International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 2015, 7 (2), 112-120

iojes
www.iojes.net

International Online Journal of Educational Sciences

ISSN: 1309-2707

Examination of Social Comparison Levels of Secondary and High School Students Doing Sports by Various Variables

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 15.06.2014.
Received in revised form 05.12.2014
Accepted 18.12.2014
Available online 27.03.2015

ABSTRACT

Social comparison can be defined as the process by which an individual compares himself/herself with others in order to get an idea about himself/herself or maintain such an idea. The purpose of this study was to investigate social comparison levels of secondary and high school students who regularly do sports. For this purpose, the Social Comparison Scale was used. A total of 323 secondary and high school students volunteered to participate in the study. In the study, data was using the SPSS 16 software package and Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied to determine significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$). As a result, it was determined that the students' purpose in doing sports affects their social comparison levels ($p < 0.05$), whereas gender, selected sports branch and whether they actively participate in recreational activities have no effect on social comparison levels ($p > 0.05$).

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Keywords:
Social comparison, sport, sport branch, leisure activities

Introduction

The development of an individual is affected by the properties of the environment in which s/he was born and grew, his/her relationships with the people around him/her and his/her experiences in various aspects. Favorable environmental conditions positively support the development of an individual, whereas adverse environmental conditions may prevent the development of an individual in many ways. An individual's relationship with his/her immediate environment shapes how s/he perceives the world and himself/herself (Sezer, 2010).

Self-concept, which is one of the factors that form the basis of personality, represents a person's thoughts on who s/he is, what s/he means, what s/he can do and how s/he adapts to the world (Sarı & Cenkseven, 2008).

Self-concept is not an innate characteristic; it emerges in time within social and physical environments (Sarı & Cenkseven, 2008).

In other words, self-concept is the way in which a person gains insight about himself/herself. Self-esteem is the emotional side of the self and the state of appreciation a person reaches as a result of one's self-assessment (Karademir, Döşyılmaz, Çoban & Kafkas, 2010). So self-esteem refers to the state of appreciation and awareness governed by self (Hu, McAuley & Elavsky, 2005).

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2015.02.002

Self-esteem can be evaluated as high or low (Uyanık & Akman, 2004). It is clear that individuals with high self-esteem have positive mental qualities such as self-confidence, desire for success, optimism and perseverance as well as a tendency to perceive themselves as helpful, important people who deserve to be respected and recognized (Cevher & Buluş, 2007). In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem show personality traits such as those of people who are distrustful of people, easily get desperate, cannot adapt in social relationships, easily have a felling of guilt and shame, etc. (Alan and Gilbert, 1995; Cevher and Buluş, 2007).

Social comparison is an inevitable aspect of the formation and perpetuation of social interaction, and thus self-esteem. It is the fact that an individual acquires knowledge to reduce uncertainties about himself/herself, makes decisions in line with his/her skills, copes with anxiety and stress associated with uncertainty, and persistently makes social comparison to be able to improve oneself (Çakmak & Kara, 2011).

In other words, social comparison is the process in which an individual compares himself/herself with others in order to get an idea about himself/herself or maintain such idea (Taş, 2011). Over the past 50 years, psychologists have consistently found that comparison with others is one of the means for self-assessment and self-concept. When people are uncertain of their self-evaluation, they usually compare themselves with others to gain information about where they stand. Self-evaluation is usually done in a relative rather than an absolute manner because judgment is context dependent and social comparison sets the standards or frames of reference (Cheng & Lam, 2007).

Social comparison can take place in various ways. Social comparison can be based on facts as well as simulation (e.g.: imaginary, temporary comparisons about the future, comparisons with something that does not exist) (Taş, 2011).

According to Petersen and Ritz (2010), social comparison can be made in an upward fashion such as comparison with individuals or groups who are in a more favorable condition or the contrary, comparison with individuals or groups who are less lucky, and it can be a contrast for those in similar conditions (Petersen & Ritz, 2010).

