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Comparison of self-perception between Slovenian, Finnish and Lebanese students

Primerjava samozaznave pri slovenskih, finskih in libanonskih študentih in študentkah

Abstract

A multitude of social changes, which take place from the local to the global level, have made the social systems highly diverse. People from different cultural backgrounds need to coexist, interact and cooperate at different social levels, from everyday life to the creation of state and world policies. Therefore, it is important to understand how people perceive themselves. The study presents a comparative analysis of the self-perception of Slovenian, Finnish and Lebanese students. We have found that students, regardless of nationality, use more individual than social self-descriptors. Next, the results confirmed that there are differences in individualist-collectivist cultures and

independent vs. interdependent self. On average, Slovenians and Finns used more individualistic descriptors (personality traits or states of mind, other people's judgement, preferences, etc.), while Lebanese had the highest number of social descriptors (social roles, group commitment, etc.). The self-complexity was the lowest with Lebanese students. The understanding of self-conception can benefit the individual's ability to adapt to the social context and to reflexively align his or her life paths to the desired goal. The understanding of self-content and complexity can also be useful for the correct design of therapy and counselling goals and procedures.

Keywords: self-concept, students, culture, individualistic, collectivistic

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Povzetek

Družbeni sistemi so zaradi številnih družbenih preobrazb, ki potekajo tako na lokalni kot globalni ravni, postali zelo raznoliki. Ljudje iz različnih kulturnih okolij so primorani sobivati in sodelovati v različnih družbenih kontekstih, od vsakdanjega življenja do vodenja državne in svetovne politike. Zato je pomembno razumeti, kako ljudje različnih kulturnih okolij zaznavajo sami sebe. V članku predstavljamo primerjalno analizo doživljanja sebe slovenskih, finskih in libanonskih študentov in študentk. Ugotavljamo, da študentke in študenti ne glede na narodnost pri opisovanju sebe bolj uporabljajo individualne kot socialne deskriptorje. Vseeno pa obstajajo razlike med individualističnimi-kolektivističnimi kultu-

rami oz. med posamezniki z neodvisnim oz. soodvisnim jazom. Tako Slovenci in Finci v povprečju bolj uporabljajo individualistične deskriptorje (osebnostne lastnosti, duševna stanja, preference, presoje drugih itd.), medtem ko zasledimo največje število socialnih deskriptorjev (družbene vloge, pripadnost skupini itd.) pri Libanoncih. Libanonci so sebe opredeljevali z najmanjšim številom različnih opisnik kategorij. Razumevanje samozaznavanja lahko koristi posameznikovi sposobnosti prilagajanja družbenemu kontekstu in reflektivni usmeritvi njegove življenjske poti k zelenemu cilju. Pomembno je tudi za vodenje in postavljanje ciljev terapevtskih in svetovalnih razgovorov.

Ključne besede: samozaznavanje, sebstvo, študentje, kultura, individualizem, kolektivizem

Introduction

»Who am I?«, is the question that defines one's self-concept (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Mead (1934) was one of the first debating the self-concept in his theory of symbolic interactionism. He defined self and self-concept as an object, for which each subject has a treatment plan and responds to it. Therefore, human behavior is organized and oriented as the product of attitudes that a person has about himself (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) and is related to self-respect, i.e. a component of realized dignity (Kleindienst, 2017). Gecas (1982) defined self-concept as the concept that the individual has of himself as a physical, social, spiritual or moral being.

For decades, the concept of self has been studied from several different scholar fields, such as sociology, psychology and psychotherapy. Sociology embodies the idea that the content and organization of self-concept reflects the content

and organization of society. Thus, it tends to focus on the antecedents of self-conceptions and typically looks for these within patterns of social interaction (Gecas, 1982). One of the influential social theories is Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and derived from it self-categorization theory (SCT; Reynolds & Turner, 2006). SCT explains how and when people define themselves as individual or group entities and examines the impact of this variability on self-perception ('I' to 'we') for the understanding of one's mind and behavior. Key contribution of the SCT is that the comparative social features that define one's social identity in a given context can also be applied to understand one's self-definition as an individual (Haslam et al., 2010).

