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Personal Self-Concept as Mediator and Moderator of the Relationship between Insight and Psychological Vulnerability

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the mediator and moderator effects of personal self-concept on the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability were investigated. The participants were 322 university students attending different departments at Kocaeli University in Turkey. Data were collected by using the Insight Scale, the Psychological Vulnerability Scale and the personal self-concept Scale. Data were analyzed via Hierarchical Regression Analysis. The statistical analyses of the data by using "SPSS for Windows, version 20" package program. Insight, psychological vulnerability and personal self-concept were significantly correlated. Hierarchical regression analysis indicated that personal self-concept partially mediated the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability. However, personal self-concept had not moderating effect on the relationship insight and psychological vulnerability. Results were discussed in the light of the in the light of literature.

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Keywords:[1]
Insight, Psychological vulnerability, Personal Self-Concept, Mediating, Moderating

Introduction

Insight is associated with the ability to identify and express feelings in an internally aware state. As a personality characteristic, insight is thought to be related to psychological health. Since the beginning of psychoanalytic approach psychotherapies have begun working to raise individual level of awareness and consciousness (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). Freud stated that having emotional conflicts in consciousness enhances to produce an immediate and complete understanding (Lyke, 2009). Insight refers to a state of understanding of an individual's thought behavior and feelings (Grant, Franklin, & Langford, 2002).

Insight is an important well-being variable. Individuals with higher levels of insight would be both happier and more satisfied with their lives than those with lower levels. Lyke (2009) reported that insight was significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction and subjective happiness. Univariate analyses revealed that people with the high levels of insight were both significantly more satisfied with their lives and happier than people with medium or low levels of insight. However, the medium and low insight groups did not differ significantly from each other in either satisfaction with life or subjective happiness (Lyke, 2009). On the other hand poor insight associated with depression (Buckley et al., 2001; Collins et al., 1997; O'Connor & Herrman, 1993; Sevy et al., 2004, cited in Markova, 2005). Insight negatively correlated with measures of depression, anxiety, stress, and alexithymia (Grant et al., 2002). Poor insight is sometimes seen as just another psychological symptom or manifestation of a disorder (Cuesta & Peralta 1994).

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Psychological vulnerability refers to tendency to psychological disorders and it's a symptom of psychological maladjustment (Ingram & Price, 2010; Sinclair & Wallston, 1999). The concept of the psychological vulnerability is expressed briefly negative cognitive schemas. People who have these cognitive schemas are more fragile to stress. Vulnerable people need approval from others to feel good about self-worth. They feel inferior to other people and resentful about their relationship with others. Vulnerable people set their goals too high and if they do not achieve their goals, they become frustrated and feel like making a mistake (Sinclair & Wallston, 1999). Insight may be negatively associated with psychological vulnerability. Hence, we hypothesized that insight negatively related with psychological vulnerability.

The self-concept has been generally defined as an organized knowledge schema that controls the steps of information related to the self (Neisser, 1988, cited in Csank, 1995). In the interpretation of experience and regulating behavior, the self-reflection conducts an important and active role (Markus & Wurf, 1987, cited in Csank, 1995). As an identity theorists, Erikson (1980) stated that the self-reflection is crucial for a stable identity in the process of construction and definition (Csank, 1995). The concept of self-reflection may enhance insight regarding the historical basis of the self (Baumeister, 1986, 1987; Martin, Gutman & Hutton, 1988, cited in Csank, 1995). According to Baumeister (1986), insight can reveal the inner self and promote self-understanding (Csank, 1995). Insight is found as related to self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth and as a positive predictor of psychological well-being (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). Therefore, we hypothesized insight is positively correlated to personal self-concept

The personal self-concept can be defined as an individual's sense of personal worth, feelings of adequacy and self-evaluation of the personality aside from the body and interpersonal relationships (Fitts & Warren, 1996, cited in Rogers, 2010). The personal self-concept is a recent term, therefore a little research mentioned about this notion (Rogers, 2010). The self-concept and insight let children learn to take the perspective of others (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1902; 1964, cited in Csank, 1995). According to research, it can be said that people with unclear self-concept self-concept are more tend to change their self-descriptions as the time pass, than people who have a clear self-concept (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, & Lavalle, 1994, cited in Csank, 1995). Having a clear self-concept decreases the inconsistency about the sense of self. In other words, judgments of self-concept indicate an abstract belief about the self which is inconsistent to specific position of behavior or experience (Csank, 1995).

