Testing the Effects of Ability-Based and Opinion-Based Social Comparisons on Interpersonal Problems through the Mediating Roles of Self-Esteem and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

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Abstract: This study investigates the effects of ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons on interpersonal problems and concurrently explores the mediating roles of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation within these relational dynamics. A demographic information form, the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Circumplex Scales Short Form (IIP-C), the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) were administered to 549 volunteer undergraduates. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the study data. The test results of the proposed model indicated that ability-based social comparison has significant direct and indirect effects on interpersonal problems. In contrast, opinion-based social comparison has no significant direct or indirect effects on interpersonal problems. To clarify, comparing their abilities with others is a significant factor in undergraduates' interpersonal problems. Moreover, self-esteem and emotion dysregulation significantly mediate this association. Conversely, comparing their opinions with others is not a significant factor in their experiences of interpersonal problems, and this remained consistent in the mediation of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation. Expected and differentiated findings of the study about the associations of distinct comparison types were discussed in light of the current literature. Presented recommendations for further research included diversifying the sample and considering sub-dimensions of interpersonal problems.

Keywords: Interpersonal problems, social comparison orientation, ability-based social comparison, opinion-based social comparison, self-esteem, emotion dysregulation

Yetenek Temelli ve Görüş Temelli Sosyal Karşılaştırmaların Kişilerarası Problemler üzerindeki Etkilerinin Öz-Saygı ve Duygu Düzenleme Güçlükleri Aracılığıyla Test Edilmesi

Öz: Yetenek-temelli ve görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmaların kişilerarası problemler üzerindeki etkilerinin araştırıldığı bu model çalışmasında öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlüklerinin bu ilişkilerdeki aracı etkileri sınanmıştır. Örneklemini üniversite lisans öğrencilerinin oluşturduğu bu çalışmada, 549 gönüllü katılımcıya

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demografik bilgi formu, Kişilerarası Problemler Envanteri-Döngüsel Ölçekleri Kısa Formu (IIP-C), Iowa-Hollanda Karşılaştırma Yönelimi Ölçeği (INCOM), Rosenberg Öz-Saygı Ölçeği (RSES) ve Duygu Düzenlemede Güçlükler Ölçeği (DERS) uygulanmış ve elde edilen veriler yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (YEM) ile analiz edilmiştir. Önerilen modele dair bulgular kişilerarası problemler üzerinde yetenek-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmanın doğrudan ve dolaylı etkilerinin tümünün anlamlı olduğunu gösterirken, görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmanın doğrudan ve dolaylı etkilerinin tümünün anlamsız olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna göre üniversite öğrencilerinin kişilerarası problemler yaşamalarında yeteneklerini başkalarıyla karşılaştırmaları istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir etmendir ve bu ilişkiye öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlükleri de aracılık etmektedir. Öte yandan, görüşlerini karşılaştırmanın kişilerarası problem deneyimleri üzerinde ne doğrudan ne de öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlükleri aracılığıyla dolaylı olarak anlamlı bir etkisi olmuştur. Farklı sosyal karşılaştırma türlerinin ilişkilenmelerine dair alanyazınla benzerlik ve farklılıklar gösteren mevcut bulgular tartışılmış ve gelecekteki olası çalışmalar için örneklemin çeşitlendirilmesi ve kişilerarası problemlerin alt boyutlarının dikkate alınması gibi önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kişilerarası problemler, sosyal karşılaştırma yönelimi, yetenek-temelli sosyal karşılaştırma, görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırma, öz-saygı, duygu düzenleme güçlükleri

Introduction

The continuation of human life after birth depends on the first interpersonal relationship established with a caregiver (Kölliker et al., 2013), and the primary function of this attachment is to ensure survival through protection and sustenance (Bowlby, 2005). For species persistence, both physiological development and the acquisition of life skills rely heavily on social interaction (Hare, 2017). In this sense, bonding with the function of survival and being valued socially through belonging are highly critical for humans (Ferguson, 2020). So much so that, the interpersonal attachment drive to avoid anxiety may even prioritize conformity and social approval over other essential needs (Evans, 1996).

As a kind of social affiliation, interpersonal relationships are essential throughout all life stages starting from birth (Rook et al., 2012; Wills, 1985) and deemed necessary for promoting the development and functioning of a healthy personality (Fournier et al., 2011). Likewise, as a prevalent topic in mental health, interpersonal relationships comprise the primary focus of psychological help, together with perceived dissatisfaction about self and difficulties in expressing various emotions (Heinonen & Pos, 2020; Horowitz, 1979). However, despite its widespread prevalence, interpersonal problems were under-researched in personality research and clinical practice (Alden et al., 1990). Moreover, the interactive function of ranking or social status on the internalized evaluations of individuals has yet to be sufficiently investigated (Gilbert et al., 1996), and research on the effects of social comparison on interpersonal behavior is limited (Suls et al., 2002). Thus, any contribution to social adaptation and interpersonal relationships can be influential.

Moreover, further research is needed on how hierarchical or egalitarian structures and collective or individual cultures influence interpersonal relationships (Fournier et al., 2011), as culture is a robust collective context in molding human behavior (Matsumoto, 2007). While intragroup comparisons are more prevalent in cultures characterized by rigid social hierarchy and apparent power distance, social comparison has mainly been studied in Western societies, and thus there is limited knowledge about its generalizability to other cultures (Guimond et al., 2007). For such reasons, investigating the psychological mechanisms in the current study within Turkish

culture, where power dynamics may be implicit but still discernible, can provide valuable insights into the daily functioning of interpersonal relationships. Since individuality in intra-family relationships is appreciated and allowed by remaining related to the group and the relational context defines the self as much as possible in Türkiye, in-group relations, hierarchical and comparative structures can be more critical for the individual (see Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017; Uleman et al., 2000). Furthermore, emotions tend to be more relational in collectivist societies (Mesquita, 2001), and they can significantly impact life satisfaction, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships (Kang et al., 2003). Considering Turkish society's collective yet hierarchical cultural structure (Keldal & Karadaş, 2021; Sarı, 2011; Triandis, 1995), insights into how interpersonal relationships, social comparison and mental well-being interact in Türkiye can provide valuable information.

Interpersonal Problems

Positive interpersonal behaviors entail cooperating, collaborating, and harmony with others. It is necessary and desirable for individuals to establish amicable, compassionate, affectionate connections by exchanging ideas and emotions (Horowitz et al., 1978). Failure to meet these innate needs leads to interpersonal problems (Horowitz, 1979). Interpersonal relationships are built upon the two main dimensions of affiliation and dominance (Leary, 1957), which are based on the two fundamental motivations of security and self-esteem (Sullivan, 1953). The convergence of these two main dimensions in varying measures gives rise to eight domains that define interpersonal problems: domineering, intrusive, self-sacrificing, overly accommodating, nonassertive, socially inhibited, distant, and vindictive (Alden et al., 1990).

