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Significance, Structure, and Gender Differences in Life Domains of College Students¹

Marc R. Blais, Robert J. Vallerand, Nathalie M. Brière, and Alain Gagnon

Université du Québec à Montréal

Luc G. Pelletier

University of Ottawa

The purpose of this study was to assess the significance and structure of life domains of college students and to explore the patterns of gender differences on different indices of significance. Four hundred fifty-seven college students rated 21 life domains in terms of degree of importance, frequency of involvement, and level of impact. They also responded to a measure of global life satisfaction. Gender differences on significance indices were investigated by means of three types of analyses. First, gender mean ratings on 21 life domains were compared via one-way multivariate analyses of variance. Second, the underlying dimensions of the 21 domains for each gender were compared via exploratory factor analyses. Third, the correlation patterns between perceived positive impact of each life domain and life satisfaction were calculated separately for men and women. Within-group comparisons revealed that men and women shared the same nine most significant domains: education, friends, biological needs, leisure, family, health, couple, esthetics, and physical activities. However, several gender differences were consistently found in the three types of analyses. The results indicated that although traditionally feminine domains are rated as more significant to women than men, traditional masculine domains were rated as equally significant by men and women. Domains considered sex role neutral (e.g., personal planning) were rated as more significant by women than men. In general, women appear to experience greater cognitive, affective, and be-

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havioral aspects of significance in a wider spectrum of activities and as well perceive their general life satisfaction as deriving from a broader range of sources. Results also highlight the importance of assessing the degree of significance of life domains as an initial step in the development of multidimensional self-related constructs.

A growing amount of evidence points to the fact that the self is not only a global unitary construct but that it also includes domain-specific components. A multidimensional perspective on the self is reflected in psychological constructs such as self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979), perceived competence (Harter, 1982), perceived control (Connell, 1985), locus of control (Lefcourt, Bayer, Ware, & Cox, 1979), personal goals (Wadsworth & Ford, 1983), and subjective well-being (Andrews & Withey, 1976). A basic premise underlying the multidimensional approach to these self-related constructs is that a given construct should have representation and meaning in different significant life domains. For example, Harter (1982) and Connell (1985) demonstrated that children's perceived competence and perceived control can be differentially identified in social, cognitive, and physical domains. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) further demonstrated that children's self-concept can be divided into academic (e.g., English and mathematics) and nonacademic domains (i.e., social, physical, and emotional). Considering older populations, Wadsworth and Ford (1983) asserted that significant life domains for personal goals are work/school, family life, social life, leisure, personal growth and maintenance, material/environmental, and other/general.

A review of current multidimensional approaches to self-related constructs reveals little consensus as to what should be the significant life domains of the self. For example, there is no evidence, to the best of our knowledge, to ascertain that the social, cognitive, and the physical domains (e.g., Harter, 1982) are the most significant domains for children, or that both genders share the same significant domains. If multidimensional approaches to the self are to be pursued, a firmer empirical foundation for justifying assumptions regarding the nature of significant life domains must be established. Furthermore, it is often assumed in the literature that both men and women share the same significant domains. However, this assumption needs to be empirically demonstrated before implying equivalence of significant life domains across these populations.

Few studies have focused on the methodology to be used in order to identify significant life domains. Some have used affective ratings (e.g., Andrews & Whitney, 1976), while others have used more cognitive re-

sponses such as importance ratings (e.g., Flanagan, 1978). In the present study, we decided to investigate life domains by means of four criteria: three specific indices and a composite index of these three indices. The three indices that were used to assess the significance of life domains were importance ratings, frequency of involvement in each domain, and degree of experienced positive or negative impact of each domain. We used importance ratings because it is the most direct assessment of the perceived value of life domains. The frequency of involvement in each domain was also assessed because one may not necessarily perceive a given domain as important but may spend significant portions of time in this domain. Such a domain should thus be considered significant. The absolute value of the degree of experienced positive or negative impacts of each domain was used so as to provide additional evaluative information to the significance of a given domain. These indices were also selected as they represent cognitive (i.e., importance ratings), affective (i.e., perceived positive or negative impact), and behavioral (i.e., perceived frequency of involvement) components of life domains. Finally, the three indices were combined together to form a composite index of life domain significance.

