

Emotional Expressivity and Loneliness in Religious and Moral Studies Education Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between emotional expressivity and loneliness. Participants of the study were 339 university students. Of the participants 175 were female and 164 were male. The Berkeley Emotional Expressivity Scale and the UCLA Loneliness Scale were used as measures. The relationships between emotional expressivity and loneliness were examined using correlation analysis and the hypothesis model was tested through structural equation modeling. In correlation analysis, loneliness was negatively related to both total emotional expressivity scores ($r=-.52$) and to subscales of emotional expressivity (positive expressivity $r=-.57$, negative expressivity $r=-.38$, impulse strength $r=-.28$). The structural model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2=277.46$, $p=.00000$, GFI =.94, AGFI =.93, CFI =.98, IFI =.98, NFI =.96, RFI =.95, and RMSEA =.047) and also accounted 68% of loneliness variances. According to path analysis results, loneliness was predicted negatively by positive expressivity, negative expressivity, impulse strength, and total emotional expressivity scores.

Keywords: emotional expressivity, loneliness, path analysis.

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Emotional Expressivity

Emotional expressivity is of vital importance to adaptive human functioning and plays a central role in psychopathology and has been defined by Kring, Smith, and Neale, (1994) as “the degree to which an individual actively expresses emotional experience through verbal or nonverbal behaviors” (p. 934). The notion that the expression of emotions leads to better health is rooted in findings that emotional expression predicts better physical and psychological adjustment in the face of stress and illness (Antoni, 1999; Stanton et al., 2000) and that “bottled-up” emotions result in psychological and physical symptomatology (King & Emmons, 1990). In parallel research findings have demonstrated the positive, protective nature of emotional expression and the detrimental correlates of a lack, or suppression, of expression (Lavee & Adital, 2004).

Research on the relationships between emotional expressiveness and personality characteristics demonstrated that there was a connection between ability to express emotions and specific personality characteristics such as extraversion, dominance, and affiliation (Friedman, 1979; Friedman, Riggio, & Segall, 1980). Similarly both observational and self-report studies have documented that neuroticism is positively related to the experience of negative emotions (Wilson & Gullone, 1999) and to the expression of negative emotions (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Watson & Clark, 1992). It is also negatively related to the experience and expression of positive emotions (Kardum, 1999; Lavee & Adital, 2004). Emotional expression also plays a central role in psychopathology, including depression (Sloan, Strauss, & Wisner, 2001), schizophrenia (Earnst & Kring, 1999), and borderline personality disorder (Herpertz et al., 2001). Furthermore studies suggest that emotional expressiveness plays an important role in interpersonal interaction (Geist & Gilbert, 1996; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; King, 1993; Long & Andrews, 1990; Sullins, 1991). Within interpersonal relationships, the tendency to be emotionally expressive may impinge on the extent of both spouses’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the relationship. Empirical evidence suggests that the communication of emotions enhances the awareness of one’s own emotional state as well as that of one’s spouse, thereby forming the basis for intimacy and satisfaction with the relationship (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; King, 1993).

Loneliness

Loneliness is typically defined by researchers as involving the cognitive awareness of a deficiency in one’s social and personal relationships and the ensuing affective reactions of sadness, emptiness, or longing (Asher & Paquette, 2003). Parkhurst and Hopmeyer (1999) described loneliness as “a sad or aching sense of isolation, that is, of being alone, cutoff, or

distanced from others . . . associated with a felt deprivation of, or longing for, association, contact, or closeness” (p. 58). Chronic loneliness is associated with various indices of maladjustment in adolescents and adults, such as low self-esteem (Brage, Meredith, & Woodward, 1993; Schultz & Moore, 1988), depression (Koenig, Isaacs, & Schwartz, 1994; Lau, Chan, & Lau, 1999), anxiety (Johnson, LaVoie, Spenceri, & Mahoney-Wernli, 2001; Moore & Schultz, 1983), anorexia nervosa (Troop & Bifulco, 2002), and suicide ideation and behavior (Garnefski, Diekstra, & De Heus, 1992; Roberts, Roberts, & Chen, 1998). Additionally, at least 10% of elementary school-aged children (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984) and 66% of high school and middle school students (Culp, Clyman, & Culp, 1995) report feeling lonely either always or most of the time which suggests a level of loneliness that places children at risk for poor outcomes.

