

## The Prediction of Elementary School Counselors' Self-Efficacy Beliefs by Social Comparison and Self-Consciousness\*

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the association between counselor self-efficacy, social comparison and self-consciousness in elementary school counselors. The predictive power of the social comparison and self-consciousness levels of elementary school counselors regarding counselor self-efficacy belief was investigated. The participants of the study are 204 elementary school counselors who work in elementary schools in Konya-Turkey. For data collection, "Personal Information Form," "Social Comparison Scale," "Elementary School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale" and "Self-consciousness Scale" were used. "Survey Monkey" was used for data collection, that is, the scales were loaded onto an internet page and the school counselors filled out these instruments. According to findings of study, while self-consciousness is a predictor of elementary school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs, social comparison does not predict counselor self-efficacy beliefs. The results were discussed and suggestions were given.

**Keywords:** Counselor self-efficacy, social comparison, self-consciousness, elementary schools

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Many human behaviors are intended toward an aim and organized with reference to the future. People motivate themselves and guide their behaviors through their thoughts about the future (Bandura, 1991a). Self-regulation, as a part of social-cognitive theory, includes an important mechanism that affects individuals' emotions, thoughts, motivations and behaviors. It is the "self-efficacy" mechanism, which plays a central role in the self-perceptions of human beings (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is one of the most important subjects in the social-learning theory propounded by Bandura and has been the subject numerous research studies (Cartwright & Atwood, 2014; Daniels & Larson, 2001; Gunduz, 2014; Sahranc, 2007; Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2014; Weng, Dai, Wang, Huang, & Chiang, 2008; Yilmaz, 2014; Yorra, 2014).

In 1998, Larson revealed a social-cognitive model of counselor education based on social-cognitive theory. Subsequently, counselor self-efficacy has become one of the most studied subjects in the social-cognitive model of counselor education (Barnes, 2004). According to Larson and Daniels (1998), counselor self-efficacy refers to beliefs and judgments concerning an individual's own capacity to provide effective counseling for a client." Many research studies have proven that counselor self-efficacy is positively correlated with counselor education and supervision, the counselor's self-concept, the counselor's self-improvement, and the client's expectations of the counselor (Cashwell & Dooley, 2001; Lent et al., 2006; Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, & Kolocek, 1996). One of the important issues related to counselor self-efficacy is the self-efficacy beliefs of school counselors. High self-efficacy beliefs in school counselors are a significant factor affecting counselors and students. On several counts, school counselors with high self-efficacy beliefs are able to affect students more easily than school counselors with low self-efficacy beliefs (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010).

In this sense, another concept that is related to self-efficacy beliefs (Ahrens, Zeiss, & Kafer, 1988; Bandura & Jourden 1991) is social comparison, which plays an important role in interpersonal relations (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2000). Festinger (1954) states that one of the most important factors in communication is social comparison with others, which enables one to more effectively adapt to and understand the world. Starting from this point of view, Festinger (1954) revealed his "Social Comparison Processes Theory" to explain the comparative judgments related to one's own thoughts and abilities. Social comparison is a process through which we associate our attributes and the characteristics of others (Buunk &

Mussweiller, 2001) and which occurs spontaneously and unintentionally (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995).

The attention and self-evaluation that an individual gives to his own emotions and thoughts is a significant factor in determining his beliefs related to his capacity. Some people always think about their own emotions and thoughts, while others think about relationships and the impressions they make in their social environment (Smith, 2007); this distinction is important for individuals. Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975) defined self-consciousness as “[o]ne’s permanent attention tendency to himself.” They stated that self-consciousness has three dimensions: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety. Private self-consciousness means an awareness of one’s own features (e.g., I am always trying to gain information about myself), whereas public self-consciousness denotes seeing oneself as a social object (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Fenigstein, 1979) and having an interest in the impression that one leaves with others (e.g., I am curious about the impact that I have on others). Social anxiety refers to being uncomfortable in situations that involve being in the same place with other people (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Nystedt & Ljungberg, 2002). According to Fenigstein et al. (1975), public self-consciousness is defined as the impact that an individual leaves on others as a social object (see also Nystedt & Ljungberg, 2002). Self-consciousness is also has been subject various studies today (Andela, Auzoult, & Truchot, 2014; Bogaert & Brotto, 2014; Mijuskovic, 2014). In brief, one’s beliefs regarding his attributes and his social comparison with others create an awareness regarding his capacity that is significant in terms of both the development of his personality and his relationships with other people. In addition, these issues are worthy of attention from the standpoint of the personal and vocational development of psychological counselors, and particularly, school counselors. Considering these factors, the aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between elementary school counselors’ self-efficacy beliefs and their social comparison and self-consciousness levels.

