



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND SELF-CONCEPT

Mehmet Kanakⁱ,

Eyüpcan Yazıcı

Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling,
Faculty of Education, Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to reveal the relationships between middle school students' emotional expression levels and their self-concept, gender, and school types. It was conducted on the seventh-grade students of five middle schools in Sivas province in the 2016-2017 academic year. Relational survey model was used. The Emotional Expression Questionnaire developed by King and Emmons (1990) and adapted into Turkish by Kuzucu (2011) and the Social Comparison Scale adapted into Turkish by Şahin, Şahin, and Durak (1993) were used as measurement tools. No significant difference was found between the emotional expression levels of the females and the males. However, the females were found to have significantly higher social comparison scores than the males. A significant difference was found between the scores obtained from the Emotional Expression Questionnaire by school type. A low-level significant, positive relationship was found between the scores obtained from the Emotional Expression Questionnaire and those obtained from the Social Comparison Scale.

Keywords: emotional expression, social comparison, self, middle school

1. Introduction

Emotion means move in Latin (Koçak, 2002). The literature contains many definitions of emotion. One of these definitions was made by Lazarus (1984), who defined it as an individual's internal experience arising from his perceptions of the stimuli around him (qtd. by Koçak, 2002). Emotions help to adapt to the different situations encountered

ⁱ Correspondence: email mehmetkanak58@gmail.com, yazici.eyupcan@gmail.com

and enable to give reactions compatible with important opportunities (Uysal and Satici, 2014). Being an important part of the daily life, emotions affect psychological and physiological well-being as well. Repression, which Sigmund Freud lists among defense mechanisms, refers to how emotions transform into unwanted behaviors through distortion or exaggeration when they are not expressed. At this point, the importance of the expression of emotions becomes evident. This is called emotional expression. Emotions start to be destructive once they disrupt the balance of the mind (Goleman and Lama, 2003). Whether they are positive or negative, every emotion has a risk of disrupting the balance of the mind and being destructive. When the people in depression direct their anger out, they may display more developed behaviors than they are capable of; however, anger may lead to traumas and physiological harms when it is not managed well (Lazarus, 1991). What is critical at this point is to have emotional and behavioral balance. Though emotions are expressed with body language and facial expressions besides verbal expressions in the daily life, individuals want to keep them under control sometimes (Kuyumcu, 2011; İşleroğlu, 2012). Although such desire for control is helpful in some situations, it prevents the expression of emotions.

The expression of emotions may be shaped by how an individual perceives himself and his environment. This being the case, it is important to think on self-concept, which started to be discussed with the development of psychology and has been subject to intense research in recent years (Uran, 2016). It is the broadest concept about self as it involves all perceptions of an individual about himself (qtd. by Korkut-Owen, 2015 from Shavelson, 1976). That is, all statements starting with "I" and including the expressions "according to me," "for me" are about self-concept. Self-concept is a person's perception of himself. Previous research shows that self-concept is associated with parental attitudes (Sezer, 2010), and that the individuals having a positive self-concept have lower levels of depression (Erözkan, 2004). In other words, environment affects self-concept, which, in turn, affects the subjective well-being of the individual. Subjective well-being should be mentioned more here. Subjective well-being is defined as an individual's experiencing positive emotions more than negative emotions (qtd. by Kasapoğlu and Kış, 2016 from Myres and Deiner, 1995). Adolescence is a critical period for self-concept to be shaped. This is also the period when social comparisons, which are an important part of self, are made. Social comparison is an individual's evaluation of his own abilities and thoughts through comparison with others (Myers, 2015). This is because self does not develop by itself in an isolated environment, but is shaped by the individuals around (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2012). As is seen, self-concept is affected by many environmental and individual factors. Bosma and Jackson (1990) list the eight problems concerning adolescents most as

follows: opinions about oneself, school, teachers, parents, peers, relations with the opposite sex, free time activities, and future plans.

Emotions and emotional expression level are important parts of an individual's self. It has been proved by research that expression of emotions has many positive influences, and positive self-concept has a positive influence on individuals' psychological well-being. It is considered that there may be a relationship between emotional expression level and self-concept, which can be identified with social comparison level.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to reveal the relationships between middle school students' emotional expression levels and their self-concepts, gender, and school types. In this regard, some sub-questions of the study are as follows:

1. Is there any relationship between students' emotional expression levels and self-concepts?
2. Do students' emotional expression levels vary by gender?
3. Do students' self-concepts vary by gender?
4. Do students' emotional expression levels vary by school type?
5. Do students' self-concepts vary by school type?