Interpersonal relationships constitute the two main factors along with self-esteem in determining university students' psychological adjustment (Liang & Fassinger, 2008) in such a developmental period when the need for social comparison information increases (Buunk et al., 2020). This developmental period, typically spanning the age range of 18-25, is a phase where individuals are caught between the complexities and responsibilities of the transition from adolescence to adulthood, exploring and discovering identity changes, and feeling an increasing need for autonomy. During this period, friendship, intimacy, and physical attractiveness gain importance, while physical performance, health-related risky behaviors, and the likelihood of using substances increase. Losing close relationships and social isolation can be quite challenging in this stage. Individuals in this population, who can also be defined as emerging adults, may experience uncertainties, instabilities, and delays in essential life tasks like education, employment, and intimate relationships due to the influence of changing industrial structures (Arnett, 2015; Santrock, 2006). Interpersonal problems, among the most common issues undergraduate students face (Koydemir et al., 2010), are significantly associated with various aspects of psychological health, such as academic performance (Mittelmeier et al., 2018), school engagement (Li et al., 2021), student well-being (Foulkes et al., 2021), psychosocial resources, identity processes (Adams et al., 2006), alcohol-related problems, depressive symptoms, (Keough et al., 2015), emotion regulation difficulties, eating disorders (Ambwani et al., 2014), psychopathological symptoms (De Panfilis et al., 2013), and risk of suicide (Suh et al., 2017).

Social Comparison

The developmental stage of undergraduates, marked by uncertainty, threat, stress, competition, and novelty, can simultaneously elicit and amplify social comparison (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Social comparison, observed in the absence of non-social benchmarks, involves humans instinctively assessing their abilities and opinions compared to others (Festinger, 1954).

Ability-based social comparison entails evaluating one's own capacities, proficiency, and performance against others, while opinion-based social comparison involves assessing one's own beliefs and cognitions relative to those of others (Festinger, 1954; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Accordingly, social comparison can motivate individuals to come together with others and provide emotional resources and cognitive clarity to reduce anxiety through forming relationships and closeness (Kulik & Mahler, 1997). Social comparison orientation intensifies during the periods (Buunk et al., 2020) when the needs, life expectations, competition (Garcia et al., 2013), motivation to learn from the social environment and a sense of agency that includes control and confidence in responsibilities and choices in life increase (Schunk & Usher, 2012). However, while intensified social comparison can sometimes lead to functional outcomes in some individuals (Fu et al., 2018), it can also be associated with negative psychological constructs in others (Kalaycı et al., 2019). Such individual differences in social comparison behaviors were conceptualized by Gibbons and Buunk (1999) as social comparison orientation based on Festinger's (1954) classical theory of social comparison. Although individual differences exist in comparison behavior, previous literature has consistently linked social comparison with negative psychological outcomes (Alicke & Zell, 2008; Kalaycı et al., 2019). For instance, diaries kept by undergraduate students have indicated that they constantly and involuntarily compare, evaluate, judge, and measure people around them. In these experiences, predominantly centered around comparing their own physical appearance and intelligence, they have been found to suffer from intense feelings of inferiority or superiority (Wolsko, 2012). In another university sample, the feeling of being ranked lower due to negative social comparisons was associated with a higher likelihood of suicidal ideation (Wetherall et al., 2019).

Despite some adverse effects, comparison behavior is a highly functional and deeply rooted phylogenetic apparatus for the continuation of the species. It reveals the power hierarchy in the inevitable struggle for survival in nature, ensuring that living things do not take vital risks and use their energy efficiently. Thus, individuals with high evaluative skills become more advantageous in reproduction and survival through natural selection. Through comparison-based evaluation, individuals determine their resource holding power or social attention holding power, which reveals the dominance hierarchy in interpersonal relationships and determines who to compete with and submit to (Buss, 2015; Darwin & Beer, 2008; Gilbert et al., 1995). As in Sullivan's (1953) conceptualization of two fundamental motivations in interpersonal relationships, namely affiliation and dominance (Leary, 1957), the emerging relational hierarchy allows for the resolution of cooperation and competition issues, ultimately increasing survival rates and reproductive success (Cummins, 1996). The dominance hierarchy is established swiftly in any social interaction in social groups (Buss, 2015; Fisek & Ofshe, 1970; Kalma, 1991). Thomsen et al. (2011) found that preverbal human infants are capable of predicting the dominance outcome between two unfamiliar individuals based on the comparative size. Therefore, humans are inherently equipped with a universal and robust motive for status striving in relationships (Anderson et al., 2015) and a desire for significance and power that feeds it; however, they begin life with a natural sense of inferiority, leading them to compensate for it by striving for superiority through others (Ferguson, 2020). In short, comparison behavior, which is inherent to human nature (Festinger, 1954), is not only ubiquitous and necessary (Mussweiler et al., 2004) but also intertwined with the craving for power, which supplies vital advantages in life (Gilbert & Basran, 2019), and holds a substantial influence on interpersonal behaviors (Locke, 2020).

Self-esteem

Any information encountered through social comparison lays the groundwork for potential cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral impact on an individual (Corcoran et al., 2011). The act of comparing personal characteristics, social status, relationships, emotions, and all material and spiritual resources that individuals possess (Cloutier et al., 2012; Kedia et al., 2014) can result in interpersonal problems, such as avoidant or submissive behaviors when they lack superior or desired traits possessed by others (Irons & Gilbert, 2005), which in turn can decrease their self-esteem and increase feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent with themselves (Wilcox & Laird, 2000). Everyday social encounters and exposures can impact and destabilize some individuals' self-concepts and influence their emotions and self-evaluations by interacting with their self-esteem (Morse & Gergen, 1970). Therefore, global self-esteem can render an individual's self-worth and ego vulnerable to various influences of everyday life (Kernis et al., 1993), as it is potentially dynamic (Pullmann & Allik, 2000) and unstable (Johnson, 1998).

Furthermore, the most prominent functions of self-esteem, characterized by feeling sufficient, successful, and valued (Harter, 2006), are protecting the individual against anxiety (Greenberg et al., 1992), pre-attentive monitoring possibilities of relational inclusion and exclusion (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and coping with daily stressors (Cast & Burke, 2002). Self-esteem, primarily characterized by emotional content (Rosenberg et al., 1995), systematically changes across different developmental stages, increasing between the ages of 15 and 30 due to developmental needs (Orth et al., 2018). Negative social comparison can be threatening to self-esteem (Alicke et al., 1997) and can adversely affect observable mood and implicit self-esteem, especially when upward comparison is made (Fuhr et al., 2015). Further, that can increase the likelihood of involvement in problematic interpersonal behaviors such as being bullied or engaging in bullying (Geng et al., 2022).