Psychology, on the other hand, tends to focus on the consequences of self-conceptions, in particular on how these relate to behavior and motivation (e.g. self-esteem motive, consistency motive, efficacy motive). Besides a self, as it exists in the present, people also have an 'ideal self' that is the self they ideally want to be (Self Concept in Counselling, 2019). The human condition of experiencing incongruence between the self concept and the here-and-now experience of the individual results in tension, possible confusion, maladjusted behaviours and can even lead to mental disorders. This is the result of being subject to conditions of worth and introjected values leading to functioning from an external locus of evaluation. In psychotherapy and counselling, the therapist aims to empower the client to identify and possibly even break down the conditions of worth that have been adopted as truths. Another aspect of the therapeutic value of the self is its complexity. The self-concept is a central aspect of the person-centered approach to counselling. It basically means how people define themselves, for example, 'I am caring, I am cheerful, etc.. It is a fluid but consistent pattern of perceptions of the 'I' or 'me' in relation to the environment, personal values, goals and ideals' (Merry & Tudor, 2006). According to theories, there are individual differences in self-complexity, the extent to which individuals have many different and relatively independent ways of thinking about themselves (Linville, 1987; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Research has found that compared with people low in self-complexity, those higher in self-complexity tend to experience more positive outcomes, including higher levels of self-esteem (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002), lower levels of stress and illness (Kalthoff & Neimeyer, 1993), and a greater tolerance for frustration (Gramzow, Sedikides, Panter & Insko, 2000).

Self and culture

One's sense of who they are as an individual can vary depending on the social comparative context. Sociologists assume that self is acquired through social interaction and is a product of particular socio-cultural environments (Markus & Cross, 1990). Studies comparing the self-descriptions of students with North American or European backgrounds with those from Asian cultures have shown that the former were more likely than latter to describe themselves in terms of inner psychological traits (Bochner, 1994; Cousins, 1989) or emotional states (Rhee, Uleman, Lee & Roman, 1995). In addition, individuals with North American or European backgrounds used fewer social categories such as social roles or memberships than did those from Asian cultures, who were more likely to report their activities (Cousins 1989; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1990).

Markus and Kitayama's (1991) proposed two ways in which cultural diversity influences how the self is construed in relation with others (i.e., independent self and interdependent self). People of Western, primarily individualistic cultures are thought to have independent self-construals. The normative imperative of this culture is to become independent from others and to discover and express one's unique attributes (Miller and Goodnow, 1995). Achieving the cultural goal of independence requires construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. (Geertz's, 1975, p. 48). In contrast, many non-Western cultures insist on the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other and construe the self as relational, contextual, and as constituted by important roles and relationships (Kondo, 1990). A normative imperative of these cultures is to maintain this interdependence among individuals (Miller and Goodnow, 1995). Central goal of individuals with this self-construal is to maintain harmony in one's relationships and to occupy one's proper place. Such self-construals are most prevalent in collectivistic cultures such as those in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and many southern European countries (Heine, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Individual and collective-self-primacy hypothesis

Although the individual self (consisting of attributes that render the person unique from fellow in-group members) and collective self (composed of attributes that are shared with in-group members) are both fundamental, they may not be

equally meaningful. Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, and Iuzzini (2002) proposed that the individual self is the motivationally primary form of self-definition, which is defined as individual-self-primacy hypothesis (ISP). In contrast, the collective-self primacy hypothesis (CSP) suggests that the collective self is the more fundamental, is closer to the core of the self-concept, and is more central to human experience. According the CSP, people will regard a treat to the collective self as more severe than a threat to the individual self (Sedikides, Gaertner & O'Mara, 2011). There is also a third hypothesis - contextual-primacy hypothesis, which posits that neither the individual nor the collective self is inherently primary. Rather, the primacy of the individual or collective self varies as a function of contextual influences such as culture (del Prado et al., 2007).