Experiencing stressful life events may have significant influence on people that it may leave them confused, withdrawn, depressed, and increasingly vulnerable to the next stressful situation that arises. Most arguments conceptualize vulnerability as an enduring but changeable, inner and hidden trait. Under some circumstances like hardy life events might serve to strengthen vulnerability (Ingram & Luxon, 2005). Updegraff and Taylor (2000) argue that some psychological factors may moderate the relationship between stressful life events and the outcomes, such as coping style, optimism, and control. Acceptance of stressful life events as real and unavoidable and attempting to focus on the positive aspects of a situation may be helpful to coping with stress (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). Whenever knowledge about oneself is distorted or denied, a state of psychological vulnerability exists (Corey, 2005). Conversely, clarity of understanding of oneself strengthens self-concept and vulnerability can be reduced. Thus, we hypothesized that personal self-concept may be negatively related with psychological vulnerability.

According to the studies, we expected that insight would be positively correlated to personal self-concept and negatively correlated to psychological vulnerability. In addition, personal self-concept would be negatively correlated to psychological vulnerability. The main purpose of this study was to examine the mediator and moderator roles of personal self-concept for the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability. In other words, our aim is to find the contribution of personal self-concept in association with insight and psychological vulnerability. In the mediational model, whether subjective happiness functions as a mediator between insight and psychological vulnerability has been examined. In the moderational model of this study, it was predicted that the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability with high personal self-concept would be less compared to the relationship with low subjective happiness. Personal self-concept may have a mediation and moderation role on insight and psychological vulnerability.

Method

Participants

The research is based on a convenience sample of 322 undergraduate students (180 (56%) females, 142 (44%) males) from a variety of departments at Kocaeli University in Turkey. Of the participants, 77 (24%) were freshmen, 103 (32%) were sophomores, 87 (27%) were juniors, and 55 (17%) were seniors. The range of their ages is from 17 to 25 (19.7 ± 1.6).

Measures

Personal self-concept scale. The Personal Self-concept Scale was developed by Goñi, Madariaga, Axpe, and Goñi (2011). The scale consists of 18 items which aim to measure personal perceptions regarding self-fulfillment (6 items), honesty (3 items), autonomy (4 items), and emotional self- concept (5 items). Thi is a Likert scale with 5 response ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın and Yıldız (2012). Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit (x^2= 323.11, df= 125, RMSEA= .063, CFI= .92, IFI= .92, RFI= .91, GFI= .92, SRMR= .070). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was found as .64. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the Personal Self-concept Scale was found as .77 for present study.

Self-reflection and insight scale. The the Self-reflection and Insight scale was developed by Grant Franklin, and Langford (2002). The 20 items, 6- point likert type scale consists of two subscales which aim to measure Self-reflection and Insight. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın and Yıldız (2012). In this research, the Insight subscale was used to measure the characteristics of having internal self-awareness of one's feelings, thoughts and motivations (e.g. I usually know why I feel the way I do). Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit (x^2= 486.06, df= 162, RMSEA= .071, NFI= .93, CFI= .95, IFI= .95, RFI= .91, SRMR= .088). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the insight subscale was found as .78. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the insight subscale was found as .72 for present study.

Psychological vulnerability scale. The Psychological Vulnerability Scale was developed by Sinclair and Wallston (1999). The scale contain 6 items and each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=unsuitable to me to, 5=definitely suitable to me). Yield total scores from 5 to 35 where higher scores indicate more psychological vulnerability. Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akın and Eker (2011). The internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire was .75. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit (RMSEA= .001, NFI= .97, CFI= 1.00, GFI= .99, AGFI= .98, RFI= .95, and SRMR= .025). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the Psychological Vulnerability Scale was found as .65 for present study.

Procedure and Data Analysis

For the reason to test whether personal self-concept mediated the link between insight and psychological vulnerability with hierarchical regression analyses, Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations were followed. According to their recommendations, firstly asignificant relationship between the independent variable and the hypothesized mediating variable is required. Secondly, a significant relationship between the hypothesized mediating variable and dependent variable is required. Thirdly, a significant relationship between independent variable and dependent variable is needed. Finally, the coefficient relating the independent variable to the dependent variable must be larger (in absolute value) than the coefficient relating the independent variable to the dependent variable in the regression model, with both the independent variable and the mediating variable predicting the dependent variable.

In order to test moderating effects of personal self-concept on the relationships between insight and psychological vulnerability, hierarchical regression procedures were performed as recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). According to their recommendations, first, a composite score of all variables were created by summing the standardized scores. Then, in the hierarchical regression model, the order of entries was as follows: At Step 1 and Step 2, the predictor (insight) and moderator (personal self-concept) variables were entered sequentially into the regression equations. At Step 3, the interactions of insight X personal self-

concept were added. Significant change in R^2 for the interaction term indicates a significant moderator effect. These analyses were carried out via IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results

Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Means, descriptive statistics, and inter-correlations of the variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the variables

Variables	Insight	Personal self-concept	Psychological vulnerability	Mean	SD
Insight	1.00			29.67	5.74
Personal self-concept	.56**	1.00		63.97	7.92
Psychological vulnerability	-.39**	-.45**	1.00	16.21	3.99

**$p < .01$

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations among insight, personal self-concept, and psychological vulnerability. Correlation analysis showed that personal self-concept related negatively to psychological vulnerability (r= -.45, p< .01) and positively to insight (r= .56, p< .01). On the other hand, psychological vulnerability was found negatively (r= -.39, p< .01) related to insight.