It can be predicted that emotional expression levels and self-concepts vary from person to person. It is possible to notice the good or bad news received by some people by looking at their faces, but it is not so easy to realize what some others feel. Self, on the other hand, is a concept considered by Erikson as an important part of personality, having a function of creating a sense of identity, and involving individuality and uniqueness (Burger, 2006). The relationship between emotional expression and self-concept is an object of curiosity. Preadolescence, which covers middle school years, is a period in which emotional ups and downs are frequently experienced (Santrock, 2012). Students going through this period have complex emotions. Their behaviors of expressing or hiding their different emotions start to take shape in this period. The self-concepts of students also begin to be shaped in this period. They compare themselves with the individuals in the social environments they are in. Self-concept fluctuates throughout life, and such fluctuation is evident in transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school (qtd. by Santrock, 2012 from Robins, 2002). In this regard, the relationship between middle school students' levels of expressing their emotions and their self-concepts is important.

2. Method

This section gives information about the research method employed. It explains the study group, data collection process, data evaluation process, and the statistical techniques applied. Relational survey model was used in the study.

2.1 Study Group

The study was conducted on the seventh-grade students of five middle schools located in Sivas province in the 2016-2017 academic year. Of 261 participants, 148 were female (56.7%) and 113 were male (43.3%). Of the participants, 66 were attending Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School (25.3%), 62 Kurtlapa Middle School (23.8%), 52 Şehit Üsteğmen Nizamettin Sungur Middle School (19.9%), 48 TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School (18.4%), and 33 Hafik Adem Yavuz Regional Boarding Middle School (12.6%). Maximum variation sampling was used for determining the study group so that different socio-economic levels were represented in it. This method is applied through gathering individuals that are subject to a problem in a small group by ensuring maximum variation (Güler, Halıcıoğlu, and Taşgın, 2015; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

Table 1: Students' Distribution by School

	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Female	148	56.7%
Male	113	43.3%
School		
Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School	66	25.3%
Kurtlapa Middle School	62	23.8%
Ş.Ü.Nizamaetin Sungur Middle School	52	19.9%
TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School	48	18.4%
Hafik Adem Yavuz Regional Boarding Middle School	33	12.6%
Total	261	100%

2.2 Data Collection Tools

2.2.1 Emotional Expression Questionnaire (Kuzucu, 2011)

Developed by King and Emmons (1990), Emotional Expression Questionnaire was adapted into Turkish by Kuzucu (2011). The questionnaire composed of items evaluating how much “positive emotions”, “negative emotions”, and “closeness” are expressed consist of 16 items. However, the 12th item was removed because it had a high factor loading value. Hence, the questionnaire was used in its 15-item version (Kuzucu, 2011). This is a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “I strongly disagree” to “I strongly agree”. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency was found to be .78.

2.2.2 Social Comparison Scale

This scale measures how a person perceives his personal characteristics in various dimensions when he compares himself with others. This is a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 6. It is made up of 18 items. It is a self-evaluation scale that can be applied to adolescents and adults. Minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 18, while the maximum one is 108. Higher scores refer to positive self-concepts, whereas lower scores indicate negative self-concepts. Its adaptation, validity, and reliability study was conducted by Şahin, Şahin, and Durak (1993). Its Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability was found to be α .79 by them. For the present study, the internal consistency coefficient of the Social Comparison Scale was found be α .95.

3. Findings

This section presents the data obtained from the administration of the measurement tools to the seventh-grade students from five different middle schools located in Sivas province in the 2016-2017 academic year as well as the tables concerning such data.

3.1. Interpretation of Emotional Expression by Gender

Independent samples t-test was used for exploring whether emotional expression varied by gender. Table 2 below presents the test results.

Table 2: Interpretation of Emotional Expression by Gender

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p	
EEQ	Female	148	70.804	13.749	259	1.805	0.883
	Male	113	67.716	13.614			

p>.05

Independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference between the emotional expression scores of the females and the males [t(259)= 1.805; p>.05].

