

## Life Orientations among University Students

### Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Yaşam Yönelimi

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#### Abstract

In the present research, whether or not loneliness, body image, academic achievement level and grade, faculty, gender and age variables predicted life orientation of university students. The research is conducted with 427 students (214 females and 213males) selected from Faculty of Education (134 students), Faculty of Science and Literature (150 students), Faculty of Engineering (52 students) and Faculty of Economical and Administrative Sciences (91 students) of Mersin University. One-hundred-twenty of them were freshmen, 144 sophomores, 128 juniors and 35 were senior students whose ages ranged between 17-33 with a mean of 21.26 and standard deviation of 2.17. The data related with life orientation was gathered by means of Life Orientation Scale developed by Scheier and Carver (1987) adapted to Turkish by Aydın and Tezer (1991). UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Russel, Peplau and Ferguson (1978) and adapted to Turkish culture by Demir (1989) was used to gather data related with loneliness, the data related with the body image was developed by Offer Self Image Scale Body Image Subscale developed by Offer, Ostrov, Howard and Atkinson (1989) and adapted to Turkish culture by Şahin (1993). Stepwise multiple regression analysis was administered to the data to examine whether the students' loneliness levels, body image, academic achievement level and grade, faculty, gender and age predicted life orientation. According to the analysis, three statistically significant models have observed (body image ( $F=70.595$ ;  $df=399;1$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), gender ( $F=38.272$ :  $df=399;2$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and grade ( $F=27.271$ ,  $df=399;3$ ,  $p=0.000$ )). Body image has predicted 15.1% of the variance of life orientation and follows 1.1% gender and 0.9% grade respectively. The greater the body image scores of the students the greater the life orientation scores ( $t=8.402$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Additionally, females scored greater on life orientation than males ( $t=-2.281$ ;  $p=.023$ ) and while the grade level increase, life orientation scores of the students decrease ( $t=2.140$ ;  $p=.033$ ). Faculty, age and academic achievement did not predict the life orientation. Results were discussed with a special concern on gender difference and the effect of educational process to the behavior.

*Keywords:* Life orientation, optimism, body image, loneliness.

#### Öz

Bu çalışmada üniversite öğrencilerinin yalnızlık düzeylerinin, beden imgelerinin, akademik başarılarının ve sınıf, fakülte, cinsiyet, yaş değişkenlerinin yaşam yönelimi düzeylerini yordayıp yordamadığı incelenmiştir. Araştırma, Mersin Üniversitesi'nin dört fakültesinden seçilen 214 kız ve 213 erkek, toplam 427 öğrenci ile yapılmıştır. (134 kişi Eğitim Fakültesi, 150 kişi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, 52 kişi Mühendislik Fakültesi ve 91 kişi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi öğrencisi; 120 birinci sınıf, 144 ikinci sınıf, 128 üçüncü sınıf ve 35 dördüncü sınıf). Araştırma grubunun yaş ortalaması 21.26 ve standart sapması 2.17'dir (17 ile 33 arasında değişmektedir). Yaşam yönelimi ile ilgili veriler Scheier ve Carver (1987) tarafından geliştirilen ve Aydın ve Tezer (1991) tarafından Türkçe'ye uyarlanan Yaşam Yönelimi Testi ile, Yalnızlıkla ilgili veriler, Russel, Peplau ve Ferguson (1978) tarafından geliştirilen ve Demir (1989) tarafından Türkçe'ye uyarlanan UCLA yalnızlık Ölçeği ile, beden imgesi ile ilgili veriler ise Offer, Ostrov, Howard ve Atkinson (1989) tarafından geliştirilen ve Şahin (1993) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan Offer Benlik İmgesi Ölçeği, beden imgesi alt ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerin yalnızlık düzeyleri, beden imgesi, sınıf, fakülte, cinsiyet, yaş ve akademik başarılarının yaşam yönelimi düzeylerini yordayıp yordamadığını incelemek amacıyla aşamalı çoklu doğrusal regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Bu analizin sonucunda üç ayrı anlamlı model elde edilmiştir [beden imgesi ( $F=70.595$ ;  $sd=399;1$ ,  $p=0.000$ ),

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cinsiyet ( $F=38.272$ ;  $sd=399;2$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) ve sınıf ( $F=27.271$ ,  $sd=399;3$ ,  $p=0.000$ ]. Beden imgesi yaşam yönelimindeki değişimin %15.1'ini yordarken, bunu sırasıyla % 1.1 ile cinsiyet, % 0.9 ile sınıf izlemektedir. Beden imgesi olumlu yönde arttıkça yaşam yönelimi puanları artmaktadır ( $t=8.402$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Ayrıca, kızların yaşam yönelimi puanları erkeklerden daha yüksektir ( $t=-2.156$ ;  $p=.02$ ) ve sınıf seviyesi arttıkça yaşam yönelimi puanları azalmaktadır. Fakülte, yaş, akademik başarı ve yalnızlığın, yaşam yönelimini yordamadığı gözlenmiştir. Bulgular, cinsiyetler arası farklılaşma ve eğitim sürecinin davranışlara etkisi yönünden tartışılmıştır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Yaşam yönelimi, iyimserlik, beden imgesi, yalnızlık.