Aim and scope

The aim of our research was to investigate whether Finnish, Slovenian and Lebanese students differ in their self-conception. More specifically, we wanted to find out, whether and what is a difference between nations in defining the self-concept according to the collectivistic-individualistic distinction and whether contextual influences such as culture play a role in forming the self-concept. We also examined whether the complexity of self (expressed by the number of descriptors) differ between nations. Finally, we studied whether there are transnational differences in self-concept according to gender. The results can be beneficial in order to understand how the self-concept is formed, whether it differs between nations and can contribute to a better formulation of therapeutic and counselling process.

Method

Participants

The sampling was stratified using convenience sampling within strata. The sample consisted of undergraduate students from:

- Lebanon (N=143, age: M=19,8, SD=2,25)
- Slovenia (N=62, age: M=29,17 SD=6,93)
- Finland (N=28, age: M=31,17, SD=7,59)

Sampling was done at the American university of Beirut (Lebanon), School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, University of Maribor, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and University of Applied Sciences in Savonia (Finland). We chose these nations because they represent different cultures: Eastern, ex-communist and Middle East cultural. The students were enrolled in the humanistic and social science studies (part or full-time study programmes). The students were highly motivated and interested in completing the test however, they often reported that the survey was not as simple as they had expected.

Instrument

We used the Twenty Statements Test (TST), developed, by Kuhn and McPartland (1954) for the researchers in the field of sociological and psychological research of self-concept. Lately, the test is gaining popularity within the intercultural (psychological) studies (Isbell, 2013; Santamaria et al., 2010; McCabe, Burns & Lair, 2013; Lam et al., 2014). It has particularly appealed to cross-cultural researches who argue that the individualistic conceptions of self-portrayed in instruments developed in the West are not appropriate for persons from non-Western cultures (Marcus & Kitayama, 1991). The TST has been shown to be especially useful for cross-cultural comparisons, as the format is more easily understood across a variety of cultures than other types of measures (Carpenter & Meade-Pruitt, 2008).

The original TST consisted of the main question »Who am I?« and 20 statements, starting with a general open-ended form »I am . . . « and the respondent had to fill out the empty space freely. It is not mandatory for respondents to give all twenty answers. The test usually only takes a few minutes. The test-retest reliability of the scale scores is approximately + .85 (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). In our case we narrowed them down to 10 statements. Namely, research has shown the TST may be even more effective with as few as 7 or 10 responses (Nudelman, 1973). Bochner (1994) found that respondents tend to give up after about 10 items, and if forced to go on, will either repeat themselves or give trivial answers. Moreover, Watkins et al. (1997) concluded that the number of responses made virtually no difference to the investigation of cross-cultural or gender influences on self-conception. Additionally, we asked for demographic data (age, gender and nationality) to perform the desired data analysis.

Procedure

The students were told that the purpose of this study was to learn more about how people from different cultures think about themselves. They were told that they would be asked the question "Who am I?" and that they should write down any answer they liked, as many as they wanted and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. After initial instruction, there were 10 lines with an open-ended sentence beginning with the "I am..."

Coding System

The test is unusual in utilising an open-question methodology, making the flexibility one of the advantages of the TST, but the non-straightforward coding one of the confusion. Self-concept content as evaluated by TST is described with various categories of participant descriptors, varying from 2 to 59 categories, depending on the researcher's interest (Wells & Marwell, 1976). There are several different coding systems or categories when considering the TST test (e.g. Kuhn, 1960; Kanagawa et al., 2001; Del Prado et al., 2007). Based on their review, we have developed the following categories used as a coding system:

