

Gender differences in developmental pathways on self-evaluation from adolescence into adulthood: The Flanders Longitudinal Study

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to look for possible gender differences in self-evaluation in adolescence, young adulthood, and full adulthood. Subjects were interviewed at three stages: in adolescence, 8 years, and 15 years later. Hypotheses were: (a) The connection between self-evaluation in adolescence and in adulthood is stronger in girls than in boys. However, for both boys and girls there is a strong connection between young adulthood and full adulthood ("the self-evaluation-triad" hypothesis); (b) The "schooling" factor has a different effect on the self-evaluation triad for boys and girls. Results showed that different psychosocial developmental pathways apply to boys and girls. Also, working girls with a negative self-evaluation in adolescence were more vulnerable to negative self-evaluation in adulthood.

Keywords: longitudinal research, developmental pathways, gender differences, adolescence, lifespan, self-evaluation, Belgium

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INTRODUCTION

The underlying idea in longitudinal studies is that the development from childhood to adulthood is guided by systematics. One of the ensuing hypotheses is therefore that in the development from adolescence to adulthood, certain lines or pathways of development can be detected.

Historically, this line of thinking links up with various theories of developmental psychology such as Erikson's (1). Such theories are mainly interested in rules on normal and 'average' development (2,3), whereas the present study stresses analysis of differential aspects. The question can be raised, for example, if the contribution of adolescence to later development is as significant for boys as for girls. To put it

differently: do girls and boys have their own typical pathways from adolescence to adulthood, and what is the specific relationship of self-evaluation in boys and girls during those stages? Strikingly, the relevant literature presents relatively few research data on this topic. For a high school and college sample, Jessor *et al.* (4) found no significant gender differences in psychosocial development from adolescence (14-19 years) into young adulthood (26-30 years). For both sexes, Jessor *et al.* (4) come to the following general conclusion: "Although important developmental change does occur, [...] the research makes apparent that there is considerable stability and continuity in that change. It would be safe to conclude from