Differential Influence of Gender and Age on the Self-Consciousness of Adolescences in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Examining gender and age differences in self-consciousness is crucial for advancing social justice and reducing inequality. Therefore, the differential influence of age and gender on adolescents' self-consciousness was cross-examined in this study. The revised self-consciousness scale was used for data collection. Data was collected from 414 participants comprising adolescents (82.2% females and 19.8% males) with a mean age of 15.5. Data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferentially involving a factorial Multivariate Analysis of Variance. Findings from the study revealed that female adolescents scored higher in PrSC, PuSC and SA. Significant age differences were observed among participants aged 13-14, 15-16 and 17-18. The 15-16 age group scored higher than both the 17-18 and 13-15 age groups across all three aspects of self-consciousness. The study found that self-consciousness varies by age and gender, with females showing higher sensitivity and susceptibility across all aspects. This study has implications for adolescent development, social justice and the creation of a more equitable society.

Keywords: *Age, Gender, Private Self-Consciousness, Public Self-Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Social Anxiety.*

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of change in a person's life that is frequently characterised by excitement and challenges. Significant biological, cognitive, emotional and social transformations take place during this stage, which frequently causes the time to be viewed as a period of crisis or "storm and stress" (Hashmi, 2013). Individual adolescent expectations, demands and pressures from family, peers and society shaped by culture; the influence of social media and the impact of technological advancements all contribute to the struggles experienced at this stage. In addition, the physiological changes that characterise this stage as "storm and stress" exacerbate these challenges (Lawrence, 2021; Swartz & Wild, 2016). This is similar to how adolescents at this stage are collectively frequently worried about physical appearance, particularly susceptible to peer opinions, regularly participating in self-reflection and self-scrutiny, concerned about how others perceive them and anxious about peer acceptability. The fundamental struggle is building a sense of personal identity and resolving gender disparity as a result of the increased worry over social judgment (Moon, Jeon & Kwon, 2016). Additionally, adolescents frequently feel more self-conscious and believe that they are the object of social judgment (Rankin et al., 2004). Positive evaluation encourages healthy habits and psychological well-being, which aids in the successful passage from childhood to maturity. Negative appraisal, on the other hand, may result in subjective discomfort,

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identity formation challenges and misunderstanding about social and gender roles (Lawrence, 2021).

According to research by Moon et al. (2016) and Somerville et al. (2013), self-consciousness affects adolescents' behaviours, thoughts, emotions, and social interactions on a fundamental level. Self-consciousness is a ubiquitous phenomenon when people deliberately think about themselves as self (Millière & Metzinger, 2020). It includes awareness and judgment of oneself. The idea of self-consciousness can be comprehended from Argyle's (1969) description of it as the activation of the "self-system." This activation results in a shift away from judging the behaviour of others and toward a greater concern for judging one's own behaviour from both private and public angles (Fenigstein, 1979). As a result, when the self-system is inactive, people tend to think less about their own behaviour and how it affects other people. According to Rankin et al. (2004), the social environment and reactions with limited development can enhance adolescent self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is generally short-lived, like other interpersonal and social adaptations that go along with adolescent transitions, but it may be severe because it does not predict long-term psychological effects (Rankin et al., 2004). Therefore, maturity, which reduces self-consciousness and shifts people's focus to broader societal and global challenges, characterises late adolescence.

Additionally, according to Fenigstein et al. (1975), social anxiety (SA), public self-consciousness (PuSC) and private self-consciousness (PvSC) are the three dimensions of self-consciousness. Fenigstein and colleagues (1975) defined PvSC as the propensity to consider and attend to the covert aspects of a person that are private in nature and difficult for others to examine, such as attitudes, sentiments, beliefs, ambitions, emotions and ideas. As a social object that symbolises those characteristics of the self that are visible to others, such as acts, mannerisms, appearance, expressive traits and speech, PuSC refers to one's overt conduct or propensity (Davis & Franzoi, 1999; Rankin et al., 2004). SA is the third component of self-consciousness. Given that the subjective manifestation of SA assumes a focus on the public self, this requires a specific type of response to the PuSC. It is the feeling of oppression over how one is perceived by others in one's society or the uncertainty about one's ability to construct sufficient self-presentations (Fenigstein et al., 1975).