The development of social comparisons is thought to be intimately tied to developmental changes in beliefs about the causes of individual behavior (Rhodes & Brickman, 2008). Individuals are involved in social comparisons as from childhood, because individuals' thoughts and feelings about themselves are, to a large extent, a product of their relationships in the early years of their lives (Cevher & Buluş, 2007).

The social dimension of sports incorporates social institutions, as well as concepts and events, including society, family, youth, women, children, education, culture, economy, politics, religion, government, law, social security, fair play, leisure, personality, being a sports fan, etc. (Demirel, Güven & Ünlü, 2007).

The purpose of people interested in sports is to improve physical and mental health, acquire self-confidence and achieve high levels of performance (Demir & Filiz, 2004). In different cultures, various aims and values in general are internalized through the socialization process, particularly the aims and values promoted in and through sports. During the adolescent age, which is especially sensitive to the social influences, it can be presumed that major differences in sports motivation will be found exactly in the aspects of extrinsic motivation reflecting social influences in different cultures (Mladenovic & Marjanovic, 2011).

One of the most important benefits of sports for people is that it facilitates socialization, which is vital for people to live in a relatively more peaceful, secure and sheltered way (Yıldırım & Özcan, 2011).

Thus, sports can be said to have an impact on individuals' self-esteem and their social comparisons. Based on this information, the aim of this study was to investigate social comparison levels of secondary and high school students doing sports, by personal variables.

Method

Study Group

The study sample was selected by simple random sampling (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2012; Ural & Kılıç, 2011). In total 323 students (209 female and 114 male) volunteered for the study. The students, involved in the study, were active athletes and participated in physical trainings or physical activities related to their sport branch for at least one year. In the study as team sports, the most common sport branches in Kutahya were football and basketball, and as individual sports athletism, karate and taekwando were chosen.

Data Collection Tool

In the study, a 10-item personal information form developed by the researchers was used as a data collection tool and a Social Comparison Scale was employed to measure the social comparison scores of the respondents. The scale originally developed by Alan and Gilbert (1991) was first adapted to Turkish by Şahin and Şahin (1992) , then revised by Şahin and Şahin (1993). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found as 0.87 (Şahin & Şahin, 1992; Savaşır & Şahin, 1997).

In their study, Öksüz and Malhan (2004) performed the validity and reliability analysis of the scale, investigated the percentages of variance of the measurement tool and stated that the measurement tool can be grouped under three subscales. In addition, they made a further factor analysis by applying varimax rotation for the three subscales. Accordingly, the three subscales explained 56.7% of the total variance. When the items of subscales were examined, it was thought that the first, second and third subscales could be social rank, attractiveness, and social virtues, respectively. Items with low correlation were removed from the 18-item scale, and the final version was a 10-item scale. Accordingly, the social rank subscale included the items of incompetent/competent, untalented/talented, unconfident/confident; the attractiveness subscale included the items of unlikable/ likeable, alone/ not alone, left out/accepted, unattractive/attractive, and the social virtues subscale included the items of impatient / patient, intolerant / tolerant and disorganized/organized. In addition, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.87. In this study, the study was based on the study by Öksüz and Malhan (2004).

Data Gathering Way

In the study data was gathered between January and April 2013 by the researchers by using a paper and pencil method in a classroom environment. Students were informed about how to fill in the scales and about the importance of the study before the application of the scales. The completion of the scales took about 10 minutes per student.

Data Evaluation and Analysis

During evaluation data, were organized in the Microsoft Excel 2010 program and analyzed using SPSS for Windows 16 software package. Percentage (%) and frequency (F) methods were used to determine the distribution of the respondents' personal details and the One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine whether the data have a normal distribution and thus which statistical methods to use. After it was seen that the data fits non-parametric test conditions, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied to determine significant differences (Ural & Kılıç, 2011).

