



# The Role of Cognitive Distortions on the Relationship Between Individuals' Self-Esteem and Sexual Self Sufficiency

## Bireylerin Benlik Saygısı ve Cinsel Öz Yeterlilik Arasındaki İlişkide Bilişsel Çarpıtmaların Rolü

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### Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of this study is to investigate whether cognitive distortions play a role in the connection between individuals' self-perceptions and their level of sexual autonomy, as people's experiences and perceptions can give rise to diverse ideas that may be fixed or subject to change based on their psychological state.

**Materials and Methods:** A sample of 200 participants comprising of an equal number of males and females was used, and data was collected using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Sexual Self-efficacy Scale, and Cognitive Distortions Scale.

**Results:** The study revealed a slight yet statistically significant association between sexual self-efficacy, self-esteem, and cognitive distortions. Specifically, higher scores in cognitive distortions were linked to lower scores in sexual self-efficacy and self-esteem. Thus, it can be inferred that individuals who struggle with sexual autonomy and self-esteem may be prone to misconstruing their own perspectives and the world around them. The results showed no significant correlation between individuals' level of sexual autonomy and their education or income status.

**Conclusions:** The data for this study was collected through literature review and the administration of standardized scales by the participants. However, a potential limitation of the study is that it assumes the participants provided honest and accurate responses, which may not always be the case.

**Key Words:** Self-esteem, Sexual self-sufficiency, Cognitive distortions.

### Öz

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmanın amacı, bilişsel çarpıtmaların bireylerin benlik algıları ile cinsel özerklik düzeyleri arasındaki bağlantıda bir rol oynayıp oynamadığını araştırmaktır; çünkü insanların deneyimleri ve algıları, psikolojik durumlarına bağlı olarak sabit veya değişime tabi olabilecek çeşitli fikirlere yol açabilir.

**Materyal ve Metod:** Eşit sayıda kadın ve erkekten oluşan 200 kişilik bir örneklem kullanılmış ve veriler Rosenberg Benlik Saygısı Ölçeği, Cinsel Öz Yeterlilik Ölçeği ve Bilişsel Çarpıtmalar Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, bireylerin cinsel özerklik düzeyleri ile eğitim veya gelir durumları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olmadığını göstermiştir.

**Bulgular:** Çalışma, cinsel öz yeterlilik, benlik saygısı ve bilişsel çarpıtmalar arasında hafif ancak istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir ilişki olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Özellikle, bilişsel çarpıtmalardaki yüksek puanlar cinsel öz yeterlilik ve öz saygıdaki düşük puanlarla bağlantılıdır. Dolayısıyla, cinsel özerklik ve özsaygı ile mücadele eden bireylerin kendi bakış açıları ve çevrelerindeki dünyayı yanlış yorumlamaya eğilimli olabilecekleri sonucuna varılabilir.

**Sonuç:** Bu çalışmanın verileri literatür taraması ve standartlaştırılmış ölçeklerin katılımcılar tarafından uygulanması yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bununla birlikte, çalışmanın potansiyel bir sınırlaması, katılımcıların dürüst ve doğru yanıtlar verdiğini varsaymasıdır, ki bu durum her zaman geçerli olmayabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Benlik saygısı, Cinsel öz yeterlilik, Bilişsel çarpıtmalar

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## Introduction

The concept of self refers to individuals' recognition of their personality traits. All individuals have thoughts about what kind of person they want to be. According to Rogers, true self-esteem is the difference between how one perceives oneself and the self one wants to be (1). Individuals develop various beliefs as a result of successfully performing a behaviour or not, which is called self-efficacy. The higher the self-efficacy level of an individual, the more successful he/she is in fulfilling his/her responsibilities (2). It has been determined that people with high self-efficacy have high behavioural efforts, can easily overcome obstacles, and therefore do not shy away from challenging environments and can take risks. The opposite is true for people with low self-efficacy (3, 4). For this reason, it is known that the behaviours of individuals in different situations are related to their self-efficacy beliefs. Sexual self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their capacity to effectively carry out their emotional responses and actions within a sexual setting (5). Self-efficacy plays an essential role in controlling sexuality (2). Individuals face problems throughout their lives. As a result of these problems, the human brain develops some stereotypes and starts to attribute different meanings to these events. According to their experiences, people comment on the situation or events that are developing. In cases where this process of interpretation and attribution of meaning is not correct, intellectual and behavioural errors such as should-expressions, catastrophizing, and mind reading occur. This whole of wrong judgments and behaviours is called cognitive distortions (6).

