Research Reports

Investigating the Predictive Role of Social Self-Efficacy on Authenticity in Turkish University Students

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between social self-efficacy and authenticity. The Perceived Social Self-efficacy Scale and the Authenticity Scale were administrated to a sample of 308 university students. The research data were analysed by correlation and linear regression analysis. Social self-efficacy is positively related to authentic living, and is negatively related to accepting external influence, and self-alienating. The linear regression analysis showed that social self-efficacy was a significant predictor of authenticity. The significance and limitations of the results are discussed.

Keywords: authenticity, social self-efficacy, linear regression

Introduction

Self-efficacy, based on Bandura's (1977) theory, has influenced psychology over the past few decades and can be defined as individuals' beliefs in their sufficiency to be successful in a task (Bandura, 1997). Researchers have suggested four factors which have an important role in the development of self-efficacy: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning or modelling, emotional arousal, and social persuasion and encouragement (Smith & Betz, 2000). Bandura (2000) found that people with high self-efficacy tend to have greater cognitive resourcefulness, strategic flexibility and effectiveness in managing their environment, and set motivating goals for themselves. While people with high self-efficacy can be successful in complex tasks, people with low self-efficacy avoid difficult tasks (Bandura, 1986, 1993).

Self-efficacy which is mostly related to interpersonal relationships is called social self-efficacy and was defined by Smith and Betz (2000, p. 286) as "an individual's confidence in his/her ability to engage in the social interactional task necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships". Gecas (1989) noted that individuals with social self-efficacy are capable of initiating social contact and developing new friendships. Self-efficacy is formed by previous accomplishment, social modelling, social persuasion, mastery experiences and psychological and emotional situations (McAuley & Courneya, 1993).

Social self-efficacy is important not only in its possible relationship to effective social behaviour but also in psychological adjustment and mental health. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that higher levels of social self-efficacy are related to higher levels of self-esteem (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Connolly, 1989; Hermann & Betz, 2004, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2000, 2002), social confidence (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Fan & Mak, 1998; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003; Smith & Betz, 2000), and problem solving skills (Bilgin & Akkapulu, 2007; Di Giunta et al., 2010; Matsushima & Shiomi, 2003). Other researchers suggested that higher levels of social self-efficacy are related to lower levels of depression (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999; Hermann & Betz, 2004, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2002), social anxiety (Connolly, 1989; Fan, Meng, Gao, Lopez, & Liu, 2010; Sherer & Adams, 1983; Smith & Betz, 2000), and shyness (Anderson & Betz, 2001; Hermann & Betz, 2004) and social self-efficacy skill mediates the relationship between stressful life events and depressive symptoms (Maciejewski, Prigerson, & Mazure, 2000). Moreover, recent research has indicated that lower levels of social self-efficacy are related to higher levels of internet addiction (İskender & Akin, 2010) and game addiction (Jeong & Kim, 2011).

Authenticity

During interpersonal relationships, those individuals who express themselves in a clear and honest manner have been accepted as psychologically adaptive persons (Harbus, 2002). In this respect Kernis (2003) proposed that "authenticity can be characterized as reflecting the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (p. 13). Authenticity is a life-long discovery process including an individual's awareness of his/her personal potential and behaving based on his/her potential (Starr, 2008). According to Sheldon (2009), authenticity comprises being emotionally sincere, self-attunement, and having psychological depth, and being authentic is essential for individuals to experience optimal levels of psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Rogers, 1961).

Kernis (2003) suggested that authenticity had four discriminable components: awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational orientation. Kernis and Goldman (2004) defined awareness as the realization of an individual's own emotions, desires and information about himself, and to trust them; unbiased processing as the individual perceiving his/her inner and external experiences without any dismissal, distortion or exaggeration; action as consistency between one's behaviours and needs; relational orientation as individuals' clear and honest behaviours in their close relationships.

Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, and Joseph (2008), inspired by Barrett-Lennard's (1998) authenticity definition based on individual-centred counselling, explained authenticity as including self-alienation, accepting external influence and authentic living. Wood et al. stated that these components interact with each other. For example, people who submit to external influence more quickly draw away from themselves and become self-alienated. In contrast, people who submit to external influence less live a more authentic life. In this context, it is possible to regard self-alienation and authentic life as two end-points. Rae (2010), similarly, emphasized that the concept of alienation would help to gain significant insight into human existence. There are, however, different types of authenticity, such as personal authenticity (Neri & Sabbadini, 2008), subjective authenticity (Wood et al., 2008), distortional authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003), emotional authenticity (Salmela, 2005) and psychological authenticity (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).

