

Self-Handicapping and Irrational Beliefs About Approval In A Sample of Teacher Candidates¹

Öğretmen Adaylarında Kendini Sabotaj ve Onay İle İlişkili Akıldışı İnançlar

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Abstract

The main objective of the current study is to examine the relationships between self-handicapping, and irrational beliefs about approval, irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, irrational beliefs about self and the overall level of irrational beliefs by reference to the "ABC" framework. Participants of the study were 263 teacher candidates. Self-Handicapping Scale and Irrational Beliefs Scale-Short Form was utilized in order to measure the constructs. Spearman's Rho correlations and Mann-Whitney U analyses were conducted. Irrational beliefs about approval and general irrational beliefs levels significantly related with levels of self-handicapping ($r = .33$ and $r = .18$ respectively, $p < .05$). The results verified that self-handicapping scores related positively to the scores of irrational beliefs about approval. A gender difference with respect to levels of irrational beliefs about approval was also verified. The results were discussed within the scope of the related literature.

Keywords: self-handicapping, irrational beliefs, approval, teacher candidates.

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı kendini sabotaj ile onay, kişilerarası ilişkiler ve benlik ile ilişkili akıldışı inançlar ve genel akıldışı inanç düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkileri "ABC" çerçevesi kapsamında incelemektir. Araştırma grubu 263 öğretmen adayından oluşmaktadır. Yapıları ölçmek için Kendini Sabotaj Ölçeği ve Akıldışı İnançlar Ölçeği-Kısa Formu kullanılmıştır. Spearman Rho Korelasyon ve Mann Whitney U analizleri kullanılmıştır. Onay ile ilişkili

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akıldışı inançlar ve genel akıldışı inanç düzeyinin kendini sabotaj ile anlamı düzeyde ilişkili bulunmuştur (sırasıyla $r = .33$ ve $r = .18$, $p < .05$). Sonuçlar onay ile ilişkili akıldışı inançlar ile kendini sabotaj arasında pozitif yönde bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Onay ile ilişkili akıldışı inançlar açısından cinsiyete göre anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmuştur. Sonuçlar ilgili alan yazın kapsamında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kendini sabotaj, akıldışı inançlar, onay, öğretmen adayları.

1. Introduction

Factors contributing to the psychological functioning, especially within the context of psychological difficulties, have always been a central focus of scholarly attention. Ellis, among many other scholars, investigated the complexity of emotions, cognitions and behaviors and their interactions in detail, and developed the theory and practice of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT; 1991) which can be envisioned as a useful and clear theoretical framework for understanding mental difficulties. Irrational beliefs are in the center of REBT theoretical framework for explaining psychological problems. REBT focuses on the explanations and interpretations people give to life experiences and results rather than the reality of events (Takash, Ghaith, & Hammouri, 2013). All of these explanations and thinking styles and types of interpretations about life events define psychological difficulties. In REBT, it is assumed that people have potentials for thinking irrationally as well as for thinking rationally (Cosman, Macavei, Sucala, & David, 2013) and for self-defeating as well as for self-protection and development (Corey, 2008).

The irrational beliefs tend to be rigid and are stated in the form of “should’s, ‘have to’s, ‘must’s” and result in negative emotions and (Ellis & Dryden, 2007), “tend to sabotage a person’s basic goals and purposes” (p. 14). Irrational beliefs affect the overall functionality of individuals by enacting self-defeating emotional patterns (Türküm, 2003), and also they restrict rational decision-making processes in life settings (Harrington, 2013). Irrational beliefs are acquired in childhood by social learning processes and are perceived as functional and protective by the individual through self-suggestion and repetition. The irrational beliefs operate intensively when people mix their basic preferences such as love, approval, success with their needs in real-life settings such as interpersonal relationships and consequently experience some behavioral and emotional difficulties (Corey, 2008; Ellis & Dryden, 2007). Ellis put forward that humans have a destructive nature and decelerate their growth by using learnt sabotage strategies (Corey, 2008; Ellis, 1991, 2008; Ellis & Dryden, 2007).