## Introduction

Adolescence is the period of identity formation, value system development and construction of the frame of references. The life success of individual has been affected various behavioral pattern and trait such as loneliness, body image, academic achievement. Also, life orientation effects future success of the individual. Aydın and Tezer (1991) proposed that positive regard to life, i.e. optimism is one of the important traits considered.

Scheier and Carver (1987) suggested that optimism as a personality disposition may be beneficial to health through a more general interest in the processes that underlie the self-regulation of behavior. In other words, people's actions are greatly affected by their beliefs about the probable outcomes of those actions. In general, it is claimed that an individual having an optimistic outcome expectation in a problematic situation is stronger to the difficulties of life. And then, optimism is discussed as a general anticipation about life events. As an important aspect of human life, life orientation or optimistic evaluation of human life is a critical variable and adolescence, as an important period in human life, may be evaluated as a critical period to develop this orientation.

Besides that, as an important component of personality, optimism or life orientation is considered to be related with various dimensions of persons' life and the relationship of this variable with the other individual variables such as physical health (Tennen and Affleck, 1987; Scheier and Carver, 1987; Davidsdottir, 2004), emotional health (Bedi and Brown, 2005), adjustment (Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger and Pancer, 2005) and behavior problems (Baker, Blacher and Olsson, 2005) is examined. Also Ji, Zhang, Osborne and Guan (2004) was investigated optimism cross culturally in the context of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreaks in Canada and China and no significant cultural difference was found on dispositional optimism, as measured by the Revised Life Orientation Test. Hudek-Knežević and Kardum (2009) have found a negative relationship between optimistic control and physical symptoms and health concerns. Matthews and Cook (2009) also found that optimism was positively related to emotional well-being. Barlow, Tobin, and Schmidt (2009) found that social interest was significantly correlated with hope and optimism, and optimism was more significant than hope as a predictor of social interest.

Loneliness is also an important human pattern that may be linked to social and academic problems in the adolescence. The individual experiencing high levels of loneliness are vulnerable to exhibit aggression, withdrawal, disruptive behavior, and problems in academic performance (Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw, 1984; Asher and Wheeler, 1985; Boivin, Hymel, and Bukowski, 1995; Cassidy and Asher, 1992; Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman, 1996, 1997; Renshaw and Brown, 1993). Demir (1989) suggested that loneliness emerges as a result of the qualitative and quantitative disability in the social network of individual. De Minzi and Sacchi (2004) suggested that feelings of loneliness are considered as deficiencies in systems of interpersonal interaction. Vulnerability to loneliness develops throughout late childhood and early adolescence in sensitive children. Also Rokach (2004) argued that loneliness is a universal phenomenon fundamental to being human. Everyone, regardless of their ethnicity, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status or social condition and age or gender can identify the pain or problem of loneliness at some point in their lives. Similarly, loneliness is always very painful, severely distressing and individualistic. Kim, LaRose and Peng (2009) found that individuals who were lonely or did not have good social skills could develop strong compulsive internet use behaviors resulting in negative life outcomes (e.g., harming other significant activities such as work, school, or significant relationships) instead of relieving their original

problems.

Loneliness also results in many academic and social problems (Rotenberg, MacDonald and King, 2004). So, the relationship of loneliness with other variables that may affect human life was examined by many researches. Social skills and attachment style (Deniz, Hamarta and Arı, 2005), social and emotional alienation (Rokach, 2004), bullying (Schäfer, et. al. 2004), interpersonal trust (Rotenberg, MacDonald and King, 2004), the Internet usage (Seepersad, 2004; Kim, LaRose and Peng, 2009), life satisfaction in adolescents with divorced and non-divorced parents (Çivitci, Çivitci and Fiyakalı, 2009), hopelessness (Girgin, 2009), humor style (Fitts, Sebby, and Zlokovich, 2009) are some of them. Studies conducted on the topic verify that loneliness is a very common problem today (Rokach, and Brock, 1997; Russell, Peplau, and Cutrano, 1980).