In Neff and Harter's (2002) research, about how married couples solve conflicts between them, it was found that, while resolving the dispute, men and women who prioritise their personal needs and behave in an agreeable

manner act more authentically than those who ignore personal needs. It was also concluded that men act more authentically than women. In a study in which he examined the relationship between authenticity and depression, Theran (2011) found that authenticity was negatively associated with depression in both male and female groups. Moreover, White and Tracey (2011) indicated in their study on relationships between authenticity and career indecision that individuals who have high authenticity live with less indecision whereas those who have low authenticity live with more indecision. Also, it is stated that authenticity is related to variables such as leadership (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988; Dillon, 2001; Hannah, Walumbwa, & Fry, 2011), well-being (Ménard & Brunet, 2011; Wood et al., 2008), self-esteem (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), and the big-five personality traits (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Sheldon et al., 1997).

The Present Study

Although there is an abundance of studies investigating social self-efficacy and authenticity, studies that investigate directly the relationship between these two concepts are limited. In this respect, this study will provide theoretical insights to both the social self-efficacy and authenticity literatures. Additionally, studies on social self-efficacy have mostly been conducted with children and adolescents (e.g., Connolly, 1989; Dinç, 2011; Wheeler & Ladd, 1982). Recent studies have also demonstrated that lower levels of social self-efficacy are related to higher levels of depression (Hermann & Betz, 2004; Smith & Betz, 2002). Similarly, Theran (2011) demonstrated that authenticity is negatively related to depression symptomology. Also social self-efficacy has been widely applied to psychological adjustment and mental health (Hermann & Betz, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2002) as well as authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Goldman, 2004; Goldman, Kernis, Piasecki, Hermann, & Foster, 2004; Rogers, 1961). Goldman et al. (2004) found that authenticity was linked with interpersonal adjustment and attachment security. Consistently Mallinckrodt and Wei (2005) found that individuals with high levels of both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance showed lower levels of social self-efficacy.

Authenticity is a self-discovery process that continues throughout the life and, as a result of this process, there is agreement in relations with self and others (Starr, 2008). In other words authenticity has an important role in social relationships. Social self-efficacy is directly related to social life. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that social self-efficacy may be a significant predictor of authenticity. Thus the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social self-efficacy and dimensions of authenticity. Based on the relationship presented above, this study poses the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Social self-efficacy is negatively associated with accepting external influence.

Hypothesis 2: Social self-efficacy is negatively associated with self-alienating.

Hypothesis 3: Social self-efficacy is positively associated with authentic living.

Method

Participants

Participants were 308 volunteer undergraduate students (166 [54%] women and 142 [46%] men) studying various subjects (biology, economics, geography, mathematics, science education, social science education, primary school education, psychology, and sociology), at Sakarya University. Of the participants, 83 (27%) were freshman, 81 (26%) were sophomores, 74 (24%) were juniors, and 70 (23%) were seniors. Their ages ranged from 17 to 23 year-old (M = 18.9, SD = 1.1). Convenience sampling was used in the selection of participants. Convenience

sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Bryman, 2004). For this reason, it is not suitable to use the results of this study to make inferences about the entire population.

Measures

Perceived Social Self-efficacy Scale (PSSE). Social self-efficacy was measured using the Perceived Social Self-efficacy Scale (Smith & Betz, 2000). The scale contains 25 items (e.g., "Put yourself in a new and different social situation" and "Find someone to go to lunch with") on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = no confidence at all to 5 = complete confidence). The scale items are related to making friends, social assertiveness, pursuing romantic relationships, performance in public situations, groups and parties, and receiving and giving help. Smith and Betz (2000) reported that the PSSE scale had a single-factor structure. A sum of all scores yields a total score that ranges from 25 to 125; higher scores indicate higher levels of social self-efficacy. A Turkish adaptation of this scale has been devised by Palanci (2004). The internal consistency coefficient of the adapted Turkish form was .89. For test–retest reliability, the scale was administered to 100 undergraduate students twice in 4 weeks. The Pearson correlation coefficient was .68. In the present study, Cronbach alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .73$.

*Authenticity Scale (*Wood et al., 2008*).* The Authenticity Scale contains 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = does not describe me at all to 7 = describes me very well). The scale has three sub-dimensions: accepting external influence (AEI, four items, e.g., "Other people influence me greatly"), self-alienating (S-E, four items, e.g., "I don't know how I really feel inside"), and authentic living (AL, four items, e.g., "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs"). A Turkish adaptation study was carried out by Akin and Dönmezogullari (2010). According to their findings, three factors explained 57% of total variance. Internal consistencies were .73, .72, and .75 and three-week test-retest reliability estimates were .89, .86, and .79 for AEI, S-E, and AL, respectively. According to results of their study, self-alienating and accepting external influence were positively correlated with stress ($r = .54$ and $r = .22$), and anxiety ($r = .43$ and $r = .16$), and negatively correlated with happiness ($r = -.55$ and $r = -.16$), self-esteem ($r = -.59$ and $r = -.20$). Authentic living was positively correlated with happiness ($r = .26$), and self-esteem ($r = .36$), and negatively correlated with anxiety ($r = -.18$), and stress ($r = -.20$). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .79$, .76, and .80 for AEI, S-E, and AL, respectively.