## Method

### *Participants*

In this study, the general search model was used. School counselors who work in public and private elementary schools in Turkey attended to the study. The participants were 84 (41.2%) men and 120 (58.8 %) women – a total of 204 – elementary school counselors. With regard to education levels, while 163 (79.9%) of the participants graduated from faculty,

41 (20.1%) of the participants graduated with a master/doctorate. Sixty-nine (33.8 %) of the participants work in the county/town and 135 (66.2%) work in the city. With regard to the participants' experience, 47 (23%) of them had worked 1-12 month(s), 117 (57.4%) of them had worked 1-10 years and 40 (19.6%) of them had worked 11 years or more.

### *Data Collection*

*Social Comparison Scale:* The Social Comparison Scale was developed by Gilbert and Trend (1991) with five questions and was adapted to Turkish by Sahin and Sahin (1992) (cited by Savasir & Sahin, 1997). The scale is a self-evaluation test that measures how the individual sees himself when he compares himself with others. The scale has 18 items with a 1-6 Likert scale. Both adults and adolescents can answer using this scale. While high points on the scale point to positive self-schemas, low points refer to negative self-schemas. Its Cronbach alpha value was found to be .87 (Savasir & Sahin, 1997).

*Self-consciousness Scale:* The scale was developed by Mittal and Balasubramanian (1987) and was adapted to Turkish by Akin, Abaci and Övec (2007). It consists of 19 items and has five subscales; it does not contain reverse items. The subscales are: self-reflectiveness, internal state awareness, style consciousness, appearance consciousness and social anxiety. The results of an exploratory factor analysis revealed that the 19 items loaded on five factors in the original form. The amount of total variance explained by the five factors was 68%. The internal consistency values found for the five factors of the scale vary between .84 and .91. The test-retest reliability scores were found to be .94, .92, .96, .91, and .94 for the five factors (Akin et al., 2007).

*Elementary School Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale:* The scale was developed by Can (2010) and consists of 21 items with three subscales called "Counseling," "Consultation" and "Coordination." The points on the scale range from 21 to 105. The mean of the scale is 88.3. The factor loadings range from .46 to .81. "Counseling" consists of eight items and explains 25% of the total variance. "Coordination" consists of seven items and explains 19% of the total variance. "Consultation" includes six items and explains 17% of the total variance. All of the subscales are positively related to each other and these correlations are between .48 and .64. The cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is .92 for the scale, .91 for "Counseling," .88 for "Coordination" and .80 for "Consultation." Test-retest correlation was found to be .86 (Can 2010).

### Procedures

“Survey Monkey” was used for data collection, that is, the scales were loaded onto an internet page and the school counselors filled out these instruments. The research was announced via Konya Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association which is a branch of Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association to all other cities in Turkey. Time was given to subjects who want to participate to study as a volunteer to fill the scales via Survey Monkey.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0. While social comparison and self-consciousness are independent variables in this study counselor self-efficacy is dependent variable. To reveal the extent to which social comparison and self-consciousness served as predictors of counselor self-efficacy, multiple linear regression analysis was used.

### Findings

*Table 1*

**Model Summary for Stepwise Regression Analysis of Coordination**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> (Adj)	SE	F	p
A	.312	.097	.093	4.48582	21.731**	.000
B	.345	.119	.110	4.44182	13.593**	.000

A Predictor: Internal state awareness  
 B Predictor: Internal state awareness, appearance consciousness  
 Dependent variable: Coordination

\* p<.01

The findings from a stepwise regression analysis are summarized in Table 1. According to finding of the study, internal state awareness and appearance consciousness are significant predictors (p<.01) of coordination (the subscale of elementary school counselor self-efficacy). Of the variance in coordination, 9.3% was explained by internal state awareness and 11.0 % of the variance in coordination was explained by internal state awareness and appearance consciousness together.