There may be gender disparities in how people experience and exhibit self-consciousness, according to several empirical investigations (Allgood-Merten & Hops, 1990; Goossens et al., 2002; Gould,1987; Moon et al., 2016; Rankin et al., 2004). Understanding these differences is crucial for fostering gender equality and promoting social value. The Kazakhstan government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), advocates for support in addressing the challenges of gender equality by developing regulations and a legal framework to achieve gender equality by 2030. Despite the success in implementing gender policies, Kazakhstan is slipping on the global gender gap index. One of the reasons for this decline may perhaps be the persistence of gender biases and stereotypes in social roles. This can be because gender self-consciousness has not received enough attention, especially among younger people. This is worsened by insufficient recent empirical evidence on gender difference and age in relation to self-consciousness (Somerville et al., 2013). Therefore, this article delves into the intricacies of gender and age differences in self-consciousness, examining the differential influence of gender and age on the self-consciousness of adolescents in Kazakhstan.

Gender and Self-Consciousness

Evidence abounds on the gender differences during the period of adolescence, as females have been found to exhibit higher levels of self-consciousness compared to males (Bluth, et al., 2017). This has become more evident given their response to physical changes and their interactions with peers and romantic partners. Hyde et al. (2008) aver that the increased self-consciousness experienced by female adolescents can potentially hinder the development of self-compassion, particularly as they grow older

and face more of these challenges related to their personal growth and relationships. This difference may arise from various social and cultural factors, such as societal expectations regarding femininity, the emphasis on appearance and body image and the socialisation processes that encourage females to be more introspective and self-aware (Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer, 1990). Although there is limited empirical evidence on gender difference and self-consciousness, the few that are available are rather too old or focused on other constructs other than self-consciousness. For example, in a study that was carried out by Vleeming and Engelse (1981), they found that female Dutch students had slightly elevated levels of self-consciousness and SA compared to their male counterparts. However, the differences in their scores were not statistically significant.

Gould (1987) conducted a study to investigate how gender differences affect the way individuals respond to advertisements and their levels of self-consciousness. The findings of the study revealed that there are variations between genders in terms of PuSC and SA, and these distinctions are especially prominent among younger females. In a longitudinal study conducted by Rankin (2004) among 393 adolescents, the result showed that females differ in self-consciousness from their male counterparts. Among several studies, other studies that have constantly shown the variation in self-consciousness based on gender include gender (Allgood-Merten, Lewinsohn & Hops, 1990; Elkind & Bowen, 1979; Goossens, 1984; Gray & Hudson, 1984; O'Connor, 1995). Common to all these studies is the fact that girls tend to score higher than boys on measures of self-consciousness. However, other studies (Adams & Jones, 1981; Goossens, et al., 2002) have found no significant gender differences in self-consciousness. Other related research that has confirmed the gender differences includes Murn and Steele (2020) who investigated age and gender influence on self-compassion among 299 sampled students comprising 98 men and 201 women with their ages ranging from 18 to 57 years in a southwestern American university. Findings from their study revealed some disparities in self-compassion based on gender and age after controlling for self-esteem. Chang et al. (2001) study revealed no significant effect of gender on gender-view expressions.

Age and Self-Consciousness

To the best of our knowledge, self-consciousness is not consistent throughout a person's lifetime as it undergoes changes associated with age. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research on this variation (Davis & Franzoi, 1991). Nevertheless, the limited available studies have observed differences in self-consciousness levels across different age groups. A cross-sectional study conducted by Garber, Weiss and Shanley (1993) discovered nonlinear relationships between age and self-consciousness, while adolescents around the age of 15 scored higher on self-consciousness than those below 15 years. Bogdan (2010) suggested that self-consciousness develops gradually in younger individuals and shifts from being extroverted to introverted as one gets older, indicating a developmental trajectory. Similarly, Somerville et al. (2013) demonstrated that adolescents' self-consciousness is influenced by age and sensitive socio-affective brain processes. However, Bluth et al. (2017) reported lower levels of self-compassion among older females compared to younger females and males of all ages. A more recent study by Ogihara (2020) found consistent age-related patterns in self-esteem for both males and females. When examining the research on age trends in self-consciousness, most studies suggest that self-consciousness transitions from a public focus to a private one as individuals age. This understanding can contribute to comprehending the social cognitive processes in adolescents and their potential impact on social roles in adulthood. Unfortunately, the statistical evidence supporting this connection has not been established, which emphasises the significance of conducting further research on this topic.