Adolescence is a critical period in the emotional, physical and cognitive development of individuals. Adolescents develop cognitive and academic skills while constructing their standing in the social network. Akbaş (2005) argued that in the adolescence period, the anxiety level of individual increase due to the physical appearances, attractiveness, etc. Also Bakırcioğlu (2002) claimed that individuals might experience difficulties related with physical appearances in this period. The body image is a critical part of self image. Modrzejewska and Badura-Madej (2009) suggested that the image of the self in adolescents is not static, it tends to fluctuate and shows changes over time. Pilecki and Józefik (2008) also suggested that self-image can be regarded as an important element of personality, especially in the adolescence. It is a framework for personality. It forms a structure that integrates and stabilizes actions and perception of oneself and the world. Pilecki and Józefik (2008) also observed a relationship between negative body image and severe eating problems such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

Bektaş (2004) argued that due to the importance of completing the developmental tasks in adolescence, it is essential that the adolescent accepts his body. The body image is an important variable in the adolescents' life, because of the link between body image and the dating behavior. Among adolescents there is a belief that appearance is important for being happy in a romantic relationship. Although culture influence the body image of individuals, it may be argued that rather than the cultures' direct influence, combination of many factors within the culture has effects on body image and adjustment of adolescents.

In the light of the theoretical explanations and study results mentioned above, the aim of the present research is to examine whether or not loneliness level, body image, academic achievement, and grade, department, gender and age variables predict the life orientation of university students.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants are composed of 214 females and 213 males, in total, 427 university students selected from four different faculties of Mersin University those of them are 134 from faculty of Education, 150 from faculty of Science and Literature, 52 from Engineering and 91 from faculty of Economical and Administrative Sciences. The participants were consisted of 120 freshmen, 144 sophomores, and 128 junior, 35 senior students. The mean age of the participants was 21.26 with a standard deviation of 2.17' dir (ranged from 17 to 33). 27 of participants did not offer cumulative grade point average (CGPA) score, so that the data related with academic achievement have been gathered from 400 participants.

### *Instruments*

*The Life Orientation Test (LOT)* is originally developed by Scheier and Carver (1987) and adapted to Turkish by Aydın and Tezer (1991). It is a 12-item self-report survey designed to measure global optimism on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (4). The LOT is composed of four positively expressed, four negatively expressed (reverse scored), and four filler items to disguise the purpose of the test that are not included in the scoring. Scores for optimism range from 0 to 32, with a higher score indicating greater optimism. The four-week interval test-retest reliability coefficients of the test was .77 (n=97; p<.001). In the validity study of the test, Beck Depression Inventory was used as a criterion and the

correlation between BDI and LOT examined. The instruments were administered two different university student groups ( $N_1=50$  and  $N_2=97$ ) and the correlation coefficients were  $-.56$  ( $p<.001$ ) and  $-.45$  ( $p<.001$ ) respectively (Aydm and Tezer, 1991).

*UCLA Loneliness Scale:* The 20-item University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson, 1978) was used to measure loneliness. Responses on a 4-point Likert-type scale are summed for a total score such that high scores indicate greater loneliness. The scale has been shown to possess high internal consistency (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrano, 1980). 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  $.94$ . The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the UCLA-Loneliness Scale ( $N=180$ ) was  $.93$ . Loneliness scores may be transformed into high-loneliness and low-loneliness categories by using the mean and standard deviation obtained from the sample.

*Offer Self-image Questionnaire (OSIQ)* was developed by Offer, Ostrov, Howard and Dolan (1989) and adapted to Turkish by Şahin (1993). The OSIQ consists of 99 items with 10 subscales through which the adolescents evaluate themselves. It assesses the adaptive behavior of the adolescents in areas such as family relations, impulse control, sexual attitudes, coping behaviors, body image, emotionality, occupational and educational aims, social relationships, psychological well-being and individual values. Body image subscale used in the present study consisted of 8 items related with the adolescents' positive and negative feelings about their body (17, 28, 39, 54, 62, 70, 73, 77. items). Internal consistency coefficient of the scale was  $.88$ . Half of the items in the scale include positive statements and the other half includes negative statements. Increase in the scores indicates increases in adaptive behaviors (Cited from: Savaşır and Şahin, 1997).

#### *Data Analysis*

Descriptive statistics related with the variables were calculated and a stepwise linear multiple regression analysis was administered data to examine whether or not loneliness level, body image, academic achievement, and grade, department, gender and age variables predict the life orientation of university students.

### Results

The means and standard deviations of the scores of the students on life orientation, loneliness and body image instruments and the age and academic achievement scores were shown in the table 1.

Table 1.

*Mean and standard deviations of the score of participants*

Variables	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	Minimum	Maximum
Life Orientation	427	18.88	5.11	3	36
Loneliness	427	50.11	5.14	32	65
Body Image	427	36.92	6.24	11	49
Academic Achievement (CGPA)	400	76.37	5.18	55	87.70
Age	427	21.26	2.17	17	33

The relationship between life orientation, loneliness and body image scores of the participants were examined by Pearson Product Moment correlation and a significant relationship between life orientation and body image was observed ( $r=0.36$ ;  $p=0.000$ ;  $n=427$ ) and no significant relationship between life orientation and loneliness ( $r=0.007$ ;  $p=0.890$ ;  $n=427$ ), loneliness and body image ( $r=-0.079$ ;  $p=0.103$ ;  $n=427$ ) was observed.