Procedure

Researchers obtained permission for the participation of students from the relevant chief of the department. Self-report questionnaires, in counterbalanced order, were administered in a quiet classroom setting, during spring term 2011. Completion of the questionnaires was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. Data were collected by the researchers and questionnaires were completed in approximately 15 minutes. Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression were applied to assess statistical significance for the relations of social self-efficacy with authenticity. Analyses were carried out with IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results

Descriptive Data and Intercorrelations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for the variables.

Table 1

Means, SDs, and Pearson Intercorrelations of the Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Accepting external influence	1			
2. Self-alienating	.46*	1		
3. Authentic living	-.30*	-.51*	1	
4. Social self-efficacy	-.34*	-.43*	.40*	1
M	13.99	11.97	23.64	88.22
SD	5.74	5.26	4.03	13.74

*p < .01.

Correlations between social self-efficacy and authenticity were statistically significant. Social self-efficacy correlated negatively *r* = -.34 (*p* < .01) with accepting external influence, and *r* = -.43 (*p* < .01) with self-alienating. However, social self-efficacy correlated positively *r* = .40 (*p* < .01) with authentic living.

Is Social Self-Efficacy a Predictor of Authenticity?

Social self-efficacy was an independent variable and dimensions of authenticity were dependent variables. Table 2 shows the results of linear regression analysis for each variable.

Table 2

Linear Regression of Social Self-Efficacy on Dimensions of Authenticity

Predictor	Dependent	*b*	Standard Error of *b*	β	*t*	*p*
Social Self-efficacy	Accepting external influence	-.143	.022	-.343	-6.39	<.001
	Self-alienating	-.165	.020	-.432	-8.37	<.001
	Authentic living	.117	.015	.399	7.62	<.001

According to the results of the regression analysis, social self-efficacy, β = -.34, *p* < .001, significantly predicted accepting external influence. Adjusted R squared indicated that social self-efficacy predicted 11.5% of the variance in accepting external influence. The results of the second linear regression indicated that social self-efficacy, β = -.43, *p* < .001 was a significant predictor of self-alienating. According to the adjusted R squared, social self-efficacy predicted 18.4% of variance in self-alienating. In the third, social self-efficacy, β = .40, *p* < .001, significantly predicted authentic living. Adjusted R squared indicated that social self-efficacy predicted 15.7% of the variance in authentic living.

Discussion

This study investigates the relationship between social self-efficacy and authenticity. Correlations and regression analysis confirm the hypotheses and show that social self-efficacy is negatively associated with accepting external influence and self-alienating and is positively associated with authentic living. There are only indirect studies that investigate relations between social self-efficacy and authenticity which support the results of the present study. For instance, as the result of research on authenticity, researchers found a positive relationship between well-being and authenticity (Ménard & Brunet, 2011; Wood et al., 2008). Furthermore, results regarding the relationship between social self-efficacy and well-being indicated a positive relation between the two concepts (Di Giunta et

al., 2010). Therefore, the positive relationship between social self-efficacy and authentic living is reasonable. In parallel with this study's findings, Goldman and Kernis (2002) examined authenticity's relationship with self-esteem. They suggested that authentic people had high levels of self-esteem. There are many studies investigating the relationship between social self-efficacy and self-esteem and the results of these studies indicate consistently that individuals who have high social self-efficacy also have high self-esteem (e.g., Caprara & Steca, 2005; Connolly, 1989; Hermann & Betz, 2004, 2006; Smith & Betz, 2000, 2002). Consequently, it can be said that results of the study are consistent with previous findings.

There are some limitations of this research. Firstly, the sample presented here is limited to university students. For that reason, it is questionable whether the findings can be generalized to different age groups. Secondly, the data reported here for authenticity and social self-efficacy are limited to self-reported data. Besides, although the regression analysis approach is used to estimate the proposed model, it is difficult to give a full explanation related to causality among the variables examined in the research, since only correlational data was collected. Finally, it can be mentioned that the participants were selected using convenience sampling in this study and therefore this may limit the generalization of findings of this study to the general population in Turkey.

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