In light of the above, the present study attempted to (a) assess the significance of life domains of college students, (b) compare the significance of life domains across genders, (c) compare the factorial structure of life domains across genders, and (d) compare genders according to the correlation pattern between perceived positive impact of life domains and life satisfaction.

METHOD

Identification of Life Domains

Twenty-one life domains were identified in a two-step process. In a first step, the five authors elaborated a list of all possible significant life domains. The list was constructed from previously identified domains in the literature. In the second step, a pilot study was conducted with 10 college counselors, 10 college teachers, and 10 college students. They were asked to evaluate the face validity of the life domains identified in the previous phase. More specifically, they were asked to indicate whether (a) any important domains were missing, (b) any of the listed domains were not significant, and (c) each domain was clearly defined and appropriately labeled. This process resulted in the identification of 21 potentially relevant life domains that were to be used in the questionnaire study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire presented the 21 life domains along with their definitions and examples. Subjects were asked to read carefully each definition. They were then asked to rate each domain in terms of (a) its importance, (b) the frequency of their involvement in the particular domain, (c) the extent to which the domain had a positive or negative impact upon them. The importance and frequency ratings were made on 9-point Likert scales. Perceived impact was assessed on a bipolar scale ranging from +8 to -8.

Subjects next completed the French version (Blais, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Brière, 1989) of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a five-item scale that evaluates global life satisfaction. The French version of the SWLS had demonstrated good reliability and validity across a variety of age groups, including college students (Blais et al., 1989).

Subjects

Subjects were 457 French-speaking students (229 males and 228 females) attending five randomly selected colleges in the Montreal metropolitan area. They had a mean age of 17.93 years ($SD = 2.64$). They answered the questionnaire in a classroom before the beginning of a class. All responses were anonymous.

RESULTS

Significance of Life Domains: Mean Comparisons

The average ratings of male and female subjects on each index of significance were compared through multivariate analyses (MANOVAs) using the 21 domain ratings as dependent variables. Kurtosis and skewness coefficients revealed that the data for all variables was normally distributed for both men and women. A MANOVA Hotellings T^2 was performed on each index of significance as well as on the composite index.

Importance. The Hotellings T^2 revealed a highly significant gender effect across the 21 domain importance ratings [$F(21,375) = 4.59, p < .0001$]. More specifically, univariate analyses revealed significant gender differences on 12 of the 21 domains (see Table I). Eleven of these 12 domains were rated as more important by women than men.

Frequency of Involvement. The Hotellings T^2 revealed a highly significant gender effect across the 21 domain frequency ratings [$F(21,406)$

$= 5.58, p < .0001$]. Univariate analyses revealed significant gender differences in 13 domains. In 12 of the 13 domains, females reported more frequent involvement than males (see Table I).

Perceived Impact. In order to assess perceived impact, we used the absolute value of ratings on the bipolar scale. Again, the Hotellings T^2 revealed a highly significant gender effect across the 21 domains, [$F(21,382) = 5.14, p < .0001$]. Univariate analyses revealed significant gender differences for 10 of the 21 domains. In all cases females indicated greater impact from these domains than males (see Table I).

Composite Index. The average Cronbach alpha for the composite index across the 21 domains was .75 with a range between .54 to .84. Reflecting the preceding results, gender differences were also evidenced on the composite index [$F(21,321) = 5.08, p < .0001$]. The univariate analyses revealed significant gender differences in 12 of the 21 domains with females scoring higher than males in 11 of the 12 (see Table I).