- Individual descriptors (focused on the individual traits):
 - physical attributes (e.g. I am tall. I am brunette.),
 - personality traits, and capabilities (e.g. I am hard-working. I am smart.),
 - mental states (e.g. I am happy.),
 - nominal personal attributes (e.g. I am Nika. I'm from Beirut.),
 - preferences/attitudes (e.g. I am a coffee lover. I am against racism.),
 - activities/behaviors/habits (e.g. I am going to the gym regularly.),
 - aspiration and goals (e.g. I am a gay supporter.),
 - others' judgment (e.g. I am loved.)
 - Social descriptors (focused on the social constructs, i.e. roles and group commitment, e.g. I am a student. I am a member of our tennis club.)
 - Existential and abstract descriptors (e.g. I am what I am. I am universal love.)
- To ensure the reliability of the coding, all responses were coded by two fully bilingual coders. The coders individually classified each participant's answer in one of the predefined categories (described above). Their interrater agreement on the individual categories ranged from .96 to .98. The mismatched answers were discussed and divided after a common consensus into a certain category. Repeated responses were coded only once. Next, we have calculated the number of different answers and categories to obtain the information about self-complexity.

The calculations were based on the proportion and average of the absolute values of the responses in a given category, taking into account the total number of meaningful units provided by the participant. The SPSS statistical program was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used for basic data analysis and inferential statistics for the analysis of differences between groups. Since the data was not distributed normally, we used nonparametric tests (e.g. Kruskal-Wallis H-test or Mann-Whitney U-test).

Results and discussion

The results are presented in three sections:

- most frequently used descriptors by nationality
- distribution of the different descriptor categories by nationality
- differential analysis by gender

Most frequently used descriptors by nationality

Our first analysis examined cultural differences in the types of self-descriptors. The results showed (See Figure 1) that the Slovenes define themselves most often as family members (50% of all participants describe themselves with such a descriptor), followed by the gender description and the friendly persons. We see a moderately high value of the descriptors »hardworking«, »human«, occupation and »positive«. Lebanese students most often use descriptors denoting student (more than 60% of participants), nationality and family. Finnish students describe themselves with descriptors that denote family (72% of participants), being happy, being a student and define the relationship status.

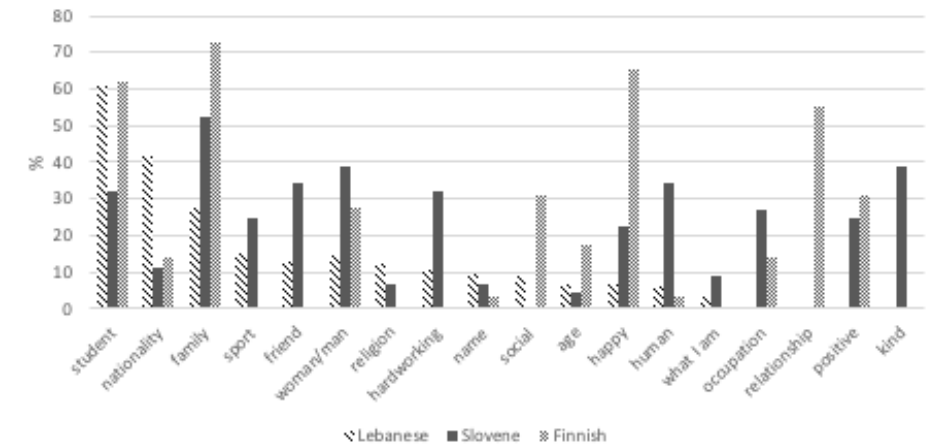
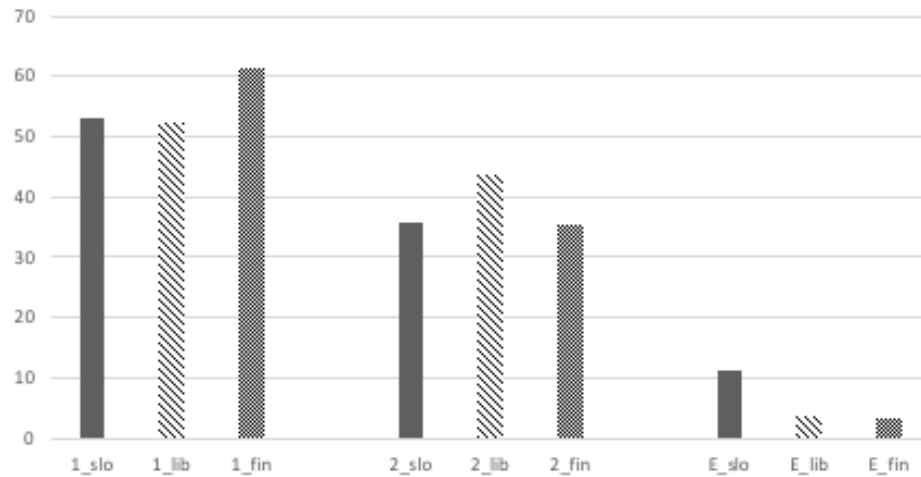