Emotion Dysregulation

Contact with emotions, which function biologically adaptive and psychologically constructive (Thompson, 1994), is inescapable for human beings (Hayes et al., 2002), and emotions are an integral part of the human experience. Hence, experiences related to social comparison, self-esteem, and interpersonal problems may predict negative affect and emotion regulation difficulties (Garofalo et al., 2017; Zuffianò et al., 2022). As a consequence of the evolution of the human nervous system, emotions affect attention, cognitive processes, behaviors, communication, and decisions, as well as supporting self-preservation, forming intimate relationships, comprehending relational requirements, and reinforcing commitments (Niedenthal & Ric, 2017; Thompson, 1994). As most emotional stressors are fundamentally related to interpersonal relationships (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015), an individual may exert more control over their emotions to maintain healthier interpersonal relationships with others (Zeman & Garber, 1996). Emotion regulation, which encompasses the observation, assessment, and modification of emotional responses (Thompson, 1994) in line with goals and contextual requirements (Mennin et al., 2002), portrays a context-dependent coping process with both negative and positive intense emotions (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Negative social comparison, complicating emotion regulation, can lead to cold and humiliating behavior in relationships by triggering envy and jealousy (Salovey & Rodin, 1984). It can also induce harmful, angry, and destructive interpersonal behaviors as a means to protect self-esteem, alleviate and control challenging emotions (Garofalo et al., 2016; Kernis et al., 1989).

In summary, based on the existing literature, it seems that self-esteem and difficulties in emotion regulation could potentially be factors that explain the differential effects of social comparison orientation on undergraduate students' interpersonal problems (see Blanchard-Fields, 2007; He, 2022; Richmond et al., 2022; Yanhong et al., 2021). In this context, exploring this process that directs the individual whose behavior towards the other may change implicitly or explicitly as they make social comparison would be valuable. For this purpose, the present research aims to reveal the effects of social comparison orientation and potential mediating variables on the interpersonal problems of undergraduates of a public university in Türkiye.

Purpose of the Study

This model testing study aimed to examine the structural relationships among undergraduate students' interpersonal problems (endogenous/outcome variable), ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons (exogenous/independent variables), self-esteem, and emotion dysregulation (mediating variables). The investigation focused on the direct and indirect relationships between these variables in this context. In addition, the extent to which ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons, self-esteem, and emotional dysregulation explain interpersonal problems of a public university sample in Türkiye was examined. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were tested.

Direct Effects

The direct relationship hypotheses concerning the study's endogenous variable of interpersonal problems, exogenous variables of ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons and mediating variables of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation are listed below:

H1. Ability-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on emotion dysregulation.

H2. Ability-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on interpersonal problems.

H3. Ability-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on self-esteem.

H4. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on emotion dysregulation.

H5. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on interpersonal problems.

H6. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant direct effect on self-esteem.

H7. Emotion dysregulation has a significant direct effect on interpersonal problems.

H8. Self-esteem has a significant direct effect on interpersonal problems.

H9. Self-esteem has a significant direct effect on emotion dysregulation.

Indirect Effects

The indirect relationship hypotheses concerning interpersonal problems as endogenous/outcome variable, ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons as exogenous/independent variables and self-esteem and emotion dysregulation as mediating variables are listed below:

H10. Ability-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through emotion dysregulation.

H11. Ability-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through self-esteem.

H12. Ability-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through the serial mediation of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation.

H13. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through emotion dysregulation.

H14. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through self-esteem.

H15. Opinion-based social comparison has a significant indirect effect on interpersonal problems through the serial mediation of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation.

Significance of the Study

In social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) argued that situations with increased differences in opinions could lead to the feelings of dissatisfaction, derogation, and hostility-like emotions and behaviors in individuals, while differences in abilities would not evoke such challenging emotions; instead, they would lead to the acceptance of superiority within the group's status stratification. Like some other limited studies (see Park & Baek, 2018), the current study partially counter-hypothesized this fundamental claim and assumed that ability comparison, like opinion comparison, can trigger certain emotional difficulties and interpersonal behaviors. In addition, most social comparison research (e.g., Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019) has combined social comparison's ability and opinion subdimensions into a single construct. However, the current study included these two sub-dimensions in the model as two related but separate variables, because the ability-based comparison is more performance and competition-oriented, whereas the opinion-based comparison is mainly about knowledge, relationships, and group dynamics (Yang, Holden, Carter, & Webb, 2018b).

Regarding the theoretical significance of the current study, it is remarkable that in identifying self-esteem and emotion dysregulation as mediating variables in the model, Leary's (1957) basic dimensions of dominance and affiliation and Sullivan's (1953) main motivations of self-esteem and security in interpersonal relationships were taken as a basis. To clarify, the proposed model included potential antecedents of interpersonal problems and provides a detailed understanding of the underlying mechanism. In addition, integrating the variable of social comparison, which is related to the need to feel safe and may be a potential trigger of the entire process, into the model with its theoretical basis (see Gilbert et al., 1995) is also theoretically contributing. Moreover, the perspectives of several theorists with different viewpoints, such as Sullivan (1953), Festinger (1954), Rosenberg (1965), Adler (1924/2013), Leary and Baumeister (2000), and Bowlby (2005), have been uniquely integrated into an evolutionary meta-theoretical framework (Buss, 2020).

Method

Design of the Research

A correlational research design was applied in the current study. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the proposed model and examine the structural relationships between undergraduate students' ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons, self-esteem, difficulties in emotion regulation, and interpersonal problems.

Sample

The study data was collected through the convenience sampling method. Following the application of exclusion criteria, which involved restricting the age range to participants aged 26 and below and ensuring a minimum response rate of at least 90% across all scales, the study included a cohort of 570 volunteer undergraduates from a Turkish public university. However, all statistical procedures, except for the sample descriptive, were performed with 549 participants as a result of outlier analyses. Among the 570 participants who responded to the related question, the Faculty of Engineering had the highest enrollment of 309 (54.3%), followed by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences with 100 (17.6%), the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences with 76 (13.3%), the Faculty of Education with 46 (8.1%), and the Faculty of Architecture with 35 (6.1%).

Other descriptive data showed that there were 291 female students (51.1%) and 274 male students (48.1%) in the sample. The age range of the participants varied between 18 and 26, with a mean age of 21.8 ($SD = 1.58$). Looking at the number of years they have been at their current university, the majority of respondents indicated that they are in their second (14.4%), third (19.5%), fourth (30.4%), and fifth (16.3%) year, with a mean year of 3.81 ($SD = 1.54$). The mean GPA for the entire sample was calculated to be 2.59 ($SD = 0.66$).

Data Collection Procedure and Instruments

Upon specifying the variables and model of the study, ethical approval was granted from the Human Subjects Ethics Committee of the Applied Ethics Research Center at Middle East Technical University before the data collection phase. The researcher gathered the data from undergraduate students studying at a public university in Türkiye between April 2018 and March 2019. The researcher visited the classrooms to collect data and informed the participants about the volunteering process, confidentiality, and measurement instruments. The data collection process was completed within 10-20 minutes following the administration of informed consent procedures and documentation.

The study variables were measured using four distinct scale: the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Circumplex Scales Short Form (Horowitz et al., 2000, as cited in Akyunus İnce, 2012).

Demographic Information Form

The researcher created a demographic information form for participants to fill in. The form asked the participants about their faculty and department, current year of university, grade point average (GPA), gender, age, and other pertinent demographic details.

Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM)

The Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) was applied to measure the social comparison orientations of the participants. Gibbons and Buunk (1999) developed the INCOM building on Festinger's (1954) classical theory of social comparison. Teközel (2000) adapted the scale to Turkish. The 11-item scale, using a 5-point Likert-type ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree), with reverse-coded 5th and 11th items, measures individual orientations in social comparison behavior. The INCOM includes two subscales: ability comparison, which measures how individuals evaluate their performance in tasks and compare themselves based on their abilities, and opinion comparison, which assesses how individuals compare their thoughts and feelings to those of others. The internal consistency coefficients for ability comparison, opinion comparison, and total score were 0.85, 0.61, and 0.83, respectively, based on data from 549 participants in the current study.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was utilized in the current study to measure the participants' self-esteem. The RSES was developed by Rosenberg (1965) and adapted to Turkish by Çuhadaroğlu (1986, as cited in Doğuş & Şafak, 2019). The one-dimensional RSES comprises ten items, with five positive and five negative (items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10) statements. As a 4-point Likert-type scale, it ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Individuals with high self-esteem perceive themselves as worthy and competent by their standards. In contrast, low self-esteem refers to feeling worthless, lacking self-respect, experiencing dissatisfaction, and rejecting oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). In the current research with 549 participants, the RSES's internal consistency coefficient was determined to be .89.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) was used study to measure the participants' emotion dysregulation in the current research. Gratz and Roemer (2004) developed the DERS, and Rugancı and Gençöz (2010) conducted its Turkish adaptation, which was later revised by Kavcıoğlu and Gençöz (2011). The DERS is a 6-dimensional scale with 36 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), with reverse-coded 11 items. Scoring high on the subscales of the DERS, which include Impulse, Nonacceptance, Awareness, Clarity, Goals and Strategies or on the total scale, indicates various difficulties in regulation of emotions. In the present research, the internal consistency coefficients of the DERS were .94 for the total score and varied between .76 and .89 for the subscales in the sample of 549 participants.

Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Circumplex Scales Short Form (IIP-C)

The Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Circumplex Scales Short Form (IIP-C) was used in the present study to assess a variety of interpersonal functioning problems of the participants on the ground of relational dominance and affiliation. Horowitz et al. (2000, as cited in Akyunus İnce, 2012) developed the IIP-C, and Akyunus and Gençöz (2016) adapted it into Turkish. The IIP-C is a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=not at all, 5=extremely) with 32 items and eight subscales. The eight circular dimensions, which consist of differentiated combinations of the main dimensions of affiliation and dominance, are domineering or controlling, self-centered or vindictive, distant or cold, socially avoidant or inhibited, nonassertive, overly accommodating or exploitable, overly-nurturant or self-sacrificing, and intrusive or needy (Akyunus & Gençöz, 2016; Akyunus İnce,

2012; Alden et al., 1990). The internal consistency coefficient of the current research sample consisting of 549 participants was .82 for the total score, while the subscales of the IIP-C ranged between .63 and .82.

Data Analyses

In this study, the model examining the relationships between ability-based social comparison, opinion-based social comparison, self-esteem, and emotion dysregulation, as well as the effects of these variables on interpersonal problems, was tested employing structural equation modeling after ensuring the relevant assumptions were met. The measurement model was tested first, followed by the structural model, using AMOS 23. Other analyses, such as descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations, were conducted using SPSS 25 software.

Findings

The present study utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the effects of ability-based and opinion-based social comparisons on interpersonal problems, explore how self-esteem and difficulties in emotion regulation mediate this relationship, and investigate the direct and indirect relationships among all the variables.

Prior to conducting the SEM analysis on the proposed model, the accuracy of the data has been examined firstly, then within the scope of preliminary data analysis, assumptions of SEM such as independence of observations with restricted interaction among participants (Newton & Rudestam, 2013), sample size (parameter ratio is 9.8:1), missing data (the ratio of missing data varied from 0.2% to 1.2% and most of them is missing completely at random), univariate outliers (10 cases removed using both the boxplot and z-scores methods), multivariate outliers (11 cases with Mahalanobis d^2 values between 35.87 and 29.46 were removed), univariate normality (skewness value ranged between -0.72 and 0.51 and kurtosis values varied between -1.00 and 0.62), multivariate normality (multivariate kurtosis is 4.65 with a critical ratio of 2.58, $p < .001$), linearity and homoscedasticity (the points in the scatterplot are evenly and randomly distributed), and multicollinearity (inter-correlations ranged from -.55 to .49, with tolerance values between .65 and .76 and VIF values from 1.32 to 1.54) (Ullman, 2013) were ensured using relevant methods and analyses.

Then, descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation of scales and bivariate correlations between the variables were provided.

Descriptive Statistics

The minimum and maximum score ranges, mean scores, and standard deviations obtained from the research scales are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Actual Range, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Variables

Variable (Instrument)	Actual Range	*M*	*SD*
Ability-based social comparison (INCOM-Ability)	6-30	18.49	4.79
Opinion-based social comparison (INCOM-Opinion)	12-25	19.42	2.58
Self-esteem (RSES)	17-40	30.74	5.05

Emotion dysregulation (DERS)	41-146	86.13	20.64
Interpersonal problems (IIP-C)	37-112	74.71	13.65

Note. Sample size, *N* = 549

In Table 2, significant bivariate correlations at moderate to high levels can be observed among all variables, except for the relationship between opinion-based social comparison and self-esteem.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations among the Variables

|	1	2	3	4	5
1. Ability-based social comparison	1				
2. Opinion-based social comparison	.48**	1			
3. Self-esteem	-.31**	-.06	1		
4. Emotion dysregulation	.37**	.10*	-.55**	1	
5. Interpersonal problems	.37**	.13**	-.39**	.49**	1

Note. Sample size *N* = 549, *p* < .05, **p* < .01 Ability-based social comparison = Ability subscale of the INCOM; Opinion-based social comparison = Opinion subscale of the INCOM; Self-esteem = RSES; Emotion dysregulation = DERS; Interpersonal problems = IIP-C

Model Analyses

The measurement model or confirmatory factor analysis (Ullman, 2013) aiming to identify non-causal associations between observed and latent variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016) was conducted based on the literature recommending criteria such as factor loadings, standardized residuals, and modification indices for applying model revisions (see Byrne, 2016; Gürbüz, 2019; Hair et al., 2010). Accordingly, the 7th and 11th items from the subscale of opinion comparison were removed since they had low factor loadings and improper covariance associations. Then, two modifications were made in the subscale of ability comparison (items 1 to 2 and 2 to 3) based on the largest MI value and semantic similarity. Thus, a good fit for the model was ensured.