Aim

The aim of this study is to determine the significant variation in gender and age of adolescents in relation to the three domains of self-consciousness.

Methods

Design and Participants

A survey-based qualitative research approach was utilised to collect and analyse the data for this study. This method allowed for the collection of data that could be analysed statistically, providing a more precise understanding of the target population. The study included 414 adolescents who were both high school and university students at a selected university in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan. The sample was selected randomly, with 80.2% of the participants female and 19.2% male. The convenience sampling method was used for this purpose. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting a sample from a readily available population (Elfil & Negida, 2017; Jagers et al., 2017).

Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire comprising two sections was used. Section A sought the biographical information of the participants such as their gender and age. The second section consisted of self-consciousness measures. Self-consciousness was assessed using the revised version of the self-consciousness scale of Fenigstein et al., (1975) by Scheier and Carver (1985). The revised scale involves 22 items assessing private and PuSC, which also incorporates a measure of SA. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each of the 22 statements is like them on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'a lot like me' to 'not at all like me'. A pilot study was performed among 43 non-participants (teachers) of the study to establish the cultural compatibility as well as internal consistency of the scale. The scale was reported to be reliable, with Cronbach's alpha score of 0.89. Examples of the items include 'I'm always trying to figure myself out', 'I'm self-conscious about the way I look' and 'I usually worry about making a good impression'. The scoring procedure is as follows, items 8 and 11 are in reversed code. Items 1, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 17, 19 and 21 are for PvSC, items 2, 5, 10, 13, 16, 18 and 20 are for PuSC, while items 3, 7, 9,11,15 1 and 22 are for SA.

Ethical Considerations

The data collection process was conducted in accordance with ethical protocols and procedures. The participants were provided with an informed consent form, which they were given a week to review. Those who voluntarily chose to participate in the study signed the form and returned it. The confidentiality of their responses was ensured, and the information collected was used solely for research purposes. Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The study lasted for four weeks, during which five hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed. A total of 411 fully completed questionnaires were returned, resulting in an 82.8% response rate. The data collected was coded and analysed using SPSS version 26 software in accordance with international research ethics.

Data Analysis

The scores were assessed before conducting the analysis of the data to ensure that there was no missing or invalid data. The assumptions underlying the data analysis techniques (such as normal distribution, diagnosis of collinearity and homogeneity of variance) were then verified. The Multivariate analysis (MANOVA) test was performed. This is a statistical technique used to extend the analysis of variance (ANOVA) framework to situations where there are two or more dependent variables. In this case, PrSC, PuSC and SA were the dependent variables that were compared with the gender and age of the participants. If the between-group variations were significant, it would indicate that the means of the different samples were not equal. In this case, a post-hoc analysis would be required. However, if the between-group and within-group variations were approximately equal, there would be no significant difference between the means of the samples. The significance level was set at 0.05.

Results

The demographic features of the participants are presented in Table 1 as follows. The gender results showed that 19.8% were males and 80.2% were females. The age indicated that the majority of the participants were between 17 and years old (59.9%), followed by those who fell between 15-17 years (28.5%) and 13-14 years (11.6%). The school-level distribution of the participants was as follows: 59.9% were university students, while the remaining 40.1% of the participants were high school students. This means that the majority of the participants were university students.

Table 1: Demographic Features of the Participants.

	Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	82	19.8%
	Female	332	80.2%
Age	13-14 years	48	11.6%
	15-16 years	118	28.5%
	17-18 years	248	59.9%
School	High school	166	40.1%
	University	248	59.9%

The result in Table 2 reveals the multivariate analysis of variance performed to determine gender differences in self-consciousness. Three sub-dependent variables were considered: PvSC, PuSC and SA. The independent variable was gender. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted except for the Box's test that was significant at .019, which necessitate the choice of reporting Pillai's trace multivariate. There was a slight statistically significant difference between males and females on the combined dependent variables, $F (3, 414) =$ 2.65, $p < .05 = .048$; Pillai's trace $= .019$; $\eta 2 = .02$. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately using univariate analysis, no statistically significant difference was found between males and females in self-consciousness; PrSC, $F (33.344) = .199$, $p > .05 = .158$, $\eta 2 = .05$; PuSC, $F (21.998) = 2.030$, $p > .05 = .155$, $\eta 2 = .05$. However, the difference between males and females in self-consciousness was statistical significance on SA $F (77.486) = 7.125$, $p < .05 = .008$, $\eta 2 = .017$. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that females reported slightly higher levels of PrSC (M = 15.86, SD = 4.13) than males (M = 15.15, SD = 3.91); PuSC females (M = 12.82, SD = 3.32), males (M = 12.24, SD = 3.19) and SA females (M = 10.49 SD = 3.36) than males (M = 9.40 SD = 3.05).

