

Examining the Relationship between the Sense of Humor and the Social Exclusion Perceived by Gifted and Talented Students

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Abstract

This research aimed to establish the relationship between the social exclusion perceived by gifted and talented students and their sense of humor. Besides, the goal was to evaluate the relationship between the variables of the use of humor, the process of coping through a sense of humor, and the appreciating humor in cases of ignoring and avoiding during social exclusion. A relational screening model was used in the research. Among the research variables included in the model, social exclusion (ostracism) is considered as a dependent variable, while the sense of humor is an independent variable. The study group is composed of 202 students who are diagnosed as gifted and talented students. Within the scope of the study, the "Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale for Children" developed by Akin and Bilgin (2015) and the "Social Exclusion Scale for Adolescents" developed by Sertelin Mercan (2016) have been applied. When the data collected as a result of the study was examined, it was revealed that there was a positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, and appreciating humor, which is the sense of humor sub-dimensions of gifted and talented students and the exclusion sub-dimension of social exclusion. This situation shows that gifted and talented children generate a sense of humor, cope with this situation through humor, and appreciate humor when they face exclusion in their social environment.

Keywords: Humor, Gifted, Talented students

Introduction

While humor is expressed as everything that encompasses all aspects of our lives, in which events and circumstances of absurdity are uncovered by the mind and contribute to people having a good time, the concept of humor is often characterized as a human trait that takes place at the center of social intellect and mental health and has creative characteristics in the related literature (Kaufman, et al., 2008; Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Krobkin, 1988; Mallen, 1993; Toraman, 2009).

While Scheel (2017) recognizes the essential components of the sense of humor as having strong mental health, social skills, and ways of coping with certain negatives, Martin (2007) argues that there are a certain ability, an aesthetic response, view of the world, coping mechanism and a defense mechanism along with them during the humor process. According to the McGhee Model (1971), which links the development of humor with the cognitive development of children also argued that language development advances with the cognitive development of children, there is an improvement in the ability of children to generate and appreciate the humor.

When research on the sense of humor is examined in general, it has been identified that children's ability to create humor and to appreciate humor is widely recognized as contexts that arise based on the cognitive development of children proposed by McGhee (1971) (Bariaud, 1989; Southam, 2005).

Research examining the relationship between cognitive development and the development of humor showed a positive correlation between both of the two variables. Besides, a correlation has been formed between creating humor and recognizing humor in the determination of talent, general and special intelligence areas (Christensen, et al., 2016; Holt and Willard-Holt, 1995; Kaufman, 2008; Pinderhughes and Zigler 1985; Ruch, 1998; Wierzbicki and Young 1978). It is suggested that gifted and talented children, who have a greater capacity for cognitive development than their classmates, have more humor skills than their peer group, use humor intensively in their everyday lives, and generate and use their sense of humor when learning various social and moral concepts. (Baska, 1989; Brüt, 1994; Clark, 2014; Holt and Willard-Holt, 1995; Laycock, 1979; Luftig and Nichols, 1991; Klavir and Gorodetsky, 2001; Martin et al., 2003; Renzulli, 1972; Shade, 1996; Ziv, 1981, 1990; Ziv and Gadish, 1989; Van Tassel-Baska, 1989).

As a result of the research undertaken by Shade (1996), it has been suggested that gifted and talented students are not only involved in humor but also experts in the use of humor relative to their peers. The explanations for this condition are attributed to the following developments: (a) the advanced level of language abilities in gifted children, which form the foundation in humor; (b) high capacity in terms of moral development; (c) progress in grasping adult humor and analyzing events; (d) the use of their intrinsic creative potential in producing a sense of humor; (e) cognitive development processes (f) development of abstract reasoning skills.