Factor Structure of Life Domains

The preceding analyses used mean comparisons to highlight gender differences in the significance of life domains. A second step was to determine whether such differences prevailed in the underlying dimensions representing the 21 domains. The data from the composite index were therefore submitted to principle component factor analyses with oblique rotations (oblimin) for the male and the female samples separately.

Male Sample. A six factor solution was revealed accounting for 56.7% of the variance. The factor solution is presented in Table II. The labeling of factors was conducted by a committee approach whereby four researchers independently labeling the six factors and then jointly decided on the final labels. The 21 domains are thus clustered under the following categories: leisure, self-management, couple, self-development, domestic obligations, and essential activities.

Female Sample. A six factor solution was also revealed accounting for 59.4% of the variance. The factor solution is presented in Table III. Following the same labeling process as with the male sample, the following categories were identified: social, self-management, leisure, couple, essential activities, and knowledge.

Correlations with Life Satisfaction

A third test of gender differences was to examine the relationship between experienced positive impact in specific life domains and global life

Table 1. Summary of Average Ratings of Life Domains and Gender Differences

Life domains	Importance ^a		Frequency of involvement ^a		Perceived impact ^b		Composite index	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Education	7.4	8.0 ^f	7.9	8.4 ^f	5.4	5.8 ^c	20.7	22.1 ^f
Friends	7.3	7.7 ^f	7.4	7.7 ^c	5.6	5.9	20.1	21.4 ^a
Biological needs	7.3	7.8 ^f	7.6	8.1 ^f	4.6	5.2 ^c	19.7	21.0 ^a
Leisure	7.0	7.4 ^c	7.0	7.2 ^c	5.0	5.6 ^f	18.9	20.2 ^a
Family	6.7	7.4 ^f	6.6	7.4 ^f	4.8	5.5 ^a	18.2	20.3 ^f
Health	6.6	7.3 ^f	6.1	6.7 ^f	4.6	5.2 ^c	17.5	19.2 ^f
Couple	7.1	7.5 ^c	5.6	6.2 ^c	4.8	5.2	17.6	18.9
Esthetics	6.2	6.7 ^f	6.3	7.4 ^f	3.9	5.0 ^f	16.7	19.3 ^f
Sports	6.5	6.1	6.3	5.8 ^c	5.1	4.5 ^c	17.8	16.5 ^c
Information	6.4	6.5	6.5	6.5	4.0	4.0	16.8	17.0
Physical activities	6.3	6.4	6.0	6.1	4.3	4.5	16.7	17.1
Personal planning	6.3	6.7 ^c	5.8	6.2 ^a	3.8	4.4 ^c	15.7	17.5 ^f
Significant other people	5.9	6.4 ^a	5.8	6.3 ^a	3.5	4.1 ^d	15.3	16.8 ^a

Work	6.5	6.5	5.4	5.6	4.1	4.2	15.9	16.1
Personal development	5.9	6.5 ^a	5.3	5.9 ^a	3.7	4.5 ^a	14.9	17.0 ^f
Sexuality	6.2	5.9 ^c	5.3	5.0	4.6	4.5	16.2	15.2
Personal administration	6.0	6.1	5.5	5.4	3.7	3.6	15.3	15.2
Transportation	5.4	5.3	6.7	7.0	2.9	2.8	15.1	15.1
Household work	4.8	5.1	4.7	5.5 ^f	2.9	2.8	12.4	13.4 ^c
Social/political involvement	4.2	4.2	3.3	3.4	2.6	2.9	10.1	10.7
Religion	3.6	3.8	3.1	3.4	3.3	2.8	10.0	9.8

^aScale = 1 to 9.^bScale = 1 to 8.^c $p < .05$.^d $p < .01$.^e $p < .005$.^f $p < .001$.