Psychological variables such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, affect dispositions, and other aspects of emotional functioning, as well as values and judgments about one’s own life—have also been associated with loneliness. For instance, loneliness is more likely in people who have lower self esteem (Brage et al., 1993; Hudson, Elek, & Campbell-Grossman, 2000; Lasgaard, 2007; Mahon, Yarcheski, Yarcheski, Cannella, & Hanks, 2006; Schultz & Moore, 1988), higher anxiety levels (Johnson et al., 2001; Moore & Schultz, 1983), especially if the anxiety focuses on social encounters (Fees, Martin, & Poon, 1999; Mahon et al., 2006), suffer from depression (Berg, Mellstrm, Persson, & Svanborg, 1981; Besser, Flett, & Davis, 2003; Cacioppo, Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2006; Koenig et al., 1994; Lau et al., 1999; Mahon et al., 2006; Nolen-Hoeksema & Ahrens, 2002; Wang, Snyder, & Kaas, 2001), feel low satisfaction with their life (Gow, Pattie, Whiteman, Whalley, & Deary, 2007), tend not to disclose their emotions and/or to silence themselves (Besser et al., 2003; Mahon et al., 2006), and have a dispositional tendency to negative affectivity (Kahn, Hesslingb, & Russell, 2003).

Despite these findings, to date, no study has examined the relationship between loneliness and emotional expressivity. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationships between loneliness and emotional expressivity. It was hypothesized that loneliness would be associated negatively with emotional expressivity.

Method

Participants

Participants were 339 university students (175 (52%) were female, 164 (48%) were male) religious and moral studies education students from different universities, in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 18 to 28 years and the mean age of the participants was 21.3 years.

Measures

Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ; Gross & John, 1995). The BEQ is a self-report questionnaire with 16 items rated on a 7-point scale (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree). This scale consists of three sub-scales; positive expressivity, negative expressivity, and impulse strength. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akin (2010). Results of language equivalency showed that the correlations between Turkish and English forms ranged from .62 to .83. Results of confirmatory factor analysis showed that the 16 items loaded on three factors (positive expressivity, negative expressivity, and impulse strength). Internal consistency reliability coefficients of Turkish form varied between .74 and .88 and test-retest reliability coefficients varied between .66 and .85, for three subscales, respectively.

UCLA Loneliness Scale. The 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) was used to measure participants' experience of loneliness. Respondents indicated on a 4-point scale (1 = never to 4 = always) how often they felt as described in each item. Scores on this scale could range from 20 to 80. This measure provides a continuous score and higher scores indicate greater feelings of loneliness. Construct validity of the scale has been supported by significant positive correlations with other measures of loneliness (e.g., Differential Loneliness Scale, $r = .72, p < .01$) and negative correlations with reported social support (Russell, 1996). Russell reported coefficient alphas ranging from .89 to .94. Demir (1989) reported an internal consistency coefficient of the Turkish version of loneliness scale to be .96, and test-retest (one-month interval) reliability coefficient to be .94.

Procedure

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related chief departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of scales, all participants were told about purposes of the study. In this research, Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling was utilized to determine the relationships between dimensions of self-compassion and loneliness. These analyses were carried out via LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1996) and SPSS 11.5.

Results

Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Alphas, and Inter-correlations of the Variables