Testing the Mediating Role of Personal Self-concept in the Relationship between Insight and Psychological Vulnerability

Following the steps of the mediation procedure, firstly it was verified that personal self-concept and insight revealed positive relation (β= .56, t= 12.04, p< .01). Then it was verified that psychological vulnerability and personal self-concept revealed negative relation (β= -.45, t= -9.08, p< .01). In the third step, the mediation was done. The results of hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that insight was negatively associated with psychological vulnerability (β= -.39, t= -7.49, p= .000). However, when personal self-concept and insight were taken together in the regression analysis, the significance of relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability (β= -.19, t= -3.27, p= .001) decreased, yet the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability was significant. This result indicated a partial mediation. Therefore, it can be said that personal self-concept partially explains the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The hierarchical regression results of testing the mediational role of personal self-concept in the relationship between ınsight and psychological vulnerability

Variable	B	Standard Error of B	β	t	p
Step 1					
Insight	-.269	.036	-.386	-7.486	.000
Step 2					
Insight	-.135	.041	-.194	-3.272	.001
Personal Self-concept	-.174	.030	-.345	-5.822	.000

Dependent Variable: Psychological vulnerability
Note: R^2=.15, Adjusted R^2=.15 (p<.05) for Step 1; R^2=.23, ΔR^2=.08, Adjusted R^2=.23 (p<.05) for Step 2.

Also, the results of regression analysİs testing mediation effects of personal self-concept on the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability are presented in figure 1. As shown figure 1,

the beta weight, when insight was regressed alone on psychological vulnerability, was -.39. The beta weight dropped from -.39 to -.19 when personal self-concept was added into the equation.

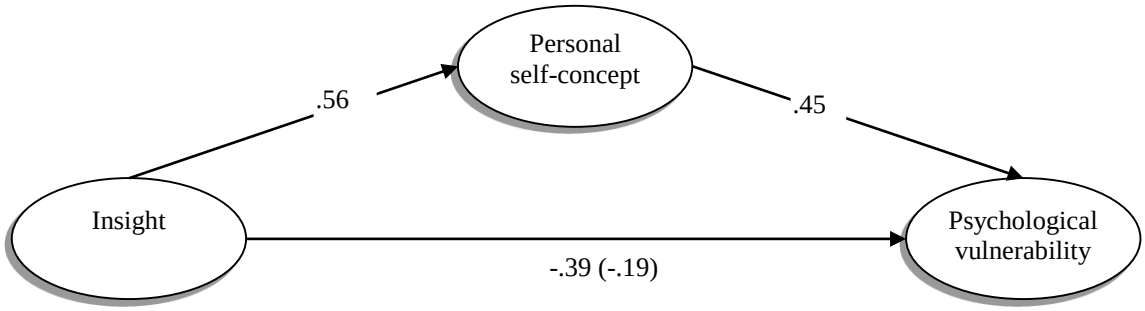


Figure 1. Examining whether personal self-concept significantly mediates the association of insight and psychological vulnerability.

The coefficient in parentheses for all models represents the association of insight with psychological vulnerability when personal self-concept is included in the model.

Sobel test was performed on estimated significance of the mediation effect. The purpose of this test is to verify whether a mediator carries the influence of an interdependent variable to dependent variable. Sobel (1982) test is characterized as being a restrictive test, and as so, assures that the verified results are not derived from colinearity issues. In the present study, the test value verified is Z= -5.22586856.

Testing the Moderating Role of Personal Self-concept in the Relationship between Insight and Psychological Vulnerability

According to the results of the hierarchical regression analysis, summarized in Table 3, insight (β= -.39, p< .001) and personal self-concept (β= -.34, p< .001) predicted psychological vulnerability significantly. However, there was no significant interaction between insight and personal self-concept (β= .000, p> .05). These findings indicated that personal self-concept had no moderating effect on the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability.

Table 3. The hierarchical regression results of testing the moderating role of personal self-concept in the relationship between ınsight and psychological vulnerability

Variable	*B*	Standard Error of B	*B*	R^2	R^2change	*F* change
Step 1						
Insight	-1.543	.206	-.386	.15	.15	56.04
Step 2						
Personal Self-concept	-1.377	.236	-.345	.23	.08	33.896
Step 3						
Personal Self-concept X Insight	-.002	.194	.000	.23	.00	.000

Dependent Variable: Psychological vulnerability

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the mediator and moderator roles of personal self-concept for the relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability. The most importantly purpose of this study, the main hypothesis that relationship between insight and psychological vulnerability was partially mediated by personal self-concept, was confirmed. In other words, as insight increases, psychological vulnerability decreases, and personal self-concept plays a mediating role in this change. We could not find any study on insight as mediator role between insight and psychological vulnerability. However, several studies also support present study result.