3.2. Interpretation of Social Comparison by Gender

Independent samples t-test was used for exploring whether the Social Comparison Scale scores varied by gender. Table 3 below presents the test results.

Table 3: Interpretation of Social Comparison by Gender

Gender	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p	
SCS	Female	148	86.763	10.247	259	1.347	0.029
	Male	113	84.893	12.143			

p<.05

Independent samples t-test indicated a significant difference between the social comparison scores of the females and the males in favor of the former [t(259)= 1.347; p<.05].

3.3. Examination of Emotional Expression Levels by School

One-way ANOVA was used for exploring whether emotional expression levels varied by school. Table 4 below presents the test results.

Table 4: Examination of Emotional Expression Levels by School

Sub-Dimension	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	F	p
EEQ	Intergroup	2500.765	4	625.191		
	Ingroup	46662.209	256	182.274	3.43	.009
	Total	49162.973	260			

p<.05

According to Table 4, a significant difference was found between the Emotional Expression Questionnaire scores by school ($F=3.43$; $p<.05$).

The post-hoc test indicated a significant difference between the emotional expression levels of the students from Kurtlapa Middle School and those of the students from TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School in favor of the latter.

3.4. Examination of Social Comparison Levels by School

One-way ANOVA was used for exploring whether social comparison levels varied by school. Table 5 below presents the test results.

Table 5: Examination of Social Comparison Levels by School

Sub-Dimension	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	F	p
SCS	Intergroup	1298.380	4	324.595	2.691	.032
	Ingroup	30877.068	256	120.610		
	Total	32174.448	260			

$p<.05$

According to Table 5, a significant difference was found between the Social Comparison Scale scores by school ($F=2.691$; $p<.05$).

The post-hoc test indicated a significant difference between the social comparison levels of the students from Şehit Üsteğmen Nizamettin Sungur Middle School and those of the students from Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School in favor of the former. This also implies more positive self-concepts among the former.

3.5. Examination of the Relationship Between Emotional Expression Scores and Social Comparison Scores

The correlation method was used for examining the relationship between the emotional expression scores and the social comparison scores.

Table 6: The Relationship Between the Emotional Expression Scores and the Social Comparison Scores

Total EEQ	N	p	r
Total SCS	261	.042	.126*

$p<.05$

Table 6 demonstrates a low-level, significant positive relationship ($p<.05$; $r=.126$) between the scores obtained from the Emotional Expression Questionnaire and those obtained from the Social Comparison Scale.

Here, the Emotional Expression Questionnaire was examined as a whole without considering its sub-dimensions, and a significant relationship was found.

Table 7: The Relationship Between the Scores Obtained from the Sub-Dimensions of Emotional Expression and the Social Comparison Scores

	Closeness	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
Total SCS	.121	.087	.082

As is seen in Table 7, the correlation method was applied to the sub-dimensions of the Emotional Expression Questionnaire as well, but no significant relationship was detected between the scores obtained from these sub-dimensions and the social comparison scores ($p>.05$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted to reveal the relationships between middle school students' emotional expression levels and their self-concepts, gender, and school types. "Emotional expression" and "expression of emotions" were synonymously used throughout the text. Also, as self-concept was measured through the Social Comparison Scale, these concepts were often used interchangeably.

The literature contains a lot of studies dealing with the expression of emotions. First, as emotional awareness rises, emotional expression increases as well (Kuyumcu, 2011; Mete-Otlu, İkiz, and Asıcı, 2016). Also, as emotional expression goes up, marital satisfaction rises (Tutarel-Kışlak and Göztepe, 2012) and subjective well-being, self-respect, and social self-efficacy expectation are positively affected (İşleroğlu, 2012). Previous research shows that as emotional expression increases, levels of resilience, strength, and assertiveness also increase (Çelik, 2013), and that emotional expression is negatively associated with desire for revenge (Uysal and Satıcı, 2014) and aggressiveness (Adıgüzel, 2012). The benefits of expression of emotions are evident.

Self-respect is a predictor of subjective well-being (Doğan and Eryılmaz, 2013). Previous research reports that there is a significant relationship between self-concept and school success (Yıldırım, 2016) and that although the students to take the university entrance exam mostly do not have negative perceptions of themselves when they compare themselves with others, gender, socio-economic variables, and repetitive taking of the exam negatively influence self-concept and this affects the frequency of psychological symptoms as well (Barlas, Karaca, Onan, and Işıl, 2010).