Further, the result in Table 3 showed the multivariate analysis of variance performed to determine age differences in the self-consciousness of adolescents. All MANOVA assumptions were satisfied by checking for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted except for the Box's test that was significant at .000, which necessitate the

Table 2: Summary of Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) Analysis of Self-Consciousness Based on Their Gender.

Variables		Univariates					Multivariate				Descriptives			
		Type III Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.	η2	Pillai's trace				Male (n= 82)		Female (n= 332)	
							F	η2	Value	Sig.	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Gender	PrSC	33.344	1	.199	.158	.005					15.15	3.91	15.86	4.13
	PuSC	21.998	1	2.030	.155	.005	2.65	.019	.019	.048	12.24	3.19	12.82	3.32
	SA	77.486	1	7.125	.008	.017					9.40	3.05	10.49	3.36

Table 3: Summary of Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) Analysis of Self-Consciousness Based on Their Age.

Variables	Univariates					Multivariate				Descriptives					
	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	F	Sig.	η2	Pillai's trace				13 -14 years (n= 48)		15 -16 years (n= 118)		17-18 years (n= 248)	
						F	η2	Value	Sig.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PrSC	300.25	2	9.34	.334	.043					14.35	4.87	16.97	3.43	15.38	4.08
Age PuSC	593.41	2	31.31	.455	.132	11.295	.076	.153	.000	10.02	2.82	14.14	2.51	12.55	3.36
SA	158.78	2	7.03	.583	.033					8.92	4.12	10.99	2.52	10.19	3.40

choice of reporting Pillai's trace multivariate. There was a statistically significant difference among those whose ages were between 13-14 years, 15-16 years and 17-18 years on the cumulative sub-dependent variables, F (3, 414) = 11.295, p<.05 = .299; Pillai's Trace = .153; η2 = .08. When the results for the sub-dependent variables were considered separately using univariate analysis, no statistical age difference; 13-14years, 15-16 years and 17-18 years old in participants' self-consciousness; PrSC, F (300.25) = 9.34, p >.05= .334, η2 = .043; PuSC, F (593.41) = 31.31, p >.05= .455, η2 = .132, and SA F (158.78) = 7.03, p >.05= .583, η2 = .033. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that participants between 15-16 years of age reported higher levels of self-consciousness across all dimensions of the dependent variable: PrSC (M = 16.97, SD = 3.43) than those between 17-18 years (M = 15.38, SD = 4.08) and those within 13-15 years (M = 14.35, SD = 4.87). In the PrSC, participants within 15-16 years performed better (M = 14.14, SD = 2.51) than those between 17 and 18 years (M = 12.55, SD = 3.36) and better than those within 13-14 years (M = 10.02, SD = 2.82). Participants within 15-16 years reported higher levels of SA (M = 10.99, SD = 2.52) than those between 17 and18 years (M = 10.19, SD = 3.40) and better than those within 13-14 years of age (M = 8.92, SD = 4.12).

Discussion

This study examined the differential influence of gender and age on the self-consciousness of adolescents in Kazakhstan. The findings revealed a slight statistically significant difference between males and females in their self-consciousness. However, when considering the individual dimensions of self-consciousness, there was no statistically significant difference, except for SA, which showed a significant difference between male and female adolescents. This suggests that adolescent males differ from their female counterparts in terms of SA as a dimension of self-consciousness. The findings also indicated that females are slightly different from males across all domains of self-consciousness, including private, public and SA. This disparity may be attributed to societal pressures on females to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, maintain interpersonal relationships and adhere to gender-specific roles. Another possible explanation for the higher self-consciousness scores among females is the heightened scrutiny and objectification they often face, leading to increased self-consciousness in social situations.