Figure 1

Proposed Structural Model with Standardized Estimates and Squared Multiple Correlations
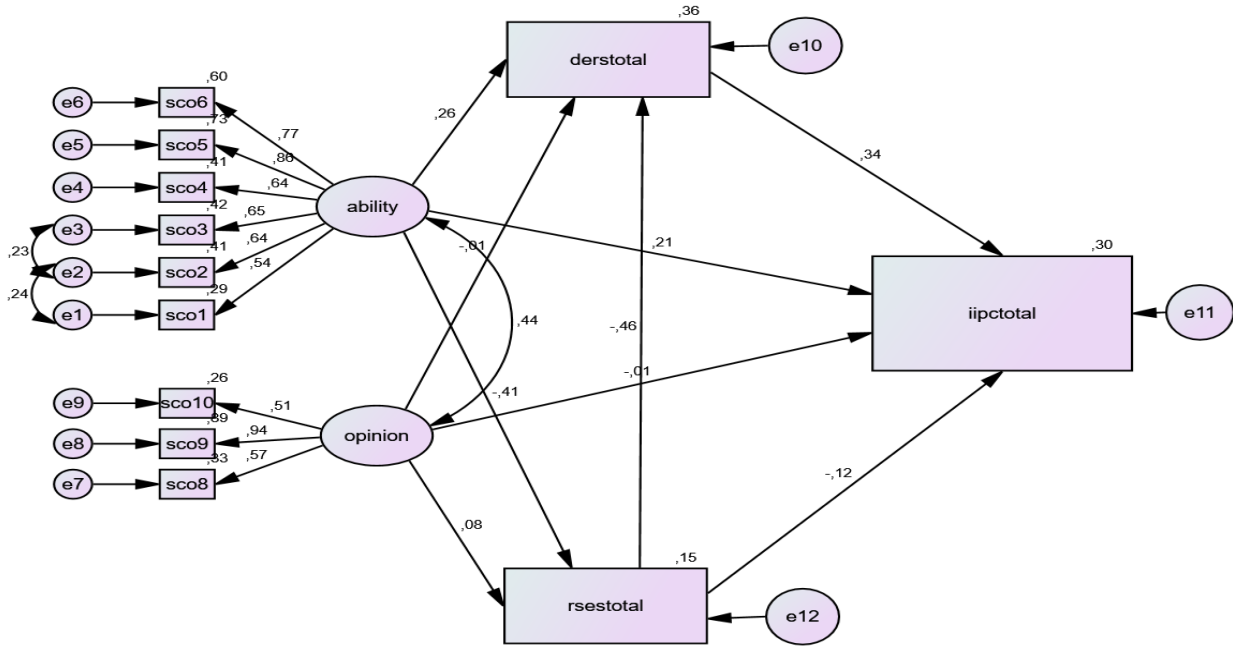
Based on structural equation modeling analyses conducted using goodness-of-fit indices with recommended values such as $\chi2 / df < 3$ (Kline, 2016; Ullman, 2013), CFI ≥ .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), NNFI ≥ .93 (Byrne, 1994), SRMR < .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999), and RMSEA < .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the measurement and structural models produced values as $\chi2$ (45) = 129.883, p = .00; $\chi2 / df$-ratio = 2.89, CFI = .96, NNFI = .94, SRMR = .05, and RMSEA = .06 indicating a good fit of the proposed model (see Figure 1) to the current study's data.

Afterwards, to evaluate the significance of the direct and indirect effects between the research variables based on the research hypotheses and to estimate the statistical precision, standardized beta values (*β*) were examined using the resampling technique of bootstrapping (2,000 bootstrapped samples) and bias-corrected (BC) intervals with 95% confidence (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Gürbüz, 2019; Kline, 2016).

Table 3

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Direct and Indirect Hypotheses	Results
H1: Ability-based SC → Emotion dysregulation	Accepted
H2: Ability-based SC → Interpersonal problems	Accepted
H3: Ability-based SC → Self-esteem	Accepted
H4: Opinion-based SC → Emotion dysregulation	Rejected
H5: Opinion-based SC → Interpersonal problems	Rejected

H6: Opinion-based SC → Self-esteem	Rejected
H7: Emotion Dysregulation → Interpersonal Problems	Accepted
H8: Self-esteem → Interpersonal Problems	Accepted
H9: Self-esteem → Emotion Dysregulation	Accepted
H10: Ability-based SC → Emotion dysregulation → Interpersonal Problems	Accepted
H11: Ability-based SC → Self-esteem → Interpersonal Problems	Accepted
H12: Ability-based SC → Self-esteem → Emotion dysregulation → Interpersonal Problems	Accepted
H13: Opinion-based SC → Emotion dysregulation → Interpersonal Problems	Rejected
H14: Opinion-based SC → Self-esteem → Interpersonal Problems	Rejected
H15: Opinion-based SC → Self-esteem → Emotion dysregulation → Interpersonal Problems	Rejected

Note. Ability-based SC = Ability-based Social Comparison, Opinion-based SC = Opinion-based Social Comparison, → = … has a significant effect on …

The results shown above in Table 3 indicate that all direct and indirect effects that begin with the variables of ability-based social comparison, emotion dysregulation, and self-esteem (i.e., nine hypotheses: Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) were statistically significant and accepted. On the other hand, all six tested hypotheses, which include direct and indirect effects involving the variable of opinion-based social comparison, were statistically nonsignificant and rejected (i.e., hypotheses 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, and 15). That is, the direct regression coefficients from ability-based social comparison to emotion dysregulation (β = .26, p = .001), interpersonal problems (β = .21, p = .001), and self-esteem (β = -.41, p = .001) were all statistically significant. However, none of the direct regression coefficients from opinion-based social comparison to variables such as emotion dysregulation (β = -.01, p = .756), interpersonal problems (β = -.01, p = .778), and self-esteem (β = .08, p = .141), were statistically significant. Moreover, all direct paths between emotion dysregulation and interpersonal problems (β = .34, p < .01), self-esteem and interpersonal problems (β = -.12, p < .01), and self-esteem and emotion dysregulation (β = -.46, p < .001) were statistically significant.

In the tested model, the indirect effects analysis revealed that the relationship between ability-based social comparison and interpersonal problems was statistically significant through both emotion dysregulation (β = .087, [bias-corrected 95% CI = 1.327, 3.077], p = .001) and self-esteem (β = .050, [bias-corrected 95% CI = .391, 2.213], p = .003). Moreover, a statistically significant relationship between ability-based social comparison and interpersonal problems was found through serial mediation involving both self-esteem and emotion dysregulation (β = .063, [bias-corrected 95% CI = .919, 2.355], p = .001). On the other hand, the relationship between opinion-based social comparison and interpersonal problems was not statistically significant in the mediation of emotion dysregulation (β = -.004, [bias-corrected 95% CI = -1.215, .874], p = .739) and self-esteem (β = -.010, [bias-corrected 95% CI = -1.039, .035], p = .080). In addition, the serial mediation of self-esteem and emotion dysregulation in the indirect relationship of opinion-based social comparison with interpersonal problems was not significant (β = -.012, [bias-corrected 95% CI = -1.164, .120], p = .121).