Figure 1. The comparison of the percentage of the most used descriptors according to nationality.

Figure 1 shows that Lebanese students describe their nationality more frequently than Slovenian or Finnish students. Finnish and Lebanese students often describe themselves as being students, while Slovenians do not use this descriptor often. Being a family member is a descriptor often used by Finns and Slovenes. As opposed to Lebanese and Slovenians Finns often use the descriptor »happy« and relationship status descriptors. The latter descriptors are not used by Slovenes and Lebanese.

Distribution of the different descriptor categories by nationality

First, we have checked how particular categories are present within each of the nations – both proportional and absolute.



Legend. 1=individual descriptors, 2=social descriptors, E=existential and abstract descriptors. Figure 2. The average percent of descriptors according to categories and nationality.

From Figure 2 we can see that all three groups of participants had the highest percentage of descriptors indicating the individual perspective. Within this category, Finns have the highest percentage, with over 60% of all responses being those with individual characteristics. The Lebanese had the highest percentage of social descriptors (over 40% of all responses), while the Slovenes have the highest number of responses reflecting existential descriptions.

Further analysis with a Kruskal Wallis test showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the nations in the ratio of individual attributes (e.g. traits, values, preferences, emotions) and social or collective attributes in their self-descriptions (individual descriptors ($H(2)=1,555$, $p=.460$); social descriptors; $H(2)=3,979$, $p=.137$; existential descriptors): $H(2)=4.913$, $p=.086$).

Next, we checked the average number of descriptors in a particular category among different nations. The results are presented in Table 1.

The average number of descriptors												
	Lebanese				Slovenians				Finns			
	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max
Individual desc.	3.86	2.860	0	11	4.73	3.409	0	10	5.28	1.811	0	11
Social desc.	2.69	2.054	0	10	2.81	2.776	0	10	3.07	1.791	0	9

Table 1. The average number of descriptors according to categories among different nations.

The average number of descriptors												
	Lebanese				Slovenians				Finns			
	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max
Existential desc.	.29	.720	0	6	.70	1.375	0	6	.031	.604	0	4

Table 1. The average number of descriptors according to categories among different nations.

The results from Table 1 show that the participants of all nations generally defined themselves most frequently with descriptors from the individual category, followed by the social category and the existential category.

When considering the average number of responses, the results showed statistically significant differences in the average number of individual descriptors between nations ($H(2)=8,865$, $p=.012$). Post hoc analysis showed statistically significant differences between Lebanese and Finns ($H(1)=37,442$, $p=.020$).

There were no statistically significant differences between the nations when considering the first attribute as the most important one ($H(2)=0.279$, $p=.870$).

Detailed analysis of individualistic descriptors

Within the category of individualistic descriptors, we have analyzed the existence and differentiation of specific descriptors between nations. The results are shown in Table 2.

The average number of descriptors												
	Lebanese				Slovenians				Finns			
	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max
physical attr.	.33	.528	0	2	.17	.423	0	2	.41	.733	0	3
personality traits, capabilities	2.17	2.389	0	10	3.89	.3173	0	10	2.62	1.568	0	7
mental states	.36	.783	0	5	.19	.396	0	1	1.38	1.083	0	4
nom.pers. attr.: name	.11	.338	0	2	.05	.215	0	1	.03	.186	0	1

Table 2. The mean scores of specific individual descriptors among students of different nations.