Findings

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents' personal details

Variable		F	%
Gender	Female	209	64.7
	Male	114	35.3
	Total	323	100
Age	11–13	16	5
	14–16	236	73.1
	17 and above	71	22
	Total	323	100
Prosperity Level	Very bad	4	1.2
	Bad	11	3.4
	Normal	132	40.9
	Good	132	40.9
	Very good	44	13.6
	Total	323	100
I usually spend my free time	On my own	52	16.1
	With my family	44	13.6
	With my friends	215	66.6
	Under the guidance of experts	12	3.7
	Total	323	100
Free Time Per Week	0-3 hours	51	15.8
	4-7 hours	66	20.4
	8-11 hours	60	18.6
	12-15 hours	44	13.6
	16 hours or more	102	31.6
	Total	323	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of personal details of students included in the study. Accordingly, it is seen that 64.7% of the sample group were women (n = 209), 73.1% were from the age group of 14-16 years (n = 236) and 40.9% (132) regarded their prosperity level as normal. Also, it is seen that 66.6% of the students prefer to spend their free time usually with their friends (n = 215), while 31.6% have a free time of 16 hours or more per week.

Table 2. The results of one sample kolmogorov-smirnov test

	Social Comparison		
	Social rank	Attractiveness	Social virtues
N	323	323	323
$\overline{X}$	4.58	4.84	4.27
SS	.99	.99	1.03
Z	2.28	2.32	1.36
P	.00	.00	.04

Table 2 presents the results of One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test performed in order to determine whether the data has a normal distribution and fits the conditions of which statistical test (parametric or nonparametric tests). Accordingly, the respondents' social comparison scores do not have a normal distribution in the social rank subscale (P = 0.00, p <0.05), attractiveness subscale (P = 0.00, p <0.05) and social virtues subscale (P = 0.04, p <0.05).

Table 3. The respondents' cocial comparison scores

Social Comparison	N	Min	Max	$\overline{X}$	SS
Social rank	323	1.33	6.	4.58	0.99
Attractiveness	323	1.	6.	4.84	0.99
Social virtues	323	1.	6.	4.27	1.03

Table 3 shows the students' mean social comparison scores. According to analysis results, the calculated possible lowest scores and highest scores of social comparison scale for social rank, attractiveness and social virtues subscales were respectively as follows: (1.33 ± 0.99), (6 ± 0.99); (1 ± 0.99), (6 ± 0.99); (1 ± 1.03) (6 ± 1.03). In addition, the respondents' calculated social rank subscale, attractiveness subscale, and social virtues subscale scores were (4.58 ± 0.99), (4.84 ± 0.99) and (4.27 ± 1.03), respectively.

Table 4. Social comparison scores by gender

Social Comparison	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Social rank	Female	209	161.52	33758.5	11813.5	0.9
	Male	114	162.87	18567.5		
Attractiveness	Female	209	163.89	34253.	11518.	0.62
	Male	114	158.54	18073.		
Social virtues	Female	209	166.66	34832.	10938.5	0.22
	Male	114	153.45	17493.		

Table 4 shows the results of Mann-Whitney U test by the respondents' gender. According to the results of the analysis, the respondents' social comparison scores by gender did not show a significant difference in social rank subscale (U = 11813.5, p = 0.9, p> 0.05), attractiveness subscale (U = 11518.0, p = 0.62, p> 0.05) and social virtues subscale (U = 10938.5, p = 0.22, p> 0.05).

Table 5. Social comparison scores by selected sports branch

Social Comparison	Sports Branch	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Social rank	Individual Sports	202	162.55	32836.	12109.	0.89
	Team Sports	121	161.07	19490.		
Attractiveness	Individual Sports	202	156.15	31542.	11039.	0.14
	Team Sports	121	171.77	20784.		
Social virtues	Individual Sports	202	165.92	33515.	11430.	0.32
	Team Sports	121	155.46	18811.		

Table 5 presents the results of Mann-Whitney U test by the sports branch selected by the respondents (individual sports / team sports). According to the results of the analysis, the respondents' social comparison scores by the sports branch selected did not show a significant difference in social rank subscale (U = 12109.0, p = 0.89, p> 0.05), attractiveness subscale (U = 11039.0, p = 0.14, p> 0.05) and social virtues subscale (U = 11430.0, p = 0.32, p> 0.05).