Table II. Factor Loadings of Life Domains for Male Sample^a

Life Domains	Factors				
	Self Leisure Management	Couple Development	Self Development	Domestic Obligation	Essential Activities
Significant other people	0.71				
Friends	0.70				
Sports	0.66				
Physical activities	0.66				
Leisure	0.61				
Personal administration		0.85			
Work		0.62			
Personal planning		0.61			
Social/political involvement		0.46			
Sexuality			0.79		
Couple			0.75		
Personal development				0.73	
Religion				0.64	
Transportation					-0.65
Family					-0.51
Information					0.49
Household work					-0.48
Biological needs					0.71
Education					0.69
Health					0.54

^aOnly loadings above .40 are presented in the above structure.

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Table III. Factor Loadings of Life Domains for Female Sample^a

Life Domains	Factors				
	Social Management	Self Leisure	Couple Development	Essential Activities	Knowledge
Friends	0.82				
Significant other people	0.74				
Personal development	0.62				
Family	0.56				
Personal administration		0.67			
Religion		0.62			
Work		0.57			
Personal planning		0.52			
Physical activities			0.89		
Sports			0.87		
Leisure			0.62		
Sexuality				-0.78	
Couple				-0.75	
Household work				-0.43	
Biological needs					-0.74
Social/political involvement					0.61
Esthetics					-0.57
Health					-0.47
Information					0.78
Education					0.69

^aOnly loadings above .40 are presented in the above structure.

Significance and Structure of Life Domains

satisfaction. Positive impact scores were computed by using the 0 to +8 range of the bipolar scale of positive and negative impact, and by giving a score of 0 to negative responses. Correlations between perceived positive impact of life domains and life satisfaction were computed. Results of these analyses are presented in Table IV. Average ratings for males and females on the SWLS were 23.17 and 23.61, respectively, and were not significantly different (t test, $p > .05$).

In the female sample, 15 domains were significantly correlated with life satisfaction whereas only 4 were found significant for the male sample. For women, life satisfaction was most strongly related to reported positive impact within family, personal planning, education, and personal development domains. For men, life satisfaction was most strongly related to positive impact within sports, family, and household work domains. Table IV indicates that the correlation between positive impact and life satisfaction was significantly greater for women than men on six domains: personal planning, education, personal development, health, personal administration,

Table IV. Correlation Between Perceived Positive Impact of Life Domains and Life Satisfaction for Males and Females

Domains	Women	Men	Z of difference between correlations
Family	0.31 ^a	0.17 ^c	1.60 ^a
Personal planning	0.30 ^a	0.11	2.12 ^b
Education	0.28 ^a	-0.02	2.86 ^d
Personal development	0.27 ^a	-0.09	3.92 ^d
Significant other people	0.24 ^a	0.10	ns
Health	0.24 ^a	-0.02	2.76 ^d
Friends	0.20 ^a	0.11 ^b	ns
Biological needs	0.19 ^d	0.11	ns
Personal administration	0.18 ^d	-0.05	2.43 ^c
Social/political involvement	0.17 ^c	0.01	1.70 ^a
Information	0.16 ^c	-0.06	2.33 ^b
Sports	0.14 ^c	0.19 ^d	ns
Household work	0.13 ^b	0.13 ^b	ns
Esthetics	0.13 ^b	0.05	ns
Sexuality	0.12 ^b	-0.04	1.70 ^a
Transportation	0.10	0.07	ns
Couple	0.10	0.10	ns
Religion	0.10	-0.08	1.91 ^a
Physical activities	0.09	0.06	ns
Work	0.06	0.08	ns
Leisure	0.04	0.10	ns

^a $p < .10$.

^b $p < .05$.

^c $p < .01$.

^d $p < .005$.

^e $p < .001$.

tion, and information. Marginally significant differences (p 's $< .10$) favoring females were found on four other domains: family, social/political involvement, sexuality, and religion.