The average number of descriptors												
	Lebanese				Slovenians				Finns			
	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max	M	SD	min	max
nom. pers.attr.: origins	.03	.165	0	1	.00	.000	0	0	.07	.258	0	1
preferences/ attitudes	.52	.981	0	5	.24	.640	0	3	.24	.435	0	1
activities/ behaviours	.14	.438	0	3	.06	.246	0	1	.00	.000	0	0
aspiration and goals	.19	.605	0	5	.10	.429	0	3	.17	.468	0	2
others judgement	.01	.084	0	1	.03	.177	0	1	.34	.769	0	3

Table 2. The mean scores of specific individual descriptors among students of different nations.

From Table 2 we can see that physical attributes, mental states, origins, and other people judgment descriptions are most commonly used by Finns. Name, preferences, activities, habits, aspirations and goals are most often used in the descriptions of Lebanese students. Descriptors describing personality traits are most common among Slovenian students. The Slovenes use the least descriptors describing their origin; the Finns do not use activity descriptors, while the Lebanese use the least descriptors of other people's judgment. Within the individual descriptors the ones that refer to personality traits and capabilities are most frequently used by all participants.

Post hoc analysis showed that there were significant differences between nations in 4 of the 9 individualistic descriptors. Statistical analysis with a Kruskal Wallis test showed statistically significant differences between Slovenian and Lebanese students in the average number of personality traits ($H(2)=37.903$, $p=0.001$).

The differences are also significant for the use of mental states between Finnish and Lebanese students ($H(2)=69.243$, $p=0.000$) and Finnish and Slovenian students ($H(2)= -77.250$, $p=0.000$). If we analyze the answers for positive/negative valence, as proposed by Bond and Cheung (1983), the Slovenes are characterized by the use of the descriptor »kind«. Finns more often than the other two nations showed the presence of positive descriptors (happy, positive). This is not surprising, as Finland ranks high on the reports of nations happiness

rates, for example The World Happiness Report ranks Finland 5th, Slovenia 62nd, Lebanon 88th place (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs 2017); Happiness Equality Index Europe - Finland 1st, Slovenia 18th (European Social Survey 2015); Life satisfaction - Finland 5th, Slovenia 32nd (Better Life Index, OECD, 2017).

The Kruskal Wallis test showed statistically significant differences in the number of descriptors for judgements of other persons between Slovenes and Finns ($H(2)=-20.783$, $p=.000$) and Lebanese and Finns ($H(2)=23.654$, $p=.000$).

In summary, Slovenians and Finns used individual descriptors in combination with the descriptors relating to the roles within the family more often than Lebanese students. The results show that within individualistic cultures (Slovenia and Finland) individual descriptors with relations to close (family) members are more important than broader social participation and role. Cross et al (2000) similarly noted that membership in groups or collectives is relatively unimportant for Americans compared to East Asians, but that close relationships are an important aspect of Americans' self-concept.

On the other hand, the Lebanese used descriptors showing social roles such as student and nationality more often than the other two nations. These results are consistent with the study by Bond and Cheung (1983), which found that Hong Kong and U.S. participants have a higher amount of general psychological attributes and family subcategories than Japanese participants. Cousins (1989) also showed a higher amount of purely psychological attributes among U.S. participants (as representatives of individualistic culture) than among Japanese (as representatives of collectivist culture). The results are congruent with the study by Rhee et al (1995), which found that the European American self-descriptions were both more abstract and more autonomous than the Koreans, with Asian Americans intermediate results depending on the extent of Asian identification.

Differential analysis of variety of categories used among the students of different nations

We have further investigated whether there is a difference between students from different cultures, depending on the number of different categories of participants' self-descriptions (See Table 3).

