

Gender and Age differences in the Perception of Personal Growth

Abstract

Posttraumatic Growth is the positive psychological changes a person may experience as a result of a stressful event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Small gender and age differences have been found across studies (Vishnesky, Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Demakis, 2010). However, studies have yet to find an explanation for these differences. One possibility is differences in how growth is conceptualized between genders, and developmentally. 196 American high school students and 324 Japanese students completed demographic information and generated three words indicating what Personal Growth meant to them. The 443 words were then condensed into 20 categories. Chi-squared tests found significant differences between nations, as well as some gender and age differences. These results suggest that there may be cross-cultural and individual differences in the perception of personal growth.

Introduction

Posttraumatic growth: Positive psychological changes resulting from a highly stressful situation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)

- Personal growth representative of changes experienced as posttraumatic growth

Small but persistent gender differences in amount of growth experienced, with women experiencing more than men (Vishnesky, Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Demakis, 2010)

- Are gender differences due to differing perceptions of what constitutes personal growth?

Youth are able to experience PTG in a manner similar to adults, but exact relationship between age and PTG unclear (Klimmer et al., 2014)

- As youth age and gain more life experience, does the perception of what constitutes growth change?

Participants	Americans 196, 37.7%	Japanese 324, 62.3%
Gender	125, 63.7% Female	193, 59.5% Female
Age	15.75 (1.13)	16.38 (.88)
Religion	137, 69.9% Christianity 35, 17.9% Unsure/Not religious 2, 1.0% Buddhist	13, 4.0% Christianity 266, 82.1% Unsure/Not religious 36, 11.1% Buddhist

References

Klimmer, R. P., Gil-Rivas, V., Griese, B., Hardy, S. J., Haislad, G. S., Alicic, E. (2014). Posttraumatic growth in children and youth: Clinical implications of an emerging research literature. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84, 506-518. doi: 10.1037/ort0000016

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G., (1996). The posttraumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9, 455-471. doi: 10.1002/jts.2490090305

Vishnesky, T., Cann, A., Calhoun, L. G., Tedeschi, R. G., & Demakis, G. J. (2010). Gender differences in self-reported posttraumatic growth: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34, 110-120. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01546.x

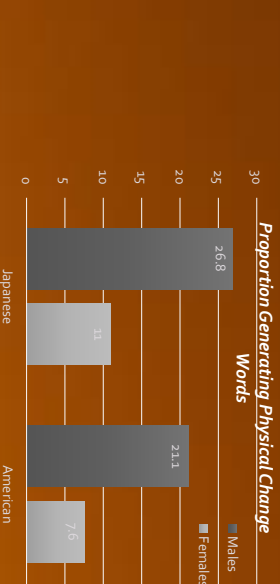
Dominick, Whitney. BS, & Taku, Kanako. PhD

Method

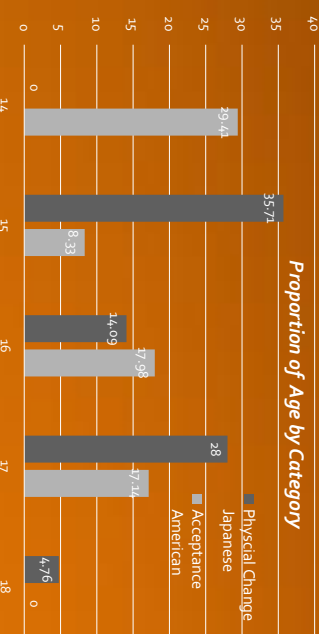
- Students completed: demographic information
- “Personal Growth” words
 - Generated 3 words indicating what “personal growth” means (443 words generated)
 - Words condensed into 20 categories by independent researchers, then re-assigned into those categories

Results

- Chi-squared test found significant differences between nations [$\chi^2(19) = 218.10, p < .001$]
 - subsequent tests run independently by nation
- Chi-Square test run on each category to test for gender differences in words generated
 - Physical Change significantly different
 - American: $\chi^2(1) = 6.16, p = .013$
 - Japanese: $\chi^2(1) = 9.34, p = .002$



- Binary regressions run to test for age differences in words generated for each category
 - Japanese: Physical Change: Wald (1) = 6.71, $p = .01$, Exp(B) = 0.64
 - American: Acceptance: Wald (1) = 6.52, $p = .011$, Exp(B) = 2.49



Discussion

- Gender only impacted “physical change” category, with males of both nations more likely to generate physical changes as representative of personal growth
 - Males stereotypically considered less mature than same-age females, perhaps impacting perceptions of growth
 - Males may focus more on stereotypically masculine gender roles (getting more muscular, taller, etc) when conceptualizing growth than females do
- Younger Japanese participants are also more likely to generate “physical change” words
 - As youth mature, growth is perceived as more than just surface level changes
- Older American participants more likely to generate “acceptance” words as representative of personal growth
 - Increases in maturity correspond with increased understanding that humans are fallible, and improved patience and understanding can also correspond to personal growth
- Limitations: Only included participants with 3 words indicating personal growth- strong understanding of growth could result in fewer words needed to describe
- Future Directions: Increase age range of participants and further investigate gender differences in perceptions of growth