To summarize, out of the 15 hypotheses in the study, which include direct and indirect relationships, all six hypotheses related to opinion comparison were rejected, while all nine hypotheses related to other variables, including ability comparison, were accepted. The final model explained a total variance of 30%, indicating that ability-based social comparison, opinion-based social comparison, self-esteem, and emotion dysregulation explained 30% of the variance in interpersonal problems.

Discussion

Upon examining all the results, it is observed that all direct and indirect hypotheses, including the exogenous variable of opinion comparison, have been rejected, while all other hypotheses have been accepted. The findings are broadly consistent with the existing literature, and the identified differences are explainable and significant in terms of theory and research. Specifically, the study's results confirmed the first hypothesis (H1), demonstrating that individuals with higher orientation to compare their abilities encounter difficulties regulating their emotions. This result is compatible with previous research indicating that people engage in social comparison for mood management, uncertainty reduction, and self-regulation (Marsh & Webb, 1996). Additionally, it aligns with findings that upward social comparison is associated with avoidant emotion regulation (Gratz et al., 2020) and that social comparison has a significant effect on the emergence of envy (Alicke & Zell, 2008). The confirmation of the second hypothesis (H2), indicating that a person's comparison of their abilities has an effect on experiencing interpersonal problems, is consistent with existing literature. This finding supported the previous research, which indicates that perceiving oneself as inferior is associated with interpersonal problems (Gilbert et al., 1996), unfavorable social comparison predicts submissive behaviors (Troop et al., 2003), and parental-driven social comparison predicts various forms of aggressions in relationships (Lee et al., 2020). The third hypothesis (H3) was confirmed, revealing that frequently comparing one's abilities is associated with reduced self-esteem. This finding is supported by research indicating that moderate and high levels of social comparison are associated with low state and trait self-esteem (Richmond et al., 2021). Similarly, studies demonstrate that social comparison orientation and its upward type lead to decreased self-esteem (Lee, 2020; Schmuck et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2014) and that comparing a valued ability has a significant impact on one's self-esteem (Smith & Insko, 1987).

Hypotheses four (H4), five (H5), and six (H6), which propose direct relationships where opinion-based social comparison is the exogenous variable, did not yield statistically significant results and were thus rejected. To clarify, the act of comparing opinions does not have a significant direct effect on emotion dysregulation, interpersonal problems, and self-esteem. Although it was unexpected based on common literature, certain studies have provided explanations and support for this particular situation. While the ability and opinion-based sub-dimensions of social comparison orientation are often treated as a single concept (see Lennarz et al., 2017; Litt et al., 2012), there are a limited number of studies suggesting that they should be distinguished as separate dimensions due to differences in their comparison content (see Callan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Upon reviewing relevant supporting research, Kim et al. (2021) found that opinion-based social comparison is not significantly correlated with variables like material possessions and social status, suggesting that it should be distinct from ability-based social comparison. They primarily linked negative outcomes such as social media addiction, stress, and low self-esteem only to ability comparison. The positive correlations of opinion comparison with

better social adjustment (Yang & Robinson, 2018), optimism, inspiration, and psychological well-being (Park & Baek, 2018), its lack of effect on global self-esteem (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2018a) and as well as its conceptualization in terms of group harmony, knowledge acquisition, and decision-making functions (Suls et al., 2000), are coherent with the obtained results. To summarize, opinion comparison is associated with various motivations such as seeking advice, sharing experiences, testing thought accuracy, communicating with others, learning social norms, seeking approval, and enhancing social interactions.

Hypotheses seven (H7), eight (H8), and nine (H9) were confirmed to be statistically significant. These findings demonstrate that emotion regulation difficulties have a direct effect on interpersonal problems and self-esteem has a direct effect on interpersonal problems and emotion regulation difficulties. These findings align with numerous studies in the literature. While difficulties in emotion regulation are associated with social anxiety disorder (Goldin & Gross, 2010), impulsiveness in relationships (Euler et al., 2021), interpersonal problems (Coats & Blanchard-Fields, 2008), and poor interpersonal functioning (Gross & John, 2003); acquisition of emotion regulation skills reduces various interpersonal problems such as being cold, dominant, socially inhibited, nonassertive, overly accommodating, intrusive/needy, and self-sacrificing (Keating et al., 2018). Moreover, self-esteem is significantly related to various interpersonal problems (Kahle et al., 1980), seeking approval from others (Jones & Buckingham, 2005), the risk of social rejection (Cameron & Granger, 2019), excessive self-sacrifice and submissiveness (Bjørkvik et al., 2009), social exclusion and negative affect (Leary & Downs, 1995), aggression and emotion regulation difficulties (Garofalo et al., 2016), suppression and anxiety (Fernandes et al., 2022), and emotional uncertainty (Marsh & Webb, 1996). Overall, the current findings are well-supported by the existing literature, establishing the significant relationships between emotion dysregulation, self-esteem, and interpersonal problems.

Considering the indirect relationships obtained, the tenth (H10), eleventh (H11) and twelfth (H12) hypotheses in which ability-based social comparison is an exogenous variable were found statistically significant and confirmed. Specifically, emotion dysregulation and self-esteem mediate the association between ability comparison and interpersonal problems, both separately and serially. In other words, individuals with a higher orientation to socially compare their abilities experience more interpersonal problems, and lower self-esteem and difficulties in emotion regulation partially mediate this association. As the purpose of self-evaluation, social comparison leads to increased social interaction (Festinger, 1954) and elevates interpersonal orientation (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). However, social comparison may trigger individuals to focus on their flawed and inadequate attributes and evoke fear of rejection (Gratz et al., 2020). When interacting with contingent self-esteem, upward social comparison can elicit emotions such as negative affect and shame (Patrick et al., 2004). The mediating role of lower self-esteem in the association between elevated anxiety and emotional suppression (Fernandes et al., 2022), as well as the more relational or other-dependent nature of the self-construal of individuals with lower self-esteem (Vohs & Heatherton, 2004), support this association. Self-esteem is a dynamic and variable construct with the need for competence and approval (Johnson, 1998) and a structure that motivates the search for social acceptance and approval by monitoring the possibility of social exclusion through its pre-attentional systemic function (Leary, 2012; Leary & Downs, 1995). Social comparison, which is closely related to self-esteem and general sense of belonging (Kavaklı & Ünal, 2021), sometimes serves the function of establishing closeness through similarities (Locke & Nekich, 2000) and self-esteem exhibits a robust interplay with social acceptance when faced with heightened social risk

(Cameron & Granger, 2019). Furthermore, due to the effects of daily social exposures on self and self-esteem (Kernis et al., 1993; Morse & Gergen, 1970), ability comparison in the context of low self-esteem can trigger challenging emotions like envy (Kim et al., 2021). Potential threats caused by social comparison may decrease relational closeness (Nicholls & Stukas, 2011), and social anxiety and avoidance may increase with self-esteem variability (Oosterwegel et al., 2001); thus, as the damage to self-esteem exacerbates, the person may become angry and hostile to protect themselves self-protection (Kernis et al., 1989). As individuals perceive themselves as inferior to others, they may experience relational difficulties such as introversion, non-assertiveness, and coldness (Gilbert et al., 1996). In such a case, individuals need the critical role of emotions to understand their relational needs and social cues, establish and strengthen social bonds, and protect themselves (Thompson, 1994). Emotion regulation difficulties have a notable impact on interpersonal problems (Euler et al., 2021) and, when faced challenging emotions like guilt, can lead to increased social avoidance through interaction with social comparison (Fernández-Theoduloz et al., 2019). In conclusion, the mediation of self-esteem and difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between ability-based social comparison and interpersonal problems finds substantial support in a diverse body of literature.