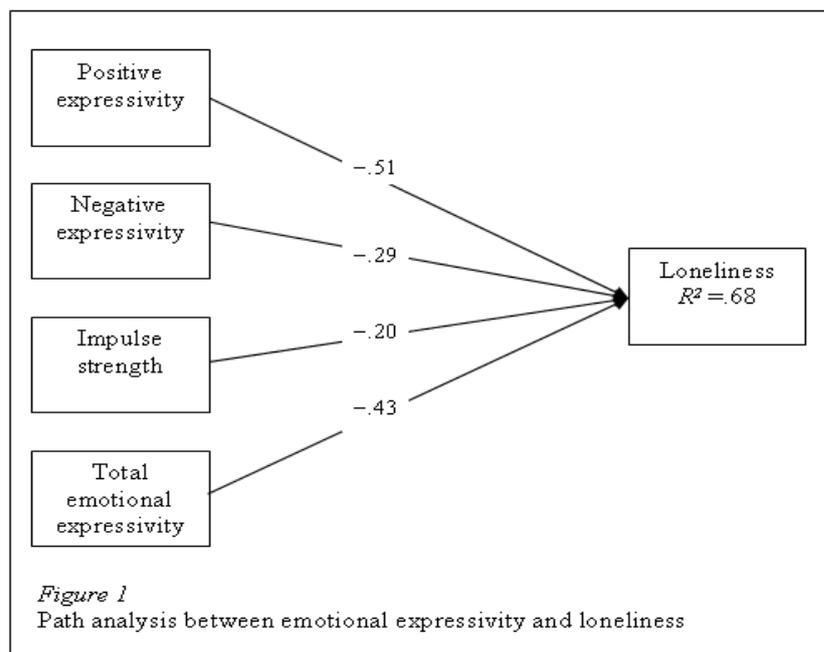
Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Positive expressivity	–				
2. Negative expressivity	.38**	–			
3. Impulse strength	.47**	.26**	–		
4. Total emotional expressivity	.77**	.72**	.79*	–	
5. Loneliness	-.57**	-.38**	-.28**	-.52**	–
Mean	20,73	24,22	28,47	73,43	34,76
Standard deviation	4,71	6,01	6,73	13,26	9,64
Alpha	.77	.91	.93	.88	.81

**p<.01

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations between dimensions emotional expressivity and loneliness. Positive expressivity ($r=-.57$), negative expressivity ($r=-.38$), and impulse strength ($r=-.28$), and total emotional expressivity scores ($r=-.52$) were found negatively associated with loneliness. There were also significant correlations between subscales of emotional expressivity.

Structural Equation Modeling

Hypothesized model was examined via structural equation modeling (SEM). According to this model, loneliness is predicted significantly by emotional expressivity. Figure 1 presents the results of SEM analysis, using maximum likelihood estimations. The structural model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2 = 277.46$, $p = .00000$, GFI = .95, AGFI = .93, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, NFI = .96, RFI = .95, and RMSEA = .047) and also accounted for 68% of loneliness variances.



The standardized coefficients in Figure 1 clearly showed that loneliness was predicted negatively by positive expressivity, negative expressivity, impulse strength, and total emotional expressivity scores (-.51, -.29, -.20, and -.43, respectively).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between emotional expressivity and loneliness. Findings have demonstrated that there are significant relationships between these two constructs. Also the goodness of fit indexes of the path model indicated that the model was acceptable and that correlations among measures were explained by the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

As hypothesized, the structural model delineated that emotional expressivity predicted loneliness in a negative way. Research showed that loneliness was associated with various indices of maladjustment such as low self-esteem (Brage et al., 1993; Schultz & Moore, 1988), depression (Koenig et al., 1994; Lau et al., 1999), anxiety (Johnson et al., 2001; Moore & Schultz, 1983), anorexia nervosa (Troop & Bifulco, 2002), low life satisfaction (Gow et al., 2007), tendency to negative affectivity (Kahn et al., 2003), and suicide ideation and behavior (Garnefski et al., 1992; Roberts et al., 1998). On the other hand, emotional expression has a positive effect on psychological problems such as depression (Sloan et al., 2001), schizophrenia (Earnst & Kring, 1999), and borderline personality disorder (Herpertz et al., 2001). Therefore the negative association between emotional expressivity and loneliness seem very reasonable. Thus, it can be said that an increment in emotional expressivity will decrease loneliness. But, participants were university students and replication of this study for targeting other student populations should be made in order to generate a more solid relationship among constructs examined in this study, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited. Also, even though structural equation modeling suggests results related to causality, it is difficult to give full explanation related to causality among the variables examined in the research, because correlational data were used.

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