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ANALYZING PEER PRESSURE AND SELF-EFFICACY EXPECTATIONS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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The relationship between levels of peer pressure and self-efficacy expectations among adolescents was examined. The data were obtained from 546 high school students using the Self-efficacy Expectation Scale, developed by Muris (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Celikkaleli, Gündođdu, and Kiran-Esen (2006), and the Peer Pressure Scale (Kiran-Esen, 2003b). Although the findings showed significantly negative relationships between peer pressure and general and academic self-efficacy expectations in these adolescents, no relationships were found between peer pressure and social and emotional self-efficacy expectations. Moreover, general and academic self-efficacy expectations were higher in adolescents who were experiencing low levels of peer pressure than in adolescents with moderate and high levels of general and academic self-efficacy. However, no significant differences were observed in terms of social and emotional self-efficacy expectations.

Keywords: adolescents, peer pressure, academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy.

During adolescence physical and mental development are accompanied by psychosocial changes (Dacey & Travers, 1996). Adolescents begin to become independent from their parents, and they spend more time with their peers. Being a member of a peer group is one of the primary experiences of adolescence. Peer groups are usually small groups of close friends with similar ages and overlapping activities (Jackson & Rodriguez-Tomé, 1993). During the period of adolescence, peers are a source of influence and support (Dacey & Travers, 1996) and provide a context for intergenerational conflict and adaptation to different values. Simultaneously, peers facilitate a learned tolerance of individual

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differences (Dusek, 1987). These peer groups offer independence from parents, provide feelings of being valued and safe, and allow adolescents to be recognized and accepted by people of a similar age and stage (Cook & Dayley, 2001).

Social needs, such as feelings of belonging, acceptance, and attachment, intensify during adolescence and may increase the amount of control exerted by a peer group. Being under the control of a peer group causes *peer pressure*, which can be defined as *group insistence and encouragement for an individual to be involved in a group activity in a particular way* (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000).

Peer pressure may be experienced directly and/or indirectly. Indirect methods lead to behavioral influences without the individuals' full realization of having been influenced (Ryan, 2000). Adolescents are influenced more by what their peers think than by what their peers actually do (Fischhoff, Crowell, & Kipke, 1999). Those who have healthy peer relationships perceive themselves differently in their competency levels and have different characteristics from adolescents whose peer relationships are problematic (Schunk & Meece, 2005). Peers can play a key role in improving personal efficacies and in shaping the life courses of adolescents who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Bandura, 2005). Peer influence on self-efficacy also stems from adolescents' unfamiliarity with life skills such as independence and developing one's own values, and they often have little information beyond the behaviors of their friends with which to assess their own self-efficacy (Schunk & Meece, 2005). *Self-efficacy* was defined by Bandura (1997) as "a person's beliefs about his/her abilities to take the actions necessary to be able to perform a behavior successfully". Self-efficacy beliefs are indicators of the extent to which people tolerate engagement in an activity, and of their belief in, perseverance, and endurance when performing a task (Pajares, 2006).

Personal experiences and assessments of other people's experiences are the sources most instrumental in acquiring self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 2005). Observing the failures of other people who are perceived to have capabilities that are similar to those of the person who is the observer, decreases self-efficacy and impairs the observer's efforts (Bandura, 1986). A perception of self-efficacy being strong is influential in improving an individual's self-control (Bandura, 1994) and in avoiding stress and assisting in the achievement of personal success and happiness (Pajares, 2005).

As they work to achieve cognitive maturity along with expanding their perceptions of their own abilities, adolescents can combine and interpret the information they gather about themselves from sources such as their family and friends (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998).

In Turkey, peer pressure and a variety of psychological structures have been investigated together in studies, and it has been found that there is a relationship

between peer pressure and psychological structures. However, the focus in the Turkish studies on self-efficacy has been mainly on teacher self-efficacy, computer self-efficacy, and science self-efficacy. In the current study my aim was to examine the major psychological structures involved in the self-efficacy expectations of adolescents in Turkey.

Examining the relationship between peer pressure and self-efficacy is especially significant in the personality development of adolescents. In their life both in and out of school, adolescents encounter pressure from various people or situations. For instance, pressure caused by peers has an especially negative impact on adolescents' psychosocial efficacy (Sim, 2000) and self-respect (De Rosier & Marcus, 2005; Kiran-Esen & Aktuğ, 2007; Lashbrook, 2000). My study is also of value in that it provides statistical data on the effect of self-efficacy in terms of adolescents' relationship with peers.