The thirteenth (H13), fourteenth (H14), and fifteenth (H15) hypotheses involving indirect relationships in which opinion-based social comparison was an exogenous variable were not statistically significant and were rejected. Accordingly, the indirect relationship between opinion-based social comparison and interpersonal problems was not mediated by emotion dysregulation and self-esteem, either separately or jointly. The unexpected nature of these findings might be attributed to the common approach in social comparison orientation studies, which often treat ability and opinion sub-dimensions as a single construct rather than analyzing them separately. However, considering both the theoretical foundation of social comparison and the scarcity of studies that examine these types of comparisons distinctly, it becomes evident that opinion comparison substantially differs from ability comparison. In their exemplary study, Ozimek and Bierhoff (2020) revealed that ability comparison was negatively related to self-esteem and positively related to depressive tendencies; in contrast, the opinion comparison was unrelated to either of these constructs. Another research (Brandenberg et al., 2019) found that unlike ability comparison, opinion comparison was not associated with global self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and use of the career-based social media site Xing. In line with previous studies, opinion comparison has not been found to have significant relationships or predictability with various variables such as competition (Garcia et al., 2013), personal relative deprivation, materialism (Callan et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017), social status, material possession (Kim et al., 2021), extraversion (Demir et al., 2022), identity clarity, global self-esteem (Yang, Holden, & Carter, 2018a), rumination and identity stress (Yang, Holden, Carter, & Webb, 2018b) in contrast to ability comparison. Furthermore, Festinger's (1954) pre-social comparison theory conceptualization of opinion comparison in the context of social reality consensus in informal communication and conformity pressure in social group processes (Festinger, 1950) aligns with the current findings. In a way, compared to individuality and emphasis on self in abilities, opinion comparison emphasizes more on sociability, conformity to social norms, closeness, and "we" (Festinger, 1954; Schneider & Schupp, 2014). In summary, the results on opinion comparison overlap with certain studies and are theoretically tenable, and the primary implication of the current research lies in the recognition of the associations between opinion-based social comparison and interpersonal problems.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has several limitations, notably its correlational and cross-sectional design, dependence on convenience sampling, and utilization of self-report measures. Among other limitations, the extended data collection period and the predominance of engineering faculty students are noteworthy. The exclusion of sub-dimensions of interpersonal problems from the model and the removal of two items from the opinion-based social comparison subscale could mask some patterns and limit the comparison of research findings.

Therefore, using alternative design and data collection methods, employing random sampling and diversifying the sample from different faculties and universities, considering the sub-dimensions of interpersonal problems, and including demographic variables in the analysis are among the recommendations for future studies.

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Author Contribution: The first author conceptualized the research, conducted the literature review, gathered, analyzed, reported the data, discussed the findings, and wrote the manuscript. The second author directed and guided the conceptualization of the research, the literature evaluation, data collection, data analysis, and data reporting and evaluation of discussion as the supervisor of the Ph.D. dissertation.

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Geniş Özet

Giriş

Bağlanma yoluyla hayatta kalma ve ait olma yoluyla sosyal gruplarda konum elde etme, türün devamına yönelik sosyal etkileşimi zorunlu kılar (Ferguson, 2020; Hare, 2017). Sosyal onay ve uyumu öncelikli hale getirebilen ve sağlıklı bir yaşam sürmede oldukça belirleyici olan kişilerarası ilişkilerin öncelikli işlevlerinden biri kaygıyı yatıştırmak olup (Evans, 1996; Rook vd., 2012; Wills, 1985), üniversite öğrencilerinin psikolojik uyumlarında ana etmenlerden birini oluşturmaktır (Liang & Fassinger, 2008).

Lisans öğrencilerinin içinde bulunduğu gelişim döneminde yakın ilişkiler kurma ve fiziksel çekicilik önem kazanırken sosyal izolasyon ve yakın ilişki kayıpları oldukça zorlayıcı olabilir. Sosyal karşılaştırma yöneliminin arttığı bu gelişimsel dönemde riskli davranış ve madde kullanım

olasılığı artabilmektedir (Arnett, 2015; Buunk vd., 2020; Santrock, 2006). Bu gelişimsel dönemin en sık karşılaşılan sorunları arasında yer alan kişilerarası problemler (Koydemir vd., 2010) okula bağlılık (Li vd., 2021), akademik performans (Mittelmeier vd., 2018), psikososyal kaynaklar, kimlik süreçleri (Adams vd., 2006), alkolle ilgili sorunlar, depresif belirtiler (Keough vd., 2015), duygu düzenleme güçlükleri, yeme bozuklukları (Ambwani vd., 2014), psikopatolojik belirtiler (De Panfilis vd., 2013) ve intihar riski (Suh vd., 2017) gibi önemli psikolojik sağlık göstergeleriyle ilişkilenmektedir.

Bu gelişimsel evrede yaygın olabilen belirsizlik, stres, rekabet ve yenilikler sosyal karşılaştırma davranışlarını da tetikleyebilmekte ve arttırabilmektedir (Gibbons ve Buunk, 1999). Sosyal karşılaştırma böylelikle bireyi başkalarıyla bir araya gelmeye güdüleyebilmekte, kurulan yakınlık ve ilişkiler yoluyla kaygıyı azaltmaya yönelik duygusal kaynak ve bilişsel netlik sağlayabilmektedir (Kulik ve Mahler, 1997). Yani, ihtiyaç duyulan kişilerarası ilişkilerdeki baskınlık ve yakınlık (Leary, 1957), sosyal karşılaştırma işleviyle çözülebilmektedir. Ancak sosyal karşılaştırma davranışı kişilerarası ilişkilerde çoğu zaman sağlıksız çıktılara neden olmakta ve bazı bireylerde olumsuz bir takım psikolojik yapılarla ilişkilenebilmektedir. Örneğin, Wolsko (2012) üniversite öğrencilerinin günlüklerinde sürekli ve istemsiz biçimde kendi fiziksel görünüm ve zekâlarını çevrelerindeki kişilerle karşılaştırıp değerlendirdiklerini ve bu deneyimler sonucunda yoğun üstünlük veya aşağıda olma duyguları yaşadıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Wetherall vd. (2019) ise bir üniversite örnekleminde olumsuz sosyal karşılaştırmaların bir sonucu olarak daha düşük bir konumda hissetmenin yüksek intihar düşünceleriyle ilişkili olduğunu bulmuştur. Etki ve sonuçları bireylere göre değişen sosyal karşılaştırma davranışındaki bu tür bireysel farklılıklar, Gibbons ve Buunk (1999) tarafından Festinger (1954)'in klasik kuramına dayanarak ilgili davranışın yoğunluğunu ifade eden sosyal karşılaştırma yönelimi olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır.