This study aimed to find the relationship between individuals' self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy and the role of cognitive distortions. Upon review of the literature, it becomes apparent that there is limited research available on the interplay between self-concept and sexual self-efficacy, as well as the impact of cognitive distortions in this regard. This research assumes that the decrease in self-esteem is directly related to the decrease in sexual self-efficacy perception, and cognitive distortions are related to self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy.

## Materials and Methods

This research was conducted with the aim of finding the roles of negative thoughts in the relationship between self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy, using a screening model. The scales used were filled out face-to-face according to exclusion criteria, and the data was entered into the SPSS program. Ethics committee approval no. 2018/455 dated 23.03.2018 was obtained from the Uskudar University Ethics Committee for the study. This research was conducted to determine the role of negative thoughts in the relationship between self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy, and a survey model was used. Survey models are a research approach that aims to describe a pre-existing situation or a situation that is currently existing. The person or object that is the subject of the research is tried to be described as it

exists within its conditions. No effort is made to change or influence these situations. The information desired to be learned exists and is there (7).

The sample of the research consists of a total of 200 people, 100 women and 100 men. The inclusion criteria for the sample are as follows:

- Having an active sexual life
- Being under the age of 18 and over the age of 65

The exclusion criteria for the sample are as follows:

- The participant has alcohol and substance addiction
- Known psychological disorders

In the study, three scales were used: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Cognitive Distortions Scale and Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale.

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

This scale, developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1963, was designed to measure the level of self-esteem of individuals. The scale's reliability has been proven in the U.S.A. and Turkey; Füsün Çuhadaroğlu realized its validity and reliability with the sample group she formed. This scale consists of twelve sub-domains; the first ten items measure self-esteem. Items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 are positive, and items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 are negative. In the scoring of the scale, a low score indicates high self-esteem, and a high score indicates low self-esteem.

### Cognitive Distortions Scale

R. Covin, D. Dozois in 2011, the cognitive distortions scale is a single-factor scale calculated on the total scoring. The scale consists of ten items in total and is prepared in seven Likert types. As a result of the research, it was observed that this scale adapted to Turkish, gave consistent and reliable results.

### Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale

This scale was created by Humphreys and Kennett in 2010 to determine the level of sexual self-efficacy of individuals and is based on providing information about oneself. The scale is formed in an eight-point Likert type and gives a total score. The third and fourth items of the scale were reverse-coded. As a result, it was determined that a high score is directly proportional to a high level of sexual self-efficacy. The possible score range is between 0-40. The validity and reliability studies of the scale have been conducted, and it has been realized that the Turkish form is also valid and reliable thanks to the research conducted.

### Statistical Analysis

In line with the purpose of the study, percentage-frequency analysis was used to determine the distribution of participants according to demographic characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis technique was used to calculate the relationships between the scores obtained from age, income level, cognitive distortions, self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy scales. Pearson Correlation Analysis requires the stan-

standard distribution assumption to be met. When this assumption is met, the direction and strength of the linear relationship between variables can be reported using Pearson Correlation analysis. The correlation coefficients obtained can be interpreted as follows; 0 to  $\pm 0.29$  is a low-level relationship, 0.30 to  $\pm 0.59$  is a medium-level relationship, and 0.60 to  $\pm 1.0$  is a high-level relationship (8). In studies with large sample sizes, it is considered sufficient for the skewness and kurtosis coefficients to be within  $\pm 2$  to meet the assumption of normal distribution (9). It was determined that the skewness and kurtosis values of the distributions were within the specified range, and the data met the assumption of normal distribution (Table 1). According to this result, it was understood that using parametric tests to analyze the data was appropriate. Analyses were performed using SPSS 24.0.