The irrational beliefs are examined in four categories of thinking processes, namely, awfulizing, demandingness, low frustration tolerance and global evaluation (Hvland, Shevlin, & Adamson, 2014). Demandingness refers to absolutistic requirements or wishes related to the self and the others (e.g. “Everybody must perform all tasks accurately and perfectly”). Awfulizing is an extreme belief includes magnificati-

on and refers to the evaluation of an experience as being much worse than it really is (e.g. "I have to get the highest grade from this exam if not it will be the day of doom for me"). Low frustration tolerance refers to seeking ease and avoiding difficulties in life (e.g. "I can't stand this study tempo because the lessons are very hard"). The fourth irrational belief process is a global evaluation that includes depreciation. It refers to extreme and global negative evaluations about the self, others and life (e.g. "I am a completely worthless person because my friend didn't even bother to congratulate my birthday"). Demandingness is the main component within the four so that other irrational beliefs emerge from it and it has an accelerating effect on enacting other irrational and dysfunctional beliefs (David, Szentagotai, Eva, & Macavei, 2005; David, Matu, Pintea, Cotet, & Nagy, 2014; Dryden, 2003, 2012; Hvland et al., 2014).

When people organize and discipline their thinking rationally and realistically, they experience a satisfying life in terms of emotional well-being and creativity (Ellis, & Harper, 2005). In this context, REBT serves as a useful model for eliminating irrational beliefs to help individuals cope with their emotional and psychological problems (Blau, Fuller, & Vaccaro, 2006). The "ABC" model exists in the center of REBT's theory and practice to formulate the emotional problems. ABC is the basic form, but new dimensions are added to this model by Ellis in his consecutive works (1991). The basic ABC model aims at demonstrating the role of cognitions and beliefs on emotional problems and helping proves focuses on changing the irrational beliefs with rational alternatives (Akin, 2010; Ellis, 1991). In this model, A refers to the existence of an activating event (e.g. "My classmate didn't say hello to me in cafeteria."); B refers to a rational or an irrational belief about activating event (e.g. "If somebody doesn't greet me, it turns out I am a totally worthless person."); and this belief results in a dysfunctional emotional or behavioral consequence denoted as C (feeling worthless). The negative emotional or behavioral response as consequence (C) is triggered by the self-destructive thinking system. A, B, and C all are quite related to each other and they form a consecutive pattern (Ellis, 1991, 2008; Ellis & Dryden, 2007; Takash, et al., 2013; Tanhan, 2014). Individuals support and preserve their self-defeating beliefs by self-suggestion and repeating as if they are functional. Individuals often fall back to self-destructive tendencies and behavioral patterns even though they may strive ambitiously to cope with them. In this context, it can be claimed that irrational beliefs have similar aspects with self-handicapping as both being self-defeating behavioral patterns.

Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping behaviors, as originally introduced by Jones and Berglas (1978), are actual or claimed obstacles, people create in order to protect their perceived competence and eventually to preserve their self-esteem in the perceived risk of failure. These behavioral strategies activated before a performance help people externalize failure and internalize success (Rhodewalt, Saltzman, & Wittmer, 1984). For instance, a student who has not studied enough for an important exam does not sleep

well the night before the exam, and after the exam, she protects her self-esteem. Lack of sleep may offer the student a potential excuse to shift attributions for the failure from low level of effort to the handicap (not sleeping the night before the exam). In this way, low effort or irresponsibility will be ignored and the sense of competence and the self-esteem is protected (Martin & Brawley, 2002). If the self-handicapping person has a good performance despite the obstacles her sense of competence is boosted even further (Petersen, 2014).