Sosyal karşılaştırmayla edinilen bilgi, bireyin bilişini, duygularını ve davranışını etkileme gücüne sahiptir (Corcoran vd., 2011). Bireysel niteliklerin, toplumsal konumun, kişilerarası bağların, duygusal durumların ve bireylerin sahip olduğu maddi ve manevi varlıkların karşılaştırılması (Cloutier vd., 2012; Kedia vd., 2014), başkalarının sahip olduğu üstün veya arzu edilen niteliklerde eksiklik hissettirdiğinde birey kaçıngan veya boyun eğici olmak gibi kişilerarası zorluklar yaşayabilmektedir (Irons & Gilbert, 2005). Bu durum bireyin ilişkisel dışlanma riskini gözleyen öz-saygısının (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) azalmasına ve hoşnutsuzluk hissinin artmasına neden olabilmektedir (Wilcox & Laird, 2000). Ayrıca, duygu düzenlemeyi güçleştiren olumsuz sosyal karşılaştırma, ilişkilerde soğuk ve aşağılayıcı davranışlara yol açabilen kıskançlık ve düşmanca duygulara (Salovey & Rodin, 1984) ve öz saygıyı korumaya ve zor duyguları yönetmeye yönelik öfkeli ve yıkıcı kişilerarası davranışlara neden olabilmektedir (Garofalo vd., 2016; Kernis vd., 1989).

Özetle, öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlükleri, sosyal karşılaştırmanın kişilerarası problemler üzerindeki etkilerinin potansiyel açıklayıcıları olabilir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın temel amacı, lisans öğrencilerinin kişilerarası problemlerini etkileyen sosyal karşılaştırma yöneliminin rolünü incelemek ve bu etkiyi öz-saygı ile duygu düzenleme güçlükleri gibi potansiyel aracılar yoluyla araştırmaktır.

Yöntem

Korelasyonel araştırma deseninin kullanıldığı bu çalışmada veriler kolayda örnekleme tekniği kullanılarak elde edilmiştir. Dışlama kriterleri ve aykırı değer analizleri uygulandıktan sonra geriye kalan 549 katılımcı, yaş ortalaması 21,8 (*SS* = 1,58) olan %51,1 kadın ve %48,1 erkek

öğrencilerden oluşmuştur. Daha sonra, önerilen modeli test etmek ve lisans öğrencileri arasında yetenek-temelli ve görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmalar, öz-saygı, duygu düzenleme güçlükleri ve kişilerarası problemler arasındaki yapısal ilişkileri araştırmak için yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (YEM) uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular

Görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırma ile öz-saygı arasındaki korelasyon haricinde, tüm değişkenler orta ila yüksek düzeyde iki değişkenli ilişkilere sahiptir. Yapısal eşitlik modellemesi, önerilen modelin çalışma verileriyle uyumlu olduğunu göstermiştir. Yetenek-temelli sosyal karşılaştırma ile kişilerarası problemler arasındaki tüm doğrudan ve dolaylı ilişkiler anlamlı bulunmuş ve ilgili hipotezler doğrulanmıştır. Bunula birlikte, görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırma ile kişilerarası problemler arasındaki tüm doğrudan ve dolaylı ilişkiler istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bulunamamış ve ilgili hipotezler reddedilmiştir. Nihai model, kişilerarası problemlerin %30'unun yetenek-temelli ve görüş temelli sosyal karşılaştırmalar ile öz-saygı ve duygu düzenlemede yaşanan güçlükler tarafından açıklandığını ortaya koymuştur.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Elde edilen bulgular mevcut alanyazınla büyük ölçüde tutarlılık göstermiştir. İlgili alanyazınla farklılaşan görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmaya ilişkin bulgular ise açıklanabilir nitelikte olup kuram ve araştırma açısından katkı sağlayıcıdır. Yetenek-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmanın, kişilerarası problemler üzerindeki anlamlı doğrudan etkisinin yanı sıra öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlükleri aracılığıyla dolaylı etkilerinin de anlamlı bulunması, mevcut literatüre göre beklenen sonuçlardır (bkz. Alicke & Zell, 2008; Euler vd., 2021; Nicholls & Stukas, 2011; Richmond vd., 2021; Patrick vd., 2004). Yani yeteneklerini başkalarıyla yoğun biçimde karşılaştıran kişiler, kişilerarası ilişkilerinde daha fazla sorun yaşamakta ve bu deneyimlerine görece düşük öz-saygıları ile duygu düzenlemede yaşadıkları yüksek güçlükler aracılık etmektedir.

Öte yandan görüş-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmanın kişilerarası problemler üzerinde ne doğrudan ne de öz-saygı ve duygu düzenleme güçlükleri aracılığıyla istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir etkiye sahip olmaması ve hipotezlerin reddedilmesi yaygın alanyazına göre beklenmedik bir sonuçtur. Ancak sınırlı sayıdaki bazı çalışmalar, farklı karşılaştırma içerikleri nedeniyle görüş ve yetenek-temelli sosyal karşılaştırmaların ayırt edilmesi gerektiğini öne sürmüştür (bkz. Callan vd., 2015; Kim vd., 2017; Zhang vd., 2021). Görüş karşılaştırmasının psikolojik iyi oluş, iyimserlik (Park & Baek, 2018) ve yüksek sosyal uyum (Yang & Robinson, 2018) ile pozitif korelasyonlar kurması da mevcut bulguyla uyumludur. Ayrıca, Festinger'in (1950) görüş karşılaştırmasını sosyal gerçeklikte fikir birliği ve grup dinamiklerine uyum baskısı bağlamında kavramsallaştırması ve görüş karşılaştırmasının sosyallikle, sosyal normlara bağlılıkla, kişilerarası yakınlıkla ve kolektif kimlikle ilişkilenmesi mevcut bulguları desteklemektedir (Festinger, 1954; Schneider & Schupp, 2014).

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, kişilerarası ilişkilerin temel motivasyonları olan öz-saygı ve güvenlik (Sullivan, 1953) ya da temel boyutları olan baskınlık ve bağlılığı (Leary, 1957) önerilen modeldeki ilgili değişkenlerle aracı değişkenler olarak belirleyerek kişilerarası problemlerin öncüllerini aydınlatmayı amaçlamıştır. Ayrıca güvenlik arzusu ile ilişkilenen potansiyel tetikleyici sosyal karşılaştırmanın (bkz. Gilbert vd., 1995) kuramsal bütünlükle modele dahil edilmesi bu önemi arttırmıştır. Böylelikle, Türkiye'deki hâkim kültürün kolektif ancak hiyerarşik yapısı içinde (bkz. Keldal & Karadaş, 2021; Sarı, 2011; Triandis, 1995) kişilerarası ilişkilerin nasıl deneyimlendiği sorusuna yanıt aranmıştır.