**Table 1.** Skewness and Kurtosis Values of the Scores Obtained from the Measurement Tools Used in the Study

Variable	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Value	Std. Error	Value	Std. Error
Self-esteem	1,176	,172	,854	,342
Sexual self-efficacy	-,990	,172	,349	,342
Cognitive distortion	,271	,172	,446	,342

**Results**

It was determined that 50% of the participants were female and 50% were male. When the participants were analyzed according to age groups, 24% were between 19-22 years old, 38% of the participants were in the 23-26, and 38% were in the 27 and above age group. Most participants were undergraduate (53%) and associate degree (25%) graduates. The proportion of married participants was calculated as 53.5%. The proportion of participants with a low-income level was 7.5%, the proportion of participants with a medium-income level was 65.5%, and the proportion of participants with a high-income level was 27% (Table 2).

A low-level negative and statistically insignificant relationship was found between sexual self-efficacy scores and educational level ( $r=-0,029$ ;  $p>0,05$ ). There is a low level of the positive and statistically significant relationship between sexual self-efficacy scores and income level ( $r=0,007$ ;  $p>0,05$ ) (Table 3).

There is a low-level negative and statistically significant relationship between sexual self-efficacy scores and self-esteem scores ( $r=-0.083$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) (Table 4).

A low-level negative and statistically significant relationship was found between sexual self-efficacy scores and cognitive distortion scores ( $r=-0.180$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). As the participants' cognitive distortion scores increase, their perceptions of sexual self-efficacy decrease (Table 5).

A low positive and statistically significant relationship was found between self-esteem scores and cognitive distortion scores ( $r=0.293$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). High scores from the cognitive dis-

tortions scale indicate a high perception of cognitive distortion. High scores obtained from the self-esteem scale indicate a low perception of self-esteem. (Table 6) In light of this information, when the correlation coefficients obtained are interpreted, their perceptions of cognitive distortions decrease as the participants' self-esteem increases.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Participants According to Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	100	50,0
	Male	100	50,0
Age group	19-22	48	24,0
	23-26	76	38,0
	27 and over	76	38,0
Education Status	Did not graduate	1	0,5
	Primary School	2	1,0
	Middle School	5	2,5
	High School	24	12,0
	Associate Degree	50	25,0
	Undergraduate	106	53,0
	Master's Degree	11	5,5
Marital Status	Married	107	53,5
	Single	93	46,5
Income Level	Low	15	7,5
	Medium	131	65,5
	High	54	27,0
<b>Total</b>		<b>200</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**Table 3.** Examination of the Relationship between Participants' Sexual Self-Efficacy Scores and Sociocultural Levels

Variables		Educational Status	Income Level
	r	-0,029	0,007
Sexual self-efficacy	p	0,685	0,920
	N	200	200
	$p>0,05$		

**Table 4.** Examination of the Relationships between Participants' Sexual Self-Efficacy Scores and Self-Esteem Scores

Variables		Sexual self-efficacy
	r	-0,083
Self-esteem	p	0,242
	N	200
	$p>0,05$	

**Table 5.** Examination of the Relationships between Participants' Sexual Self-Efficacy Scores and Cognitive Distortions Scores

Variables		Sexual self-efficacy
	r	-0,180
Cognitive distortion	p	0,011
	N	200
	$p>0,05$	

**Table 6.** Examination of the Relationship between Participants' Cognitive Distortion Scores and Self-Esteem Scores

Variables		Sexual self-efficacy
	r	-,293
Benlik saygısı	p	0,000
	N	200
	$p>0,05$	

## Discussion

The concept of self and the recognition of one's self was emphasized. Individuals exhibit their behaviours by their selves, and self-perception is formed after the individual recognizes himself/herself in his/her relations with the outside world. Self-esteem also emerges as a result of these beliefs and attitudes. Appreciation and approval from the outside world play an essential role in forming one's self (10, 11).

Self-efficacy is a person's self-confidence and belief that he/she can accomplish a task. This belief can be shaped by experiences and the events and people that the person looks up to. Self-concept also influences self-efficacy perception because a person with a developed sense of self is aware of what he/she can be successful in. Factors that strengthen self-efficacy perception may also strengthen self-concept (3).

Sexual self-efficacy is related to a person's self-confidence about his/her sexual life and the belief that he/she can successfully perform sexual activities. Individuals with low sexual self-efficacy often experience problems such as sexual dysfunction, low sexual desire, sexual anxiety and performance anxiety. Moreover, such problems can further reduce the perception of sexual self-efficacy, thus creating a vicious circle. Therefore, it is essential to work on increasing the perception of sexual self-efficacy and solving such problems in psychological treatments.