Table 6. Social comparison scores by the extent of active participation in recreational activities

Social Comparison	Do you actively participate in recreational activities?	N	Mean Rank	Total Rank	U	P
Social rank	Yes	217	162.21	35199.	11456.	0.95
	No	106	161.58	17127.		
Attractiveness	Yes	217	161.03	34943.5	11290.5	0.78
	No	106	163.99	17382.5		
Social virtues	Yes	217	160.18	34758.5	11105.5	0.61
	No	106	165.73	17567.5		

The results of Mann-Whitney U test by the extent to which the students actively participate in recreational activities are given in Table 7. According to the results of the analysis, the respondents' social comparison scores did not show a significant difference in social rank subscale (U = 11456.0, p = 0.95, p> 0.05), attractiveness subscale (U = 11290.5, p = 0.78, p> 0.05) and social virtues subscale (U = 11105.5, p = 0.61, p> 0.05).

Discussion and Conclusion

According to results of the study, it was determined that the students in the sample group achieved the lowest score (4.27 ± 1.03) from the Social Comparison Scale in the social virtues subscale and the highest score (4.84 ± 0.99) in the attractiveness subscale. Given the possible lowest and highest scores in subscales of the scale, the respondents' scores were found to be high.

This result was thought to be an expected result, considering the advantages of physical education and sports for individuals and that these advantages are comprised of activities which improve not only psychomotor skills but also cognitive and affective skills (Balyan, Yerlikaya & Kiremitçi, 2012).

According to the results of the analysis, it was evident that gender had no impact on the students' social comparison levels. This result is comparable to the findings of similar studies in the literature (Yılmaz, 2010; Üstün, Göral, Kalkavan & Demirel, 2012). Saygın and Arslan (2009) argued that students who are faced with similar problems have similar relationships in the same developmental period, irrespective of gender. This is thought to have some indirect implications on this result obtained in our study.

Another result of the study was that the preferred sports branch (individual or team sports) had no impact on the respondents' social comparison levels. While referring to the importance of sports in young people's lives, Kılbaş (2010) suggested that sports have a very diverse and important role for many young people and emphasized that young people turn into sports in order to gain recognition and build friendships (Kilbaş, 2010). This is considered to have effects on the result obtained.

Another result of the study was that the respondents' active participation in recreational activities also had no effect on social comparison levels. Free time is a legitimate and valuable space in which young people will find their own identity (Üstün, Kalkavan & Demirel, 2013). Participation in recreational activities provides a variety of satisfaction in individuals and individuals develop themselves (Kılbaş, 2010). However, examination systems which the students are exposed to and intensive curricula were thought to affect this result.

In the literature, there are several studies which tried to reveal the relationship between regularly doing sports or participating in athletic activities and the concepts, including individuals' personality, self, social comparison, developing self-esteem, developing positive behaviors, etc (Tuncay, 1991; Er, Çamlıyer, Çamlıyer Çobanoğlu &Er, 1999; Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009; Demirel, 2013; Balyan, Yerlikaya Balyan & Kiremitçi, 2012).

Physical education and sports are two concepts which complement each other and should not be considered separately. One of the basic purposes of physical education and sports is to improve a person's physical and mental health and strengthen his/her will. Moreover, physical education and sports are an important factor that triggers an individual's undiscovered characteristics and creativity (Akgül, Göral, Demirel & Üstün, 2012). Zorba maintains that doing sports regularly leads to the emergence of positive results such as development of self-esteem, increasing self-confidence, etc. in individuals. (Zorba, 2012).

In other words the advantages of doing sports whether as an amateur or professional or for medical purposes are high for individuals, particularly for primary and secondary school students, whose development hasn't been completed yet.

In light of the results obtained in this study and as similar studies are conducted, it is thought that advantages of sports for young Turkish people in physical, affective as well as cognitive areas will be better understood. Similar studies should be conducted not only on individuals who do sports but also on those who don't and comparisons should be made with individuals who do sports. Moreover, the sample group should be expanded by reaching different populations in terms of revealing positive effects of sports.

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