Importantly, the higher levels of SA among females may result from their occasional inability to meet unrealistic social standards, which could further make them vulnerable to the persistence of gender biases and stereotypes in social roles. While men may feel pressure to exhibit characteristics such as strength, assertiveness, and emotional stoicism, which can limit their expression of vulnerability or introspection, women, on the other hand, may face expectations related to nurturing, empathy and physical appearance, contributing to heightened self-consciousness in these areas. These findings align with previous studies that have established gender variations in self-related factors such as self-esteem and self-compassion (Murn & Steele, 2020; Neff, 2015; Yarnell et al., 2015). These findings, in particular, support the study by Gould (1987), which demonstrated gender differences in PuSC and SA, especially among younger females. However, this present study disagrees with the study by Goossens et al. (2002), who found no significant gender differences in self-consciousness.

Further findings also revealed a statistically significant difference among individuals aged 13-14 years, 15-

16 years, and 17-18 years in terms of self-consciousness. Participants in the 15-16 age group scored higher in all three aspects of self-consciousness compared to those in the 17-18 age group and those in the 13-15 age group. This implies that middle adolescents have higher levels of self-consciousness compared to early and late adolescents, making them more susceptible to SA. Moreover, it can be explained that during middle adolescence, individuals become more aware of themselves both privately and in public, unlike the earlier years. However, this self-consciousness tends to decrease in later years as they prepare for adulthood. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Allen et al. (2012), Bluth et al. (2017) and Homan (2016). These studies support the notion that self-consciousness plays a role in social cognitive processes during adolescence and may influence social roles in adulthood (Ogihara, 2020).

It is reasonable to assume that the impact of self-consciousness is greater during middle adolescence, which aligns with Somerville et al.'s (2013) assertion that self-consciousness in adolescents is influenced by age and sensitive socio-affective brain processes. The study also supports Bogdan's (2010) findings that self-consciousness gradually develops in younger individuals and shifts from being extroverted to introverted as they grow older, indicating a developmental trajectory. It was also observed that participants in middle adolescence also scored higher in SA.

This outcome could possibly be because of negative appraisal of themselves due to peer rejection which on the other hand, may result in subjective discomfort, identity formation challenges and misunderstanding about social and gender roles, (Lawrence, 2021), since peer acceptance promotes social functioning and possibly reduced SA (King et al., 2018).

Implications for practice

Understanding gender and age differences in self-consciousness is essential for promoting social justice and eliminating social inequality in the contemporary world. Challenging societal norms and expectations that contribute to gender and age differences can help create a more inclusive and supportive society. Encouraging self-acceptance, body positivity and healthy self-expression can mitigate the negative consequences of excessive self-consciousness. The outcomes of this study have revealed the influence of age and gender on self-consciousness of adolescents which has implications for adolescent development, social justice and the creation of a more equitable society. By challenging age and gender stereotypes as well as promoting social consciousness among all age groups, psychologists, social workers, educational psychologists as well as sociologists have the responsibility of eliminating SA in adolescents so that they can freely express themselves and take social roles without any prejudice.

Conclusion

This study exposed the variation in self-consciousness of adolescents' age and gender in Kazakhstan. The study established a slight statistically significant difference between males and females in their self-consciousness. However, when considering the individual dimensions of self-consciousness, there was no statistically significant difference, except for SA, which showed a significant difference between male and female adolescents. The findings also indicated that females are slightly different from males across all domains of self-consciousness, including private, public and SA. Further findings also revealed a statistically significant difference among individuals aged 13-14 years, 15-16 years and 17-18 years in terms of self-consciousness. Participants in the 15-16 age group scored higher in all three aspects of self-consciousness compared to those in the 17-18 age group and those in the 13-15 age group. Based on the findings, this study has found that self-consciousness varies by age and gender, with females being more susceptible and sensitive to each aspect of self-consciousness. It is important that adolescents be exposed to psychosocial interventions or psychoeducational programmes that can help them creatively redirect their

attention to more socially benefiting skills including self-compassion, resilience, healthy social function and consciously participating in economic and political activities regardless of their gender and age. In addition, it is imperative that future research should focus on managing self-consciousness in adolescence by adopting non-clinical interventions such as emotional intelligence and social skill training.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Availability of data and materials

The data used in this work is not available publicly but could be provided by the author on reasonable request.

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