While the mental development and sense of humor of gifted and talented children are more sophisticated than their peers, these children have differing social-emotional needs because their cognitive areas do not mature simultaneously and experience certain difficulties accordingly. Difficulties in peer relations, depression, perfectionism, and school adjustment

problems have been described as one of these issues (Akarsu & Mutlu, 2017; Mueller, 2009; Koshy & Robinson, 2006). In the related literature, it has been found that the interaction between gifted and talented children and their peers is distinct from that of students with average intelligence. These children often seek to become friends with children whose cognitive level is equivalent to their levels. They have communication difficulties with their classmates and teachers in the course of revealing their mental capacity. Also, it was believed that they were excluded in both groups of peers and other social settings because of the difficulties they faced and that they may be left alone because of jealousy of others (Akarsu and Mutlu, 2017; Bilgen and Yıldız, 2016; Cornell, 1989; Levent, 2011; Yıldırım, 2012). In this situation, gifted and talented children experience social exclusion (ostracism), which can be defined as being ignored and overlooked comes to the fore as a concept.

Social exclusion (ostracism) is a term defined as ignoring and avoiding the individual by another person (s)(Williams, 2007). This situation experienced in different groups and environments such as with friends and work environment is a phenomenon that individuals may encounter every time in their life and also avoid experiencing (Ferris, et al., 2008; Sertelin Mercan, 2016; Williams, et al., 2000).

Social exclusion, dismissal, or exclusion of a person who is a social object creates psychological issues along with maladaptive behavior (Williams, 2007). As the related literature was analyzed, it was observed that young people who suffer social exclusion (ostracism) display a high degree of feeling of inadequacy, alienation, and depression and often show detrimental social behavior compared to their classmates who have a healthy social interaction (Akin, et al., 2015; Dixon, 2007; Witvliet, et al., 2010). Also, in research conducted by Twenge, et al., (2001), the sense of belonging and self-esteem of individuals suffering social isolation (ostracism) is low relative to a group of people who do not experience social exclusion, while their aggression levels are higher than those who do not experience social exclusion.

This research aimed to establish the relationship between the social exclusion perceived by gifted and talented students and their sense of humor. Besides, the goal was to evaluate the relationship between the variables of the use of humor, the process of coping through a sense of humor, and the appreciating humor in cases of ignoring and avoiding during social exclusion. The study results are expected to improve educational programs, psychological guidance programs, and family education programs for gifted and talented children.

Method

Research Model

A relational screening model was used in the research. Among the research variables included in the model, social exclusion (ostracism) is considered as a dependent variable, while the sense of humor is an independent variable.

Study Group

The study group is composed of 202 students who are diagnosed as gifted and talented students and who study at the Beşiktaş Science and Art Centre. The demographic features of the study group are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group

Variable	Feature	F	%
Gender	Female	105	52.0
	Male	97	48.0
Age	10	51	25.2
	11	66	32.7
	12	46	22.8
	13	39	19.3
Grade	4	48	23.8
	5	58	28.7
	6	44	21.8
	7	52	25.7

The research group consists of 202 students identified as gifted and talented students, with 52% female students and 48% male students. 25.2% of the students participating in the study are 10 years old, 32.7% of them are 11 years old, 22.8% of them are 12 years old and 19.3% of them are 13 years old.

Along with these, of the students participating in the research, 23.8% of them are in the 4th grade, 28.7% of them are in the 5th grade, 21.8% of them are in 6th grade and 25.7% of them are in 7th grade.

Data Collection Tools

Within the scope of the study, the “Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale for Children” developed by Akın and Bilgin (2015) and the “Social Exclusion Scale for Adolescents” developed by Sertelin Mercan (2016) have been applied.

Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale for Children

The scale created by Akın and Bilgin (2015) offers both a sub-dimensional score and a total score for a sense of humor. In the confirmatory factor analysis, it was determined that the scale composed of 17 items consistent with the original form, and the items were gathered in 3 dimensions (generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, appreciating humor) ($\chi^2 = 187.46$, $sd = 113$, $RMSEA = .048$, $CFI = .97$, $GFI = .93$, $AGFI = .90$, $SRMR = .052$). Factor loadings of the scale are ordered between the values of .54 and .88. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale is calculated as .92 for the whole scale, .92 for the generating sense of humor sub-dimension, .87 for the sub-dimension of coping through humor, and .88 for the appreciating humor sub-dimension.