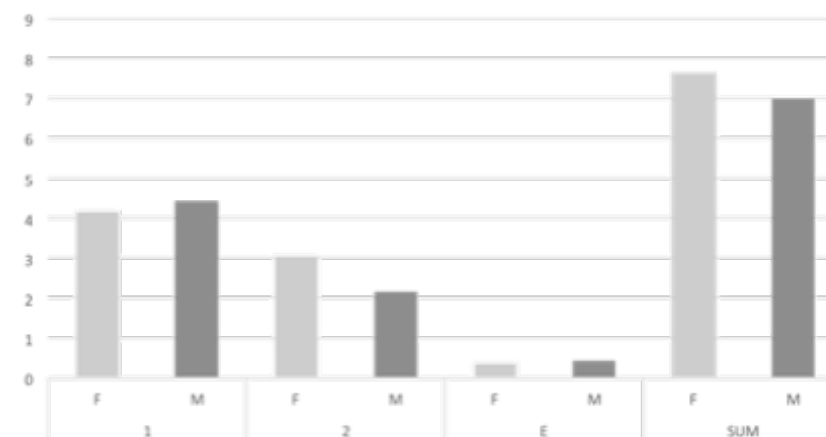
Nationality	Nr. of categories	
	M	SD
Slovene	8,24	2,493
Finnish	8,66	1,914
Lebanese	6,84	2,533

Table 3. The average number of categories used by students from different nations.

From Table 3 we can see that Lebanese students differ from Slovenian and Finnish students in the number of categories in which their answers were classified. The Kruskal Wallis test showed statistically significant differences between Lebanese and Slovenian or Finnish students (Slovene-Lebanese $H(2)=40.563$, $p=0.000$, Finns-Lebanese: $H(2)=49.441$, $p=0.001$). These results indicate that Lebanese students have lower self-complexity. The greater the extent to which a person makes distinctions among the attributes or features associated with various self-aspects, the greater the person's self-complexity is (Psychology, 2019). Baumeister and Vohs (2004) extended self-complexity to the realm of self-regulation. Those who are lower in self-complexity are more at risk of failure and therefore more motivated to escape from self-awareness following failure. People higher in self-complexity experience less negative emotional reactions following negative events, and consequently may also reduce the adverse health and mental health effects of negative stressful events. One explanation for our result is the lower average age of Lebanese students. From a developmental perspective (Evans, 1994), self-complexity is viewed as one of the primary features of development, and it is thought to increase with age. Contrary to the developmental viewpoint, clinical and personality perspectives focus predominantly upon the potential protective factors of self-complexity that carry into adulthood. Specifically, highly self-complex individuals are at less risk for depression and psychopathologies (Evans, 1994).

Diferential analysis by gender

In addition, we have checked how the data differ according to gender. Figure 3 shows how the data are distributed across different categories according to gender.

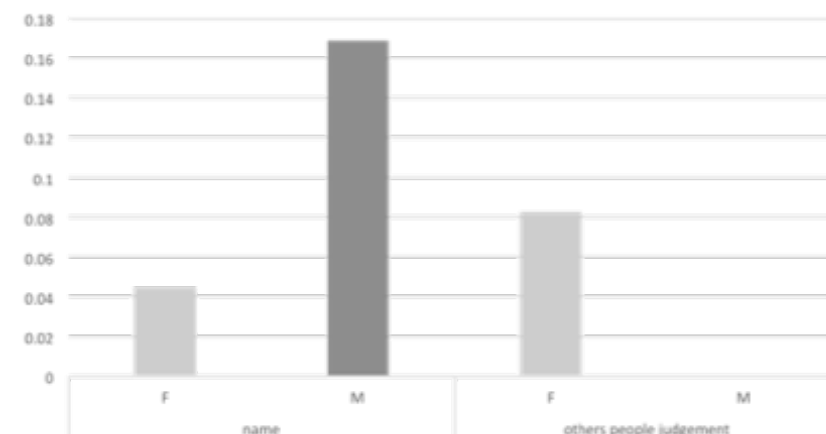


Legend. F=female, M=male, 1=individual descriptors, 2=social descriptors, E=existential and abstract descriptors.

Figure 3. The average number of descriptors according to gender.