Self-handicapping encompasses three characteristics; the handicap (e.g. not sleeping the night before), the reason (to use sleeplessness as an excuse), precedence of the strategy before the performance (e.g. not sleeping in order to form an excuse, not making up excuses after the exam) (Schwinger, 2013). Leary and Shepperd (1986), proposed two types of self-handicapping behaviors: self-reported handicaps and behavioral handicaps. Behavioral handicaps are actual behaviors that might prevent performance such as drug and alcohol consumption (Higgins & Harris, 1988; Jones & Berglas, 1978), withdrawing or reducing effort (Rhodewalt & Fairfield, 1991), or decreasing practice (Rhodewalt, Saltzman, & Wittmer, 1984; Warner & Moore, 2004). Self-reported handicap denotes for claiming the existence of handicaps such as by making excuses or by reporting social anxiety (Snyder & Higgins, 1988). Smith, Snyder, & Perkins (1983) has claimed that complaints on physical illnesses and symptoms or depression as self-reported handicapping strategies. Snyder et al., (1985) argued that shy or socially anxious individuals can use their symptoms of anxiety as self-handicapping strategies in social performance. Even past experiences of trauma may serve as potential self-reported handicaps for some individuals (DeGree & Snyder, 1985).

Self-handicapping behaviors are remarkably important for mental health, due to the fact that protects self-esteem in the short term by effectively shifting attention to the handicap (McCrea & Hirt, 2001); yet it has negative impacts on psychological well-being in the long run (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). Self-handicapping affects social functioning as well; it helps individuals preserve their public social esteem; yet decreases interpersonal liking and self-handicappers have higher levels of negative public self-consciousness (Hirt, McCrea, & Boris, 2003).

Self-handicapping increases the possibility of failure in tasks due to the fact that self handicappers prefer short-term benefits despite the long-term risks (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Self-handicapping is associated with maladaptive phenomena such as high depression, low self-esteem, high other-directedness, high public self-consciousness, perfectionism (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990), high social anxiety (Strube, 1986), poor academic achievement, high levels of depression and anxiety (Arazzini Stewart & George-Walker, 2014; Kearns, Forbes, Gardiner, & Marshall, 2008). In a meta-analysis of studies investigating academic self-handicapping and achievement, a consistent pattern of negative relationship between the two variables has been documented (Schwinger, Wirthwein, Lemmer & Steinmayr, 2014).

Self-handicapping is an important process which is linked to a wide range of human behavior and its neuronal basis is also shown to exist (Takeuchi, et al, 2013).

The Present Study

Self-handicapping behaviors can be described as strategies that may help individuals to protect and project a positive self-image in the short term (Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997). On the other hand, chronic self-handicapping, characterized by failure expectations, excuses, external attributions, and task-avoidance, can be a self-defeating process ending up harming the self-concept in the long run,. In this respect, self-handicapping is related to social comparison and self-presentation processes. Irrational beliefs and self-handicapping both harm well-being in the long term and sabotage goal pursuing behaviors. Irrational beliefs may have an effect on the usage of self-handicapping strategies. The aim of the current study is to examine the potential role of self-handicapping behaviors as maladaptive consequences of irrational beliefs. In this respect, relationships between self-handicapping, and irrational beliefs about approval, irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, irrational beliefs about self and the overall level of irrational beliefs is investigated. ABC model from the REBT framework forms the basis of our hypothesis that higher levels of irrational beliefs are associated with higher levels of self-handicapping behaviors. The “B” denotes “irrational beliefs”; whereas “C” denotes self-handicapping, as the maladaptive behavioral consequence. Although a consecutive relationship is conceptualized, the relationship may also be reciprocal in nature.

2. Method

The present study has a correlational quantitative design, and the measurement procedures relied on self-reported data collected from volunteering subjects. The informed personal consent of the individuals to participate in the study was taken. Correlational statistical procedures and mean difference analysis were utilized. A personal information form for collecting demographic data; Self-Handicapping Scale (Jones, & Rhodewalt, 1982), and Irrational Beliefs Scale-Short Form (IBS-S) were utilized.

Participants

Participants of the study were 263 university students enrolled in undergraduate teacher education programs in a faculty of education, whose ages ranged from 19 to 34 with a mean of 23. There were 144 (54,8 %) female students, and 118 (44,9 %) male students were recruited in the sample. 156 students (59,3) had a GPA between 2.00 and 3.00, and levels were 107 students (40,7) had GPA's (Grade Point Average) ranging from 3.00 to 4.00.