Social Exclusion Scale for Adolescents

The scale developed by Sertelin Mercan (2016), consists of 11 items, has two sub-dimensions. As the form of self-evaluation, a 5-point Likert-type scale is used and evaluated two sub-dimensions of social exclusion. The first dimension measures the experience of being ignored (5 items), while the second dimension measures exclusion (6 items). The factor loads of items range between .83 and .59. Item-total correlation coefficients of the scale range between .83 and .75. The internal consistency Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale for the being ignored sub-dimension is calculated as .82 and .83 for the exclusion sub-dimension. Test-retest reliability coefficients of the scale for being ignored

sub-dimension calculated as .65 and .63 for the exclusion sub-dimension.

Data Analysis

Following the transfer of the collected data to the SPSS 21 package program, correlation and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were implemented. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine whether there is a significant correlation between a sense of humor and social exclusion. Besides, multiple regression analysis was implemented to examine to what extent that

generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, appreciating humor, being neglected, and being excluded predict humor. The collected data were tested at the 0.05 significance level.

Findings

In this section, the relationships between the sub-dimensions of the research variables, namely the sense of humor and the social exclusion, are stated. The relationship between the variables of sense of humor and social exclusion and their sub-dimensions and descriptive statistics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Spearman Correlation Coefficients between Variables and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	x	sd
Generating Sense of Humor						3.76	.83
Coping through humor	.46**					4.27	.67
Appreciating humor	.42**	.43**				3.46	1.13
Being neglected	-.25**	-.16**	-.12**			1.88	.72
Being Ignored	.31**	.19	.38**	.17**		3.34	.94

N = 210; **p<.01

As seen in Table 2, the sub-scales of generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, and appreciating humor were found to be in a negative significant relationship with the being neglected subscale of the social exclusion while in a positive significant relationship with the being ignored subscale (p <.05 and p <.01).

Multiple regression analysis was applied to the state to what extent the sub-dimensions of coping through humor, appreciating humor, being neglected, and being ignored predict generating a sense of humor. The outcomes of the procedure undertaken to determine the significance of the model based on the results of the analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3: The Level of Prediction of the Variables in terms of Generating Sense of Humor

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Pred. Std. Error
1	.57	.32	.30	.69

According to the analysis results, the model is found to be significant as a whole (R = .57, R² = .32, P <.01). Together, the variables in the model explain 30% of the total variance of generating a sense of humor. The results obtained from the analysis of the B and Beta Correlation Coefficients and Significance

Levels of the Research Variables are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Generating Sense of Humor

Predictive Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Coping through Humor	.43	.41	.35	5.46	.00
Appreciating Humor	.13	.05	.19	2.79	.00
Being neglected	-.06	.07	-.05	-.92	.35
Being Ignored	.15	.05	.17	2.63	.00

According to the Standardized regression coefficient (β), it was determined that the highest contribution was made to the model by coping through humor (β=.35 p <.01), generating a sense of humor (β=.19 p <.01) and exclusion (β=.17 p <.01) respectively. As can be understood from the correlation table, the being neglected subscale does not contribute to the regression model, although it has a relationship with all variables (β= -.05, p > .01). Based on this result, while the sub-dimensions of generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, appreciating humor, and being ignored contribute to the model, the sub-dimension of being neglected does not contribute to the model.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of the research is to determine the relationship between gifted and talented children's sense of humor and social exclusion. When the data collected as a result of the study was examined, it was revealed that there was a positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, and appreciating humor, which is the sense of humor sub-dimensions of gifted and talented students and the exclusion sub-dimension of social exclusion. This situation shows that gifted and talented children generate a sense of humor, cope with this situation through humor, and appreciate humor when they face exclusion in their social environment. When the relevant literature has been reviewed, the results that gifted and talented children encounter greater difficulty than their peers because they undergo emotional intensity in their everyday lives, display the features of perfectionism, identify the issues around them more easily, and use humor as a method of coping with these situations are consistent with the findings of this research. In research conducted by Ziv and Gadish (1990), it was observed that gifted and talented children take advantage of humor more because of their desire for social acceptance. When qualitative data from the same study were evaluated, it was found that the classmates of gifted and talented students do not understand them. Thus they used humor more when interacting with their close friends.