Insight is significantly positively correlated with all of the psychological well-being dimensions and the satisfaction with life scale, also insight is negatively correlated with anxiety and stress (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). As predictors of satisfaction with life, insight is significant for the all variables of the psychological wellbeing variables (Self-acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life and Personal Growth) and positive predictor of psychological well-being (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). This result confirms that the state of a conscious awereness of an individual's feelings, thoughts and motivations is significant to overall well-being (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). On the other hand psychological vulnerability has negative relationship with social support, emotional support, positive affectivity, life satisfaction, dispositional optimism, self-efficacy and adaptive coping behaviors (Sinclair & Wallston, 1999), self-esteem (Luxton, Ingram, & Wenzlaff, 2006). Previous research may be explain that "Why" personal self concept has a meditational role on insight and psychological vulnerability.

ınsight is found related to many markers of affect and well-being. ındividual with high insight has lower depression and anxiety symptoms, lower negative affect, higher positive affect and higher self- esteem (Silvia & Philips, 2011). Higher insight predicted lower Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Anxiety Inventory, and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scores, higher Positive Affect, lower Negative Affect, and higher self-esteem (Silvia & Philips, 2011). Insight has significant negative relationships with private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and rumination, insight did not significantly predict reflection (Silvia & Philips, 2011). Insight negatively correlated with measures of depression, anxiety, stress and alexithymia, and correlated positively with cognitive flexibility and self-regulation (Grant et al., 2002). On the other hand, psychological vulnerability is correlated positively with anxiety and stress (Sherman, Bunyan, Creswell, & Jaremka, 2009), depression (Ingram, 2003; Wang, 2006), doubts about self–worth (Luxton, et al., 2006), helplessness, negative affectivity, depressive symptoms and maladaptive coping behavior (Sinclair & Wallston, 1999).

Increasing in insight can lead to adaptive changes in cognitive structures, behavior and everyday life experience (Harrington & Loffredo, 2011; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003). In addition, people who makes decisions about their lives in accordance with their own criteria, consider themselves to be honest and decent, see themselves in relation to achieving the aims and objectives of their lives, and emotionally adjusted, they are high in personal self concept (Goñi et al., 2011). High level of insight with image of oneself self-fulfilled, autonomous, emotionally adjusted and decent person may be decrease psychological vulnerability and increase the resiliency.

In terms of the role of moderator, the results did not support personal self-concept as a moderator between insight and psychological vulnerability. According to the result personal self-concept does not have an enhancing function over the insight and psychological vulnerability. As far as our knowledge, no study has investigated personal self-concept as moderator between insight and psychological vulnerability. This study may explain personal self-concept as mediator or moderator role between insight and psychological vulnerability. Howewer, there is need for further research on personal self-concept and different variables mediation and moderation analyses.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the study group was relatively small and homogeneous sample drawn from an undergraduate student population. Therefore, it is not clear to what extent these result will generalize across age and educational status. For this reason, the research needs to be repeated at different universities with participants from other population. Future longitudinal or experimental studies will facilitate more causal evaluations. Finally, in this study, the use of self-reports measuring to evaluate insight, personal self-concept and psychological vulnerability. The use of different methods for evaluation these variables such as parent, teacher, and peer reports may decrease the subjectivity limitation of the findings. In this study personal self-concept was the only potential mediator that we examined, even though there are certainly other mediators that are likely to play an important role in the association between insight and psychological vulnerability, such as self-esteem, coping styles, positive and negative affect can be examined. It is clear that there is a need for more studies about these constructs.

Consequently, the present study empirically examined the role or effect of personal self-concept a mediator or moderator between insight and psychological vulnerability. The results show that personal self-

concept plays an important role as a mediator between insight and psychological vulnerability, but not as a moderator between insight and psychological vulnerability. These findings indicate that, high level of insight with high level of personal self-concept reported low scores on vulnerability than those with low personal self-concept. Thus, personal self-concept serves as a mediator between insight and psychological vulnerability. In addition, findings showed that personal self-concept is positively related to insight and negatively related to psychological vulnerability. Insight and psychological vulnerability are related negatively. These results suggest that insight with personal self-concept may be an important construct in understanding ways to mitigate the negative effects of psychological vulnerability. Finally, this study suggests that mental health professionals may be state insight and personal self-concept improvement programs to help at university students to decrease psychological vulnerability.

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