DISCUSSION

The present study identified central life domains of college students. The composite index revealed that men and women agreed on the five most significant life domains: education, friends, biological needs, leisure, and family. Both men and women also included health, couple, esthetics, and physical activities in their top ten rankings. These results confirm previous assumptions regarding the significance of specific life domains. First, previous research has consistently stressed the significance of interpersonal domains for children, adults, and elderly populations (e.g., Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Connell, 1985; Harter, 1982; Shavelson et al., 1976; Wadsworth & Ford, 1983). Our results support the significance of such specific social domains for college students. Family, friends, and couple domains were found to be consistently salient across genders. Furthermore, the family and friends domains were among the most strongly correlated with life satisfaction for both men and women. These latter results replicate previous empirical reports (e.g., Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976).

Second, our results confirm previous assumptions that education and leisure domains should be included as components of multidimensional self-related constructs. The present study suggests that the education domain is not only central (e.g., Connell, 1985; Harter, 1982; Shavelson et al., 1976; Wadsworth & Ford, 1983) but is perceived as *the* most significant domain for both male and female college students. Furthermore, results substantiate previous conceptualizations recognizing the importance of a "physical" domain for children (Connell, 1985; Harter, 1982; Shavelson et al., 1976), and a leisure/recreation domain for adults (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Wadsworth & Ford, 1983).

Third, biological needs, health, and esthetics were also found to be highly significant domains in this study. We made a distinction between health and biological needs domains in that the former domain corresponds to "regular activities related to health care (e.g., following a diet, seeing the dentist) and/or treatments" whereas the latter corresponds to "essential activities related to survival (e.g., eating, sleeping)." Although such a distinction does not exist in the multidimensional self-related construct literature, the health domain has been shown to be significant for college students, adults, and the elderly (e.g., Wadsworth & Ford, 1983). The significance of the esthetics domain for both genders has received less attention.

The significance of activities directed at improving personal appearance is not surprising given the strong emphasis on physical appearance throughout the media.

Another important contribution of the present study is the identification of a consistent pattern of gender differences in ratings of domain significance. A portion of the specific domains that females rated as greater in significance could be identified as corresponding to traditional sex roles. Namely, the interpersonal domains comprising friends, family, significant others, and the couple domain all received greater significance scores from females. Also consistent with traditional feminine sex roles, the esthetics and the household work domains were judged to be more significant for females. However, the education domain, which could be considered traditionally masculine, received greater significance ratings from women than men. Although the sports domain was rated as more significant by men, other traditional masculine domains such as information, physical activities, personal administration, and work were ranked as equally significant by men and women. Hence, traditionally masculine domains, in general, were rated as equally significant by women than men. Other domains that were rated as more significant by females included biological needs, leisure, health, personal planning, and personal development. These domains are not easily categorized as masculine or feminine, but seem to refer to self-care and personal growth activities that are possibly more relevant to androgynous sex roles. These results would tend to support the contention that this cohort of college females adopt an androgynous orientation in their view of the significance of various life domains, whereas males seem to focus on more traditional masculine domains. We must nevertheless take these interpretations with caution as no measure of sex role orientation was taken. Furthermore, subjects were francophone students from the Province of Quebec and thus may not necessarily be representative of English-speaking American students. Future studies will thus be needed with different populations in order to assess the generalizability of the present results.

Response bias could also be an alternative explanation to the consistent higher average ratings given by females. However, the normal distribution of the data as well as the marked gender differences from the correlation analyses and the factor analyses seem to disconfirm this interpretation. In that respect, females' correlations revealed a far greater diversity of domains that are significantly related with life satisfaction, while for males the list of such domains is more restrictive. These results are consistent with the fact that females ascribed greater significance ratings across the majority of domains as compared to males. Female college students appear to experience greater cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of significance in a wider spectrum of activities and as well perceive their general life satisfaction as deriving from a broader range of sources.