There is a correlation between sexual self-efficacy and both embracing one's gender identity and engaging in sexual activities. It was stated that self-efficacy is related to self-perception and self-esteem, and external factors can also affect it. According to the study results, there was no significant relationship between educational level and sexual self-efficacy. However, there was a low-level negative relationship between sexual self-efficacy and self-esteem.

The emphasis is placed on the idea that the development of self-efficacy perception is influenced by numerous factors that operate within a complex interrelated network. It is stated that family and environmental factors impact the formation of self-efficacy perception as well as one's successful performance. The effect of education level on self-efficacy perception is limited, and it is emphasized that the perspective of society may also be an essential factor. Therefore, it is emphasized that self-efficacy perception cannot be predicted only by looking at demographic characteristics and that the characteristics of the society should also be examined.

It was stated that cognitive distortion is thoughts specific to the person and that the person can distort events or thoughts with the influence of his/her environment, previous experiences or the psychological state he/she is in. It was stated that cognitive distortion could cause intellectual errors. It was pointed out that this is caused by factors such as the environment in which the person grew up, his/her family and society's value judgments. It was emphasized that

cognitive distortions pass through schemas, and it was stated that distortions between individuals might be different but are related to self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy. Additionally, it was determined that there exists a statistically significant but weak inverse association between scores on the sexual self-efficacy scale and the cognitive distortion scale (12).

The concept of self and the importance of self-esteem and self-efficacy perception are discussed. It is emphasized that people acquire a self by observing and experiencing what happens around them, but this self may be formed differently. It is stated that the more the self one wants to have and the self one perceives they coincide, the higher the self-esteem will be. In addition, the behaviours exhibited by the person and the positive feedback he/she receives increase the perception of self-efficacy. For example, an athlete's degree increases his/her self-efficacy perception, encouraging him/her to push himself/herself more and take risks.

The self-efficacy perception related to one's sexuality is called sexual self-efficacy. According to Bailes, Creti, and Fichten, sexual self-efficacy pertains to an individual's conviction in their competence to effectively execute their emotional responses and behaviors within a sexual context. As a result of the behaviours developed due to these beliefs and the experiences gained from them, stereotyped behaviours and judgments emerge in the individual. As a result of these, they make comments about both themselves and their environment.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the correlation between an individual's perception of self-esteem and their sexual self-efficacy. In this context, in addition to the literature review, surveys were conducted with 100 female and 100 male participants aged 18-65.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Cognitive Distortion Scale and Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale were used in this study. It was observed that there was a bidirectional relationship between sexual self-efficacy level and sociocultural level. Nonetheless, no statistically significant positive association was observed between levels of sociocultural factors and sexual self-efficacy. Again, the data obtained from the application and literature show that there are low-level negative and statistically significant relationships between cognitive distortions, self-esteem and sexual self-efficacy and between sexual self-efficacy scores and cognitive distortion scores.

As can be seen, human psychology and how people perceive themselves, others and the events around them are composed of complex processes, each having direct or indirect effects on the other. The fact that a person is well educated may cause him/her to be respected in his/her environment, but it may not have an apparent effect on raising his/her self-esteem. This study proves that even if people experience the same things at the same time, they will not feel the same emotions. Among the critical findings of the study is that the gender of the individual and the various characteristics he/she sees in himself/herself change the courage he/she shows in various areas of his/her life. Individuals'

exchanges with themselves in their inner worlds, as much as their exchanges with the outside world, impact their feelings of efficacy. The most critical point of the study is that it is the first study that aims to establish a direct relationship between sexual self-efficacy, self-efficacy, self-perception and self-esteem.

**Ethical Approval:** Ethics committee approval no. 2018/455 dated 23.03.2018 was obtained from the Uskudar University Ethics Committee for the study.

**Author Contributions:**

Concept: M.Y.

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Data acquisition: M.C.Y.

Analysis and interpretation: M.Y., M.C.Y.

Writing manuscript: M.Y.

Critical revision of manuscript: M.Y.

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