Measures

Self-Handicapping Scale (Jones, & Rhodewalt, 1982). The scale was used in order to measure self-handicapping. Participants report their levels of agreement with 25 statements on a Likert scale from 1= “disagree very much” to 6= “agree very much”. Turkish adaptation of this scale was conducted by Akın (2012). The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the overall scale was .90 and test-retest reliability coefficient was .94. The corrected item-total correlations for the scale ranged from .30 to .59. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the uni-dimensional model fitted the data well. The goodness of fit indices of the model were $\chi^2= 50.23$, RMSEA= .037, NFI= .98, CFI= .99, IFI= .99, RFI= .97, GFI= .97, AGFI= .94 (Akın, 2012).

Irrational Beliefs Scale-Short Form (IBS-S). IBS-S, which is developed by Türküm (2003) to measure irrational beliefs consists of 15 items. IBS-S is the short form of The Irrational Beliefs Scale which includes 29 items (Türküm, 1999). IBS-S is a Likert-Type Scale which is anchored at “1= definitely inappropriate” to “5= definitely appropriate”. The lowest score of the scale is 15 and the highest score is 75. The high score obtained from the scale is interpreted as higher levels of irrational belief level. Item-total correlation of the scale is between .50 and .52. The Cronbach Alpha of the scale is .75 and the reliability score obtained by test-retest is .81.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Convenience sampling technique was used in the process of participant selection. Participants participated voluntarily. Data collection tools were administered in paper and pencil format.

Correlation analysis is utilized to test the degree to which two variables are linearly related, yet it does not address questions about the causal nature of the relationships (Well, 2002). Since our model does not non-parametric correlation analysis is used to utilized for since the data did not fulfill the prerequisites of parametric correlation; Spearman’s Rho Correlation coefficients were calculated in order to assess the magnitudes of the relationships among self-handicapping, irrational beliefs about approval, irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, irrational beliefs about self, overall level of irrational beliefs; and gender differences with respect to the constructs was scrutinized with Mann-Whitney U test. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 17.0 software.

3. Findings

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test indicated that the data was not normally distributed ($p < .05$). Levene’s test of homogeneity was significant for self-handicapping and Irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships ($p < .05$) but it was not significant for irrational beliefs about approval, irrational beliefs about self scores and total scores

of irrational beliefs ($p > .05$). Considering these results, non-parametric analyses were utilized in the present study.

Correlations

When Table 1, which shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between variables is examined, it can be seen that, there was a significant correlation between self-handicapping scores and overall score of the irrational beliefs ($r = .183$; $p < .001$); and there was a significant correlation between self-handicapping and irrational beliefs about approval ($r = .326$; $p < .001$). There were no significant correlations between self-handicapping and irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships and self ($p > .05$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations (Spearman's rho) of the variables

	SH	APP	INT	SELF	IRR
SH	1				
APP	.326*	1			
INT	.034	.293*	1		
SELF	.018	.116	.082	1	
IRR	.183*	.691*	.643*	.591*	1
Mean	79,14	13,58	7,81	15,03	36,42
Std. dev.	12,26	3,57	3,29	3,25	12,26

Note: SH= Self-Handicapping, APP= Irrational beliefs about approval, INT= Irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, SELF= Irrational beliefs about self, IRR= Total score of Irrational beliefs

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Gender Differences

Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized in order to investigate gender difference with respect to the constructs. When Table 2. is examined, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between males ($M = 121,42$) and females ($M = 144,80$) in levels of irrational beliefs about approval ($p < .05$); yet there are no gender differences for other constructs.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Test: Differences with respect to gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
SH	M	144	123,88	17838,50	7398,5	.057
	F	119	141,83	16877,50		
APP	M	144	121,42	17484,50	7044,5	.013*
	F	119	144,80	17231,50		
INT	M	144	133,01	19154,00	8422	.809
	F	119	130,77	15562,00		

Variable	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
SELF	M	144	136,77	19694,50	7881,5	.261
	F	119	126,23	15021,50		
IRR	M	144	132,60	19094,00	8482	.888
	F	119	131,28	15622,00		