In prior research it has been suggested that adolescent self-efficacy is significantly influenced by peers (Schunk & Meece, 2005). Because of this suggestion I expected that in this study I would find a relationship between peer pressure, psychological structures, and adolescent self-efficacy perceptions. Therefore, my aim in this study was to investigate the relationship between peer pressure and self-efficacy expectations in high school students in the context of the following questions: (a) Are there significant relationships between perceptions of peer pressure and general, academic, social, and emotional expectation in adolescents? (b) Do the general, academic, social, and emotional expectations of adolescents differ significantly with perceptions of different levels of peer pressure?

Method

Participants

This research was conducted with a randomly selected voluntary sample of 546 (313 female, 233 male) adolescent students from six high schools in the Mersin province of Turkey. The participants comprised 254 second-grade and 292 third-grade students with a mean age of 17.21 years.

Instruments

Self-Efficacy Expectation Scale for Adolescents (SEES-A). The SEES-A was developed by Muris (2001) and adapted into Turkish by Celikkaleli, Gündoğdu, and Kiran-Esen (2006). In reliability studies on the original scale, the internal consistency coefficient was calculated at .88 for the whole scale, and ranging from .85 to .88 for each subscale. In a factor analysis to test the validity of the scale, the scale's three factors explained 56.7% of the total variance (Muris, 2001). In a reliability study of the Turkish adaptation of the SEES-A,

(Celikkaleli et al., 2006) the test-retest correlation coefficient was $r = .85$ for the whole scale and ranged between .65 and .77 for each subscale. In this study, the internal reliability coefficient was .88.

The SEES-A is composed of 24 items and includes three dimensions: academic, social, and emotional efficacy expectations. High scores indicate high self-efficacy expectations, and low scores indicate low self-efficacy expectations.

Peer Pressure Scale (PPS). The PPS comprises 34 items and two subscales and was developed by Kiran-Esen (2003b). In reliability studies on the original scale, the internal reliability coefficient was .90 for the whole scale, .89 for the direct PPS subscale, and .82 for the indirect PPS subscale; the test-retest reliability coefficient was .82 for the whole scale, .74 for the direct PPS subscale, and .79 for the indirect PPS subscale. The two factors were obtained from the factor analysis in the PPS validity study and explained 40.5% of the total variance. A single score is obtained from the scale. High scores indicate high levels of peer pressure, and low scores indicate low levels of peer pressure (Kiran-Esen, 2003b). In the current study, the internal reliability coefficient was .93.

Procedure

The relationships between peer pressure and self-efficacy expectations in adolescents were examined using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether or not the self-efficacy expectation differed according to level of peer pressure. Peer pressure scores, which were continuous variables, were categorized across self-efficacy expectation groups. Hence, the level of peer pressure was separated into groups of low, moderate, and high, where low was defined as less than half and high was more than half of a standard deviation from the mean. Tukey's honestly significant difference test was used to identify the source of any differences that emerged among the groups.

Results

The Relationships between Peer Pressure and Self-efficacy Expectations

Significant negative relationships were found between peer pressure and both general ($r = -.17, p < .001$) and academic self-efficacy expectations ($r = -.34, p < .001$). Thus, as the perception of peer pressure increases, adolescents' general and academic self-efficacy expectations decrease. No relationships were found between peer pressure and either social or emotional self-efficacy expectations.

General Academic, Social, and Emotional Self-efficacy Expectations by Levels of Peer Pressure

Results of the ANOVA indicated significant differences among the average scores of general ($F(2, 251) = 3.98, p < .05$) and academic self-efficacy

expectations ($F(2, 251) = 3.98, p < .05$) of all students regardless of level of perceived peer pressure. In other words, although general and academic self-efficacy expectations differed according to level of peer pressure, adolescents' social and emotional self-efficacy expectations did not change across levels of peer pressure.

When the average scores of general and academic self-efficacy expectations were compared across peer pressure levels, general self-efficacy expectations were significantly greater for students who perceived a low level of peer pressure ($I-J = -7.18, p < .001$). Additionally, students with a score indicating a low level of peer pressure had significantly higher academic self-efficacy scores than did students with scores at moderate and high levels for peer pressure (moderate level: $I-J = -3.65378, p < .001$; high level: $I-J = -5.79351, p < .001$). Among the groups of students with scores indicating moderate and high levels of perceived peer pressure, academic self-efficacy expectations were significantly greater for students experiencing moderate levels of peer pressure ($I-J = -2.13973, p < .001$) when compared with the academic self-efficacy expectations of students perceiving high levels of peer pressure. Thus, I found that among the general and academic self-efficacy expectations of these adolescents increased as their perceptions of peer pressure decreased.