Results from the factor analyses further indicated that even though certain domains were rated as equally significant by men and women, they may still possess very different underlying characteristics. Results pertaining to the education and the interpersonal domains (i.e., friends, other significant persons, and family) illustrate this point. These domains were rated by both genders as being highly significant on a within-group comparison. However, the loading patterns of these domains from the factor analyses presented very different underlying features. For males, the education domain loaded with biological needs and health domains to form an Essential Activities factor. For females, education loaded with information to form a Knowledge factor. The education domain thus appears to represent more of a "regular obligation" or "necessity" for men, whereas it is linked with a focus on knowledge for women.

Three interpersonal domains (i.e., friends, significant others, and family), which were judged to be highly significant by both genders, also displayed very different loading configurations. First, while females' structure revealed a Social factor by itself, the males' structure did not reveal such a factor. Females' Social factor included friends, significant others, family, and personal development. For males, the family domain loaded on the "Domestic Obligation" factor, while the friends and significant others domains loaded on the leisure factor. In sum, although the interpersonal domains and the education domain are among the most significant domains, their pattern of relations with other domains differed dramatically. In both cases, the pattern of these relationships seems to reflect a more instrumental nature for male as compared to female respondents. Such interpretation would be in line with recent studies showing that male college students, compared to female students, present greater instrumental motivations, and lower self-determined motivational orientations toward the education domain (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989) and the interpersonal domain (Blais, Vallerand, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989). A greater autonomy profile for females was also found with both French-Canadian and English-American students regarding their general causality orientation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, Lacouture, Blais, & Deci, 1987).

Other aspects of the present results may also be suggestive that our female subjects demonstrate a greater sense of self-determination and autonomy. For example, the data revealed that they invest (i.e., involvement, importance, and experienced impact) more in a greater range of life domains, several of which are developmentally important for autonomy (e.g., personal planning, personal development, education, friends, and health). Furthermore, global life satisfaction was also related with a wider possibility of activities (including the latter domains) than our male subjects. Our interpretation of females' greater autonomy profile is nevertheless speculative at this point and remains to be verified in future studies.

In conclusion, we believe this study helps establish the specific domains that should be included as components of multidimensional self-related constructs. Present results substantiate the value of assessing the significance of life domains as an initial step in the development of multidimensional self-related constructs. Methodologically, using three separate indices of significance, as well as the composite index, was shown to be a useful strategy. Each specific index was a rich source of information for comparing genders. The composite index, for its part, revealed to be a reliable and useful tool for identifying the least and most significant domains both within and across gender groups.

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Gender and Health on the Kibbutz

Ofra Anson, Arieh Levenson,¹ and Dan Y. Bonnef

Ben-Gurion University

Gender differences in health status and illness behavior have been explained in terms of sex roles and gender-related personality traits. It may be hypothesized that in a community that is committed to gender-negating ideology, where men and women alike participate in public life, and housework and child care largely collectivized, gender health differences will disappear. The kibbutz movement is committed to the ideology of the emancipation of women: women fully participate in the labor force and decision making. Nonetheless, women on the kibbutz are responsible for the housework and are concentrated in feminine occupations. The kibbutz, then, allows us to test the relationship between gender ideology and participation in public life vs. gender roles and tasks, and health. The health behavior, health status, and illness behavior of 230 members of two kibbutzim, one religious and one secular, were studied. Men and women report similar health status and illness behavior; parental status is not related to health; and marital status is related to psychological distress only. Similar patterns were observed for the secular kibbutz and the religious one despite the more traditional division of labor in the latter.

Sex differences in health status and illness behavior have been well documented (Nathanson, 1975, 1977; Waldron, 1982, 1983; Wingrad, 1984; Verbrugge, 1985, 1986a). Except for fatal chronic conditions, the rates of acute and chronic health problems are higher at all ages among women than among men (Verbrugge, 1985). Women are also more frequently involved in all types of illness behavior, such as days of restricted activity and bed disability days, and use health services and medications more often than men (Caffereta, Kasper, & Bernstein, 1983; Rossiter, 1983; Meininger, 1986).

¹Medical student, supported by the National Fund for Medical Education, 35 Kneeland Street, Boston, MA 02111.