Note: SH= Self-Handicapping, APP= Irrational beliefs about approval, INT= Irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, SELF= Irrational beliefs about self, IRR= Total score of Irrational beliefs

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationships between self-handicapping, and irrational beliefs about approval, irrational beliefs about interpersonal relationships, irrational beliefs about self and the overall level of irrational beliefs. Irrational beliefs about approval levels and general levels of irrational beliefs had significant relationships with self-handicapping levels. The relationship with the general levels and self-handicapping can be due to the influence of the approval sub-dimension. Hence, it can be concluded that irrational beliefs about approval domain was the only sub-dimension of irrational beliefs which had valid correlations with self-handicapping. The findings contribute to our understanding of self-handicapping behaviors and irrational beliefs, both of which are important phenomena for overall mental functioning. The study revealed that irrational beliefs about approval had a significant relationship on self-handicapping. This finding can be explained through the ABC model, as self-handicapping behaviors may play a role, being the negative consequences or dysfunctional strategies aimed at coping with negative emotional consequences.

The results of the study suggest that the relationship of self-handicapping and irrational beliefs can be examined through the basic ABC model, described in the REBT theoretical framework (Ellis, 1991, 2008; Ellis & Dryden, 2007). Irrational beliefs constitute the “B” part in the model whereas self-handicapping can be regarded as an emotional and behavioral consequence denoted as “C”. For instance, a student in face of an important and challenging exam (“A” Activating event), having an irrational belief “it is a necessity for me to be loved or approved by virtually every significant other person” (“B” Belief; Ellis, 1994); can engage in self-handicapping strategies by reporting s/he is “scared and worried”, “cannot be successful”, “exam is difficult beyond limits” in order to avoid negative reactions from friends and teachers, or to externalize personal inadequacy (“C” Consequence). Thus his/her handicapping behavior serves as a “lightning rod” absorbing negative reactions, and criticisms.

Self-handicapping behaviors and irrational beliefs both affect goal-pursuing behavior and overall functioning negatively (Ellis, & Dryden, 2007; Zuckermann, & Tsai, 2005). Self-handicapping behaviors enable individuals both to preserve and project

a positive self-image to a degree (Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997). Self-handicapping may create plausible excuses for poor performances; but chronic self-handicapping is a dysfunctional strategy which has detrimental effects on self-concept in the long run (Maata, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2002; Zuckermann & Tsai, 2005). In this respect, self-handicapping is related to social comparison and self-presentation processes as in the example above; and is regarded as a strategy of impression management (Kolditz, & Arkin, 1982). Self-handicapping, in some cases, may become a maladaptive consequence of irrational beliefs. In other words, sometimes the C dimension of the ABC framework. These behaviors may also be regarded as dysfunctional coping strategies for negative emotional consequences such as anxiety, as well as its role as a consequence (“C”) within this framework. In this context, it can be claimed that irrational beliefs have overlapping aspects with self-handicapping as both being self-defeating behavioral patterns.

The gender difference with respect to irrational beliefs about approval may not be regarded as counterintuitive. Research and theory on sex differences traditionally suggest that women have a stronger positive attitude and a predisposition for being relational and interdependent; whereas men have a stronger tendency for being independent and autonomous (Chodorow, 1989; Gilligan, 1982) and females have a slightly higher tendency for seeking approval of others (Kiyotaki & Yokoyama, 2006). Women’s relatively higher levels of preoccupation with social approval may manifest itself especially in the form of perfectionist irrational beliefs about approval. The results of the present study may have implications for both theory and practice in psychology and counseling, yet there are some limitations. Correlational statistics and research design were utilized and no causal inferences can be made. Secondly, generalizability is limited, since the study group consisted of teacher candidates; future studies on wider populations from various developmental periods would be necessary. The study relied on self-reported data; further studies on the two constructs with experimental design and behavioral observations, and perhaps case studies would be remarkably important. Future research may also investigate predictive relationships between the constructs in order to illuminate the nature of the relationships.

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