Table 2

Model Summary for Stepwise Regression Analysis of Consultation

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> (Adj)	SE	F	p
A	.210	.044	.039	3.82579	9.329*	.003
B	.268	.072	.063	3.77891	7.803*	.001
A Predictor: Social anxiety						
B Predictor: Social anxiety, appearance consciousness						
Dependent variable: Consultation						

\* p<.05

According to the findings revealed in the stepwise regression analysis, social anxiety and appearance consciousness are significant predictors (p<.05) of consultation (subscale of elementary school counselor self-efficacy). Of the variance in consultation, 3.9 % was explained by social anxiety and 6.3% of the variance in consultation was explained by social anxiety and appearance consciousness together.

Table 3

Model Summary for Stepwise Regression Analysis of Counseling

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> (Adj)	SE	F	p
A	.227	.052	.047	5.70657	11.009*	.001*
A Predictor: Internal state awareness						
Dependent variable: Counseling						

\* p<.05

According to findings that are presented in Table 3, internal state awareness is a significant predictor of counseling (p<.05). Of the variance in counseling, 4.7 % was explained by internal state awareness.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the association between counselor self-efficacy, social comparison and self-consciousness in elementary school counselors. The analysis indicates that, while self-consciousness is a predictor of elementary school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs, social comparison does not predict counselor self-efficacy beliefs. Contrary to findings that social comparison affects self-efficacy beliefs (Schunk, 1983; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000), this study shows that social comparison is not a significant predictor of elementary school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs. To clinch the argument, it can be propounded that research regarding self-efficacy beliefs suggests that they stem from different social

environments that provide social information. Research also shows that self-efficacy beliefs improve via vicarious experiments and comments about the performance of others instead of as the result of normative criteria (Schunk, 1981; Schunk & Hanson, 1985). Consequently, social comparison may have an indirect effect on school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs.

Our study also revealed that internal state awareness and appearance consciousness explain coordination. According to Creed and Funder (1998), internal state awareness is positively related to psychological health. Many research studies show that internal state awareness is a positive subscale of private self-consciousness (Anderson, Bohon, & Berrigan, 1996; Creed & Funder, 1998). While internal state awareness is a component of private self-consciousness, appearance consciousness is a dimension of public self-consciousness. These results may mean that school counselors with high levels of internal self-consciousness coordinate the school and the environment easily.

Yet another result from the study shows that social anxiety and appearance consciousness are predictors of consultation. Counselors with low self-efficacy beliefs perceive the presence of anxiety as a threatening situation; they cannot establish realistic aims for themselves and have certain self-protective ideas regarding themselves (Larson & Daniels, 1998). In his research, Soker (2007) found that elementary school teachers believe that counseling services are important to classroom management and that they collaborate with school counselors. In a recent study Guiney, Harris, Zosho and Cancelli (2014) found that school psychologist's self-efficacy belief is significant predictor of consultation. Also, in another research study regarding the expectations of school counselors, Tuzcuoglu (1995) found that principals, teachers and parents have high expectations of school counselors. These high expectations create high levels of anxiety for school counselors. Also in recent study Akpochafo (2012) found that self-efficacy beliefs is a significant predictor of stress in primary school teachers which means people's thought and beliefs about what others think about their performance is a significant factor in anxiety and stress. Accordingly, this result may mean that, in their relationships with other teachers or staff, counselors feels socially anxious about their efficacy.

The final finding of this study was that internal state awareness is a significant predictor of school counselor self-efficacy beliefs.. These results were supported by Greason and Cashwell's (2009) findings. In a study they found that mindfulness was a significant predictor of counseling self-efficacy. According to Daniels and Larson (2001), it is important to examine the relationship between counselor self-efficacy beliefs and anxiety. Even if the

counselors have adequate information and ability, they may have low self-efficacy beliefs and high social anxiety if they focus on their performance during sessions (Leach, Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Eichenfeld, 1997). This could be explained by considering self-consciousness to be an affective process, so that self-consciousness is a significant predictor of counselor self-efficacy. As a result, counselors with a high internal state of awareness have high self-efficacy beliefs about their counseling with clients.

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the literature on several counts. Firstly, this is a unique study from the standpoint of predicting elementary school counselors' self-efficacy beliefs in terms of social comparison and self-consciousness. Secondly, the findings of the study contribute to the existing literature. Lastly, this is a study not only for theorists, but also for practitioners

As a recommendation, findings of study can be used an example for future counseling programs and to develop actions to be taken in elementary schools. With a more extensive sample, new research could be presented in the future. Also, in the future, research intended to develop a model could be conducted.

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