the two dimensions i.e. moral ($t=4.88$, $p<0.01$) and intellectual ($t=2.65$, $p<0.01$) which were showing significant difference.

DISCUSSION

A widely accepted cultural belief is that boys have much higher self- concept than girls. On considering the total self concept, the mean score of males was higher than the females but no significant differences were reported. Girls may think less well of themselves because they internalize this negative cultural message (Kling et al. 1999). The results were consistent with the study of Crain (1996) according to which gender stereotyped expectations for physical attractiveness and achievement have a detrimental effect on the self- concept of many girls. In adolescence, they score slightly lower than boys in overall sense of self- worth, partly because girls worry more about their appearance and partly they feel more insecure about their capabilities. Further, morally and socially female scored better than boys. The reason being females in adolescence years have a more social pressure to be morally good. Even parents lay more emphasis that girls' from adolescents years show a good moral behaviour, so girls make it a part of their personality. Hay and Ashman (2003) were also of the same view that adolescent boys were less interested in close relations than girls. Rosenberg and Simmons (2000) also stated that girls in early adolescence are more conscious, more vulner-

able to criticism and more concerned with promoting interpersonal harmony. Overall, adolescents' girls are increasingly "people oriented" while boys "achievement and competence oriented".

As far as developmental trends are concerned, self- concept in males was not independent from their age in adolescence. In some dimensions it is increasing, in some it is constant, while in others it's decreasing with age. According to Erickson's theory (Erickson 1968), this age in adolescents is called identity crisis. Teenagers experience identity crisis as temporary period of distress as they experiment with alternatives. The results were supported with the views of Arnett (2000) according to whom for some people, identity development is traumatic and disturbing. By trying out various life possibilities with age moving towards making enduring decisions, young people forge an organised self structure. Development trends in self -concept of girls showed that self -concept gets better with age. The reason for this may be because cognitive development affects the changing structure of the self (Yuill and Pearson 1998). The results are also consistent with the findings of Marsh and Shavelson (1990) which state that age is positively related to mean scores on all dimensions of self -concept.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, it can be concluded that more than half of the respondents in both the gender-groups held above average self-concept. No individual in either gender was there in below average or low level of self-concept. Though the total self-concept of male and female adolescents was not significantly different, males manifested better self-concept in physical and intellectual domains whereas, females held better self-concept in social and moral domains. In males, total self-concept was almost consistent with growing age. In females, self-concept grew better with increasing age. Significant differences were seen in the dimensions of social, temperamental, educational and intellectual self-concept with the older respondents having a higher mean score than the younger ones. In 14-15.5 years age-group, significant gender differences were observed. The domains of physical, temperamental and intellectual self-concept report significant gender differences. Whereas, in the age-group of 15.5-17 years, the gender differences were non-significant. In younger years self-concept showed significant gender differences with males having a better self-concept than females. In the older years this gender difference is non-significant because male self-concept remained constant with age whereas, female self-concept grew better with increasing age.

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