The results of the regression analysis applied to the adolescents' life orientation scores showed 3 different regression models. The models indicating the predictive value of body image, gender and grade, multiple correlation and regression coefficients are given below in Table 2

Table 2.

*Multiple linear regression analysis to predict life orientation and regression equation*

Predictors	B	$\beta$	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p	t	p
Body Image	.315	.385	.388	.151	70.595	.000	8.402	.000
Body Image + Gender	-1.063	-.099	.402	.162	38.272	.000	-2.281	.023
Body Image +Gender + Grade	-.524	-.098	.414	.171	27.271	.000	-2.140	.033
Constant	7.272						5.156	.000

*Life Orientation' = 7.272 + .315 Body image-1.063 Gender-.524 Grade*

The results of stepwise linear multiple regression analysis administered to the data to examine whether or not loneliness level, body image, academic achievement, and grade, department, gender and age variables predict the life orientation of university students showed three significant model (body image (F=70.595; df=399;1, p=0.000), gender (F=38.272; df=399;2, p=0.000) and grade (F=27.271, df=399;3, p=0.000)). While body image predicted 15.1% of the variance on the life orientation, gender and grade predicted 1.1% and 0.9% of the variance respectively. The more the body image differs positively, life orientation scores of the adolescents increase (B=.315; t=8.402; p=.000). Additionally, females had higher scores on life orientation test than males (B=-1.063; t=-2.281; p=.023) and while grade level increase, life orientation scores decrease (B=-.524; t=-2.140; p=.033). Another words, increase in the grade level and being male would result in a 1.063 and 2.140 point decrease on the life orientation scores respectively. The department, age, academic achievement and loneliness variables did not predict life orientation.

### Discussion

As expected, the results of the present study showed that the more positive the body image of the adolescents the more they are optimistic and perceive the life more positive. Demirer (2005) stated that the development of the body image of the individual effected by all their past and present feelings, attitude and perception and also the others' perceptions. Özaltın (2003) pointed out the importance of body image on the self-image of the individual. A healthy person maintaining a normal body image there must be congruence between body authenticity, body ideal and presenting the body. Pilecki and Józefik (2008) also stated that self-image can be regarded as an important element of personality, especially in the developmental age. It forms a structure that integrates and stabilizes actions and perception of oneself and the world. On the other hand, Modrzejewska and Badura-Madej (2009) argued that young people's self-image is not a constant value; it tends to fluctuate. So, the adolescence, as a critical period, may greatly change the individuals' life. Similarly, Collin-Ve'zina, He'bert, Manseau, Blais and Fernet (2006) found that the self-concept of teenagers involved in severe violence that includes injury is especially negative. Raphael and Cubis (1990) also found that adolescents from disrupted families reported poorer perceptions of their bodies and had more negative views of their school performance. Briefly, the adolescents' the perception of their own body may affect many dimension of their life positively or in a negative way as well as the life orientation.

Another finding of the research has shown that females scored higher on life orientation than males. Complex social structure of modern life had changed the gender roles and the expectations from females varied. There has been a debate on the related literature whether gender differences originated from the nature of sexes or gender socialization process. Giddens (1996) argued that many of the difference between females and males are not physical. Traditional gender roles are taught strongly to the children and once a role is acquired, the society expects the person act in that manner. These expectations are performed and reproduced in daily life (Lorber, 1994; Bourdieu, 1990). Females and males develop a different culture because they live in different social environments. Different behavioral patterns, treats, emotional

characteristics, skills and cognitive style have been formed by means of this process. Even if the source of the difference in the gender roles of females and males seems to be the genetic factors or the result of the learning from parents, friends and school environments, there is a clear-cut diversity in the behaviors of two different sexes. Because of this diversity in the socialization, females may view the life more positively than males.

Finally, the research result indicated that the more the grade level increase, optimism level decrease. Since one of the important developmental task in adolescence is vocational choice, preparation for a profession and perform the profession at the end of this preparation. Then, employment or unemployment is one of the most critical events in adolescents' life. However, there has been an unemployment problem in Turkey because of economical crisis. The upper grade students get closer to the unemployment because many university graduates have been unemployed in Turkey. For example, the number of unemployed university graduates has been increased from 87000 to 362000 since 1998 to 2008 (TUIK, 2010). Therefore, such a despairing indicators may make adolescents feel helplessness and develop a more pessimistic view of life.

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