In this study, it was concluded that there is a negative relationship between the sub-dimensions named generating a sense of humor, coping through humor, appreciating humor, and the being neglected sub-dimension of social exclusion in gifted and talented students. In other words, it was observed that gifted and talented children resort to humor when they face exclusion in their social relations but do not use humor when they are neglected. Clark's (2014) argued that gifted and talented children prefer one of three ways to respond to situations where their intellectual giftedness is not accepted and neglected. These ways are listed as isolating themselves from a group, seeking the attention of others, trying to be obedient by pleasing everyone or trying to look like everyone else. Stuart and Beste (2008) suggest that gifted and talented children perceive it difficult

to interact with their peers because they are more responsive and sensitive than their classmates and are thus often seem introverted.

When literature regarding the concept of humor, which offers an important and different viewpoint on dealing with stressful life processes, is analyzed, it has been concluded that having a sense of humor is healthy and positively enhances the mental health of individuals, decreases the effects of coping with everyday difficulties and stress, and mitigates worry, anxiety, and complaints (Abel, 2002; Kelly, 2002; Kuiper and Martin, 1993; Morreall, 1997; Thorson, et al., 1997; Yovetich, et al., 1990). Therefore, both gifted and talented students and the ones with normal intelligence should be supported for using humor in their education.

In a research performed by Bilgen and Yıldız (2016), the talent and success of gifted children lead them to be left alone by being envied by others, along with their exclusion from their social environment and friends. Faced with this scenario, gifted and talented children prefer to be isolated from the society in which they live. Owing to the behavioral traits of gifted and talented children, it is important to be mindful of the conditions in which they live and to follow suitable approaches to foster healthy and positive relationships. In this way, it is thought that it would allow gifted and talented children to explore and use their inherent potentials efficiently and avoid negative social and emotional issues.

Holt and Willard (1995) noted in their analysis that the appreciation of humor by teachers in classrooms of gifted children brought a positive contribution both to the social and emotional development of students and to seeking proper solutions to issues experienced within the classroom. In research performed by Klavir and Gorodetsky (2001), it was reported that gifted and talented children perform at a greater level than their peers in problem-solving methods, which they experience in their everyday lives and are more successful in using humor to solve problems. In their study on the types of humor used by gifted and talented individuals, Martin et al. (2003) showed that these people have a participatory type of humor. They prefer to communicate with others through humor. Luftig and Nichols (1991) found that gifted and talented females' sense of

humor is greater than gifted and talented males, but humor contributes more to males gaining popularity. It has been found that gifted and talented boys use humor more to become popular in their group.

The limitation of this research, which seeks to determine the relationship between the sense of humor of gifted and talented children and social exclusion, can be stated as it has been performed with 10-13-year-old students studying in an institution. For future studies, it is suggested that activities for the sense of humor may be implemented in educational programs for the social-emotional development of gifted and students, and also, in practices performed within the framework of counseling, as well as for the creation of learning environments where students can show their inherent sense of humor. In this way, gifted and talented children, who are positively affected in a social and emotional sense, will have academic achievement. At the same time, they will have the opportunity to continue their life happily and healthily that will allow them to realize their potentials.

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