From Figure 3 we can see that in general men used more individual descriptors than women, while women overtook men in the use of social descriptors. The figure shows that women generally list more self-reflective descriptors than men.

Further analyzes showed statistically significant differences by gender in the use of the descriptor »name«, which was used more by men than by women (Mann-Whitney $U = 3974$, $p < 0.05$ two-tailed) and in the use of the descriptor »Other people's judgment« in favor of women (Mann-Whitney $U = 4209$, $p < 0.05$ two-tailed) (see Figure 4).



Legend. F=female, M=male.

Figure 4. The proportion of the use of descriptors »name« and »other people's judgment« according to gender.

Our results are not congruent with the findings of Grace and Cramer (2002), who found no gender differences in sense of self, using TST. Results of our study show that there are gender differences in self-construct, supporting the context-primacy hypothesis, which states that self-concept is influenced by various contextual aspects. Our results support a cultural evolutionary perspective (e.g., Sahlins & Service, 1960), cultural and gender differences are unlikely to be characterized by the same dimensions of self. Based on the results, we can conclude that other's people opinion is more important for women than for men. This result is congruent with most theorists which agree that women are more relational than men (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986). Studies also show that women's self-evaluations are more responsive to the valence of the evaluative feedback they receive than are men's (Roberts, 1991). A more proximal explanation, lies in men's and women's different approaches to evaluative achievement situations. Men may be particularly likely to respond to the competitive nature of evaluative achievement and hence to adopt a self-confident approach that leads them to deny the informational value of others' evaluations. Women may be particularly likely to approach such situations as opportunities to gain information about their abilities (Roberts, 1991).

Conclusions

Our results do not support the collective-primacy but the individual-self-primacy hypothesis, which presupposes greater proportion and a higher average absolute value of personal than social (group) attributes in all cultures (del Prado et al., 2007). Similar findings have been confirmed in several studies (Triandis et al., 1990; Bochner 1994; Dhawan et al. 1995; Rhee et al. 1995; Ip & Bond, 1995; Kanagawa et al., 2001; Ross et al., 2005; Gaertner et al., 1999). One thing that can be perceived as a partially for contextual-primacy hypothesis is that there are differences between nations regarding the individual descriptors. Lebanese students used absolutely fewer individualistic descriptors than Finnish students, while there were no statistically significant differences between Slovenians and other nations. One of the reasons could be the transition of the Slovenian nation from a collectivist (communist) country and culture to a more individualistic one. . On the other hand, Slovenians and Finns (as representatives of individualistic cultures) showed higher values in some (but not all) individual descriptions than Lebanese students (as representatives of collectivist culture).

The analysis of descriptor diversity showed a less complex self with Lebanese students. A further examination of the reasons is necessary. When examining the results by gender, significant differences in the appearance of the descriptors of individual/social categories were found, suggesting that context variables correlate with self-concept. This supports the context-primacy hypothesis.

One of the main limitations of research on individualism and collectivism is that nations are treated as cultures (Fiske, 2002). In fact, Heine, Lehman, Peng and Greenholtz (2002) concluded that people from different cultural backgrounds in the same country have greater differences than people from different countries. Therefore, the data should also be analyzed according to specific cultures in each nation. Instead of cultural dichotomies, which are based on the assumption that cultures are internally homogeneous, externally distinctive, and geographically located, Hermans and Kempen (1998) emphasize the relevance of intersystem, mixture, travel, contact zones and multiple identities. Another important factor is media exposure (Kovačič et al., 2018).

The results are meaningful from different perspectives. Nowadays, social systems are highly diverse. People from different cultural backgrounds need to coexist, interact and collaborate at different social levels, from everyday life to creation of a state and world policies. The understanding of self-concept can benefit the individual's ability to adapt to the social context and to reflexively align his or her life paths to the desired goal. The intercultural understanding of content and complexity of self-concept is also highly valuable for person-centred therapeutical and counselling approaches in terms of understanding the needs and behavior of clients, the potential weaknesses that can arise from self-organization, and how therapy and counseling treatment can be properly adapted.

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