The study was conducted on the seventh-grade students of five middle schools located in Sivas province in the 2016-2017 academic year. Of 261 participants, 148 were female (56.7%) and 113 were male (43.3%). Of the participants, 66 were attending Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School (25.3%), 62 Kurtlapa Middle School (23.8%), 52 Şehit Üsteğmen Nizamettin Sungur Middle School (19.9%), 48 TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School (18.4%), and 33 Hafik Adem Yavuz Regional Boarding Middle School (12.6%). The reason for the seventh-grade students to be chosen was the intention to represent a typical middle school student. Fifth and sixth graders may not be old enough for the adolescence period. Eighth graders, on the other hand, may be suffering from stress due to TEOG (transition from primary to secondary education) exam. Therefore, the seventh graders were considered more appropriate for a strong representation.

In the present study, no significant difference was found between the females and the males in terms of emotional expression [$t(259)= 1.805$; $p>.05$]. However, the females were seen to have significantly higher social comparison scores than the males [$t(259)= 1.347$; $p<.05$]. Though higher emotional expression among the females was an expected result, no significant difference was found between the females and the males. Significantly higher self-concepts among the females may be indicating that gender roles have started to change.

A low-level, significant positive relationship was found between the scores obtained from the Emotional Expression Questionnaire and those obtained from the Social Comparison Scale ($p<.05$; $r=.126$). That is, the middle school students who can express their emotions have positive self-concepts. The results of one-way ANOVA indicate significant differences between the schools in terms of emotional expression ($F=3.43$; $p<.05$) and social comparison ($F=2.691$; $p<.05$) scores. The post-hoc test results indicated significantly higher emotional expression scores among TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School students compared to Kurtlapa Middle School students. The fact that Kurtlapa Middle School is a village school may cause students to grow up in a more closed environment, where it is not possible for them to express their emotions. This may have been influential on the low emotional expression scores among the students from this school. However, it is interesting that the scores obtained by the students from Kurtlapa Middle School, which is a village school, are not significantly different from the scores obtained by the students from Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School, which is a school located in a very central area, but are statistically different from the scores obtained by the students from TOKİ Ahmet Yesevi Middle School, which is situated at a far corner of the city.

The students from Şehit Üsteğmen Nizamettin Sungur Middle School were found to have significantly higher social comparison scores and those from Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School. This implies more positive self-concepts among the students from Şehit Üsteğmen Nizamettin Sungur Middle School. The students from this school, which is located in an environment with a low socio-economic level, have significantly more positive self-concepts than the students from Kadıburhanettin İmam Hatip Middle School, which has quite a central location.

The findings of the present study may attract attention to changing gender roles. Gender involves the roles, expectations, and behaviors attributed to individuals in relation to biological sex (MEB, 2013). For example, girls are socially expected to play with dolls, whereas boys are socially expected to play with toy cars. However, many societies attribute more passive roles to girls than boys. In most cultures, women have less power, lower status, and fewer resources than men (qtd. by Santrock, 2012 from UNICEF, 2011). This manifests itself in females' self-concepts as well, and females have more negative self-concepts than males (Sezer, 2010). However, in the present study, the females' self-concepts were found to be higher than those of the males. This may be implying a change in gender roles. In addition, most of the studies dealing with emotional expression have been conducted on adults and young adults and report that females have higher emotional expression than males (Tutarel-Kışkal et al., 2012; Mete-Otlu et al., 2016; Uysal et al., 2014; Çelik, 2013; Kuyumcu, 2011; Uçar, 2016). The fact that the findings of the present study indicate no significant difference between the females and the males reveals the need for research on early ages on this issue. The results based on school types are noteworthy, and the importance of school types should not be ignored in future research focusing on the relationship between emotional expression and self-concept. The development of an individual's self is influenced by the behaviors of people around him and interpersonal relations a lot (Özgüven, 2012). Surely, such interpersonal relations are affected by the location of the school, teachers' characteristics, and so on. As a matter of fact, the findings of the study show that emotional expression and self-concept are influenced by school type. Finally, the positive relationship between emotional expression and self-concept, which was the basic hypothesis, was proved, though at a low level.

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