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Social Comparison Orientation, Hardiness and Life Satisfaction in Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The first aim of the present study was to examine changes on hardiness and life satisfaction in terms of social comparison orientation in Turkish undergraduate students. Secondly, the moderator effect of social comparison orientation on the relationship between hardiness and life satisfaction was investigated. The study was conducted on a total of 326 undergraduate students. The data of the study were collected through the IOWA-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure, Personal View Survey III-R, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. In the study, in order to test differences between levels of hardiness and global life satisfaction among undergraduate students at low and high social comparison orientation, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used. Hierarchical multiple regression procedures were performed to test moderating effect of social comparison orientation on the relationship between hardiness and life satisfaction. The findings of the study indicated that the students having a low social comparison orientation had more hardiness and life satisfaction than the students having a high social comparison orientation. In addition, social comparison orientation did not moderate the relationship between hardiness and life satisfaction. In conclusion, this study shows that social comparison orientation has a notable role on hardiness and life satisfaction in undergraduate students.

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1. Introduction

The question "Who am I?" is a question most people often ask themselves. How people answer this question has been the subject of investigation of various disciplines. Although it there are many ways an individual can acquire

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information about herself/himself it seems like a tough task to overcome (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000). Comparing one's self with other people is an important source in the process of obtaining information about one's self (Wood, 1989). According to the social comparison theory proposed by Festinger (1954) an individual has the motivation of self-evaluation. According to Festinger (1954), the main goal of social comparison is for the individual to evaluate herself/himself correctly. When the individual does not have objective standards to evaluate himself/herself, s/he has the tendency of comparing himself/herself with others. Social comparison shows how individuals use other people to make sense of themselves and their social world (Buunk & Gibbons 2006).

Diener and Fujita (1997) claim that social comparison is a function of personality and whether an individual makes social comparison or not, or making positive or negative social comparison shows individual differences. Gibbons and Buunk (1999) also support the idea that social comparison is a personality tendency and focused on individual differences in social comparison process. Accordingly, they conceptualized the tendency to engage in social comparison as social comparison orientation. Individuals with high social comparison orientation make more social comparisons and get more affected from the consequences (Buunk & Gibbons, 2006). Hence, it is reported that as social comparison orientation increases self-esteem, optimism, and positive affect decrease; depression, anxiety, social anxiety, neuroticism, and negative affect increase (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

Although social comparison can be made intentionally it is generally made spontaneously and automatically. However, in situations where there are stress, novelty or change it is indicated that the need for social comparison increases (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Thus, it could be said that the adaptive and coping roles of social comparison may gain importance in novel and stressful situations. When evaluated according to this point of view, it could be expected that social comparison orientation could have an effect over hardiness that is an important personality variable in the process of coping with stress.

Hardiness is defined as a personality trait that restrains the negative effects of stress on health. This trait is seen as the mixture of thought, emotion and behavior that helps the individual to survive and enrich his/her life. Hardy individuals have a remarkable curiosity and they have a tendency of thinking about their own lives as interesting and meaningful. They believe that they can be effective by what they imagine, what they say, and what they do. They perceive change as natural, meaningful, and despite stressful situations they perceive them as attractive and they can include these changes into their life plans. Thus, they experience less stress when faced with stressful events. Whereas, individuals with low hardiness have the tendency of finding themselves and their environments boring, meaningless, and threatening. They feel weak facing stressful experiences, they desire a life in which there are no changes and they are more passive in the interaction with their environments (Kobasa, Maddi, & Courington, 1981).

College years, that is accepted as one of the life cycles including stressful experiences, is a time in which young adults are responsible of their own health, school life, financial condition and they have to manage their own life (Cress & Lampman, 2007). It is observed that hardiness that reduces the negative effect of stress is related with college students' psycho-social and academic adjustments. According to some research, as hardiness increases in college students, coping with stress, problem solving skills (Weigold & Robitschek, 2011), total adjustment, academic adjustment (Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Fazel, & Resurreccion, 2009; Surucu & Bacanlı, 2009), academic achievement (Sheard, 2009; Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Fazel, & Resurreccion, 2012), self-esteem (Kamya, 2000), perceived social support (Terzi, 2008) increase; perceived stress (Cress & Lampman, 2007), mourning based on losing someone close (Mathews & Servaty-Seib, 2007), alienation (Thomson & Wendt, 1995), and psychopathologic tendencies (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994) decrease. Furthermore, it was found that hardiness has a moderator role between academic stress and perceived health issues in college students (Hystad, Eid, Laberg, Johnsen, & Bartone, 2009). In an experimental research (Maddi et al., 2002), it was observed that a hardiness training for college students at the risk group decreased strain and increased wellness. Consequently, hardiness is a personality trait that helps college students to cope with compelling experiences and facilitates personal and academic adjustment.

It is worth investigating what kind of changes hardiness, that has an important role in college students' coping with adjustment and problems, will change according to social comparison orientation. No studies have been encountered investigating the relation of hardiness and social comparison in the literature. In a study by Warren and Rios (2013), it was found that as social comparison tendency increased in college students, perceived pressure and acculturative stress significantly increased. In another study (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), it was reported that there was a positive relation between perceived stress and social comparison orientation. Consequently, it can be expected that hardiness which is a trait that eases to cope with stress will have a relation with social comparison orientation. When

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