Discussion

The amount of peer pressure that was experienced by the students in this study had an influence on general and academic self-efficacy expectations; in terms of perceptions of peer pressure levels, general and academic self-efficacy expectations were significantly higher among students who perceived that they had a low level of peer pressure. No differences according to level of perceived peer pressure were found in terms of social and emotional self-efficacy expectations. I have not located any similar studies on this subject, however, my results fit within an established theoretical framework. Bandura (1994) suggests that self-efficacy is first experienced and formed within the family, with peers later becoming influential, and peer groups have a crucial role in regulating and confirming individuals' self-efficacy.

Despite the absence of studies in which peer pressure and self-efficacy have been examined simultaneously, the two variables have been studied separately, with similar psychological structures. Self-efficacy has been found to be related to self-image, increases in perceived social acceptance, and, in general, self-value (Connolly, 1989), self-respect (Blake & Rust, 2002), depression (Jenkins, Goodness, & Buhrmester, 2002), academic success and problem-solving capabilities (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000), and stress and the ability to overcome stress (Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003).

In research conducted on the relationships between peer pressure and other psychological structures, there have been reports of relationships between peer pressure and psychosocial efficacy (Sim, 2000), self-respect (De Rosier & Marcus, 2005; Kiran-Esen & Aktuğ, 2007; Lashbrook, 2000), depression (Beran & Violato, 2004), attitudes toward aggression and substance use (Dishion & Skaggs, 2000; Farrell, Kung, White, & Valois, 2000; Wang, Eddy, & Fitzhugh, 2000), risk taking (Kiran-Esen, 2003a), and antisocial behavior (Eamon & Mulder, 2005). Individuals who have a perception of high self-efficacy can deal much better with challenging situations or stress (Bandura, 1994). Schunk and Meece (2005) suggest that the self-efficacy of adolescents is strongly influenced by their peers. Observing the accomplishments of peers can increase the self-efficacy of the one who observes and can cause the person to believe that he or she is able to do the same task. However, if the observed peer fails, the self-efficacy of the one who observes may decrease (Schunk & Meece, 2005).

Regarding academic self-efficacy expectations, the academic success of peers with similar group characteristics in terms of self-efficacy expectations is comparable (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999). It has been found that there is a relationship between self-efficacy and academic success, and that there is a relationship between peer pressure and academic success. Mounts and Steinberg (1995) and Kiran-Esen (2003a) both found negative relationships between peer pressure and success at school. Ryan's (2000) findings in a study with adolescents also support their results.

In my study, I did not find a relationship between peer pressure and social and emotional self-efficacy. One explanation for this finding is that peer groups provide adolescents with opportunities to observe coping strategies for similar problems. Simultaneously, peers provide adolescents with the necessary rules of social interaction (Cook & Dayley, 2001). Therefore, adolescents may consider themselves socially and emotionally competent and may not perceive themselves as being under pressure because they think they are socially and emotionally supported by their peers.

In conclusion, the results obtained in the present study are supported by the results of previous studies in which it has been found that there is a relationship between self-efficacy and peer pressure and that this is related to similar psychological structures. Thus, peer pressure, which significantly influences many adolescent behaviors, has also been found to influence adolescents' general and academic self-efficacy.

There are several limitations in my study. Firstly, the participants are not representative of all high school students because the sample size was small and consisted of students from only six high schools. Based on this limitation, the findings need to be replicated with wider samples of high school students.

Secondly, the data about students' peer pressure levels and self-efficacy expectations were based on their own perceptions as reported in the data collected using self-report scales. Further efforts may expand these findings by using different scales and methods. In spite of the limitations outlined, in my study I have provided some evidence of the usefulness and importance of exploring relationships between peer pressure level and self-efficacy expectations of high school students. The findings may be useful, especially for those in related work, such as researchers and individuals working in the guidance and psychological centers of high schools.

Finally, there is evidence that contradicts the findings in these experimental studies. Adolescents can increase their self-efficacy expectations if school psychologists/counselors work with them to teach them how to resist peer pressure.

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