


Self-Censorship and Social Support: Mediating Role of Self-Construal

Kendini Sansürleme ve Sosyal Destek: Benlik Kurgusunun Aracı Rolü

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship, with a particular focus on the mediating role of self-construal. Self-censorship—defined as the tendency to withhold personal opinions, beliefs, or emotions due to concerns about social approval or negative evaluation—represents a critical factor influencing both individual well-being and interpersonal communication. Conversely, social support is widely recognized as a protective resource that enhances individuals' coping capacity and promotes psychological adjustment. Given the cultural significance of self-construal, this study aimed to determine whether different self-construal orientations mediate the relationship between social support and self-censorship.

Method: The study employed a correlational design. The sample comprised 400 participants (293 women, 74.3%; 107 men, 25.8%) aged 16 to 56 years. Data were collected using the Relational-Individual-Collective Self-Aspects Scale, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and the Willingness to Self-Censor Scale. Hierarchical regression analyses and mediation tests were conducted via the bootstrapping method with 10,000 resamples to examine the hypothesized model. **Results:** Findings indicated that individuals with higher levels of perceived social support exhibited lower tendencies toward self-censorship ($\beta = -0.13, p < .05$). Moreover, individual self-construal significantly mediated the relationship between social support and self-censorship ($\beta = -0.18, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.09, -0.01]$). By contrast, no significant mediating effects were observed for relational or collective self-construals.

Conclusion: These results suggest that perceived social support serves a protective function in reducing self-censorship tendencies, particularly among individuals with an individualistic self-construal. The study highlights the importance of considering cultural self-structures when examining the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social support and self-censorship, providing both theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Self-censorship, social support, self-construal

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma, algılanan sosyal destek ile kendini sansürleme arasındaki ilişkiyi, özellikle benlik kurgusunun aracılık rolüne odaklanarak incelemiştir. Kendini sansürleme—kişinin sosyal onay ya da olumsuz değerlendirilme kaygısıyla kişisel görüş, inanç veya duygularını dile getirmekten kaçınma eğilimi—bireysel iyi oluşu ve kişilerarası iletişimi etkileyen kritik bir faktör olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Öte yandan, sosyal destek bireylerin başa çıkma kapasitesini artıran ve psikolojik uyumu teşvik eden koruyucu bir kaynak olarak yaygın şekilde kabul edilmektedir. Benlik kurgusunun kültürel önemi göz önünde bulundurularak, bu çalışmada farklı benlik kurgusu yönelimlerinin sosyal destek ile kendini sansürleme arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık edip etmediği araştırılmıştır.

Yöntem: Çalışma korelasyonel bir desene yürütülmüştür. Örneklem, 16 ile 56 yaşları arasında 400 katılımcıdan (293 kadın, %74,3; 107 erkek, %25,8) oluşmaktadır. Veriler, İlişkisel-Bireysel-Toplulukçu Benlik Yönleri Ölçeği, Çok Boyutlu Algılanan Sosyal Destek Ölçeği ve Kendini Sansürleme İsteği Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Hipotez edilen modelin test edilmesi için hiyerarşik regresyon analizleri ve 10.000 tekrar ile bootstrap aracılık testleri uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular: Sonuçlar, daha yüksek düzeyde algılanan sosyal desteğe sahip bireylerin kendini sansürleme eğilimlerinin daha düşük olduğunu göstermiştir ($\beta = -0,13, p < ,05$). Ayrıca, bireysel benlik kurgusunun sosyal destek ile kendini sansürleme arasındaki ilişkide anlamlı bir aracılık rolü üstlendiği bulunmuştur ($\beta = -0,18, \%95 \text{ GA } [-0,09, -0,01]$). Buna karşın, ilişkisel veya toplulukçu benlik kurguları için anlamlı bir aracılık etkisi gözlenmemiştir.

Sonuç: Bu bulgular, algılanan sosyal desteğin özellikle bireysel benlik kurgusuna sahip bireylerde kendini sansürleme eğilimlerini azaltmada koruyucu bir işlev gördüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, sosyal destek ile kendini sansürleme arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık eden mekanizmaların incelenmesinde kültürel benlik yapılarının dikkate alınmasının önemini vurgulamakta ve hem kuramsal hem de uygulamalı açıdan katkılar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kendini sansürleme, benlik kurgusu, sosyal destek

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social in nature. Due to this social disposition, individuals not only feel the need to belong to a social environment but also to share their thoughts and feelings with others. For those living within a community, the emotions and opinions of others hold significant importance (Boz 1999). This suggests that openly expressing one's thoughts may not always be appropriate or rational in every situation (Van Dyne et al. 2003). In some cases, individuals may prefer to conceal their feelings or opinions—thus engaging in self-

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self-censorship—rather than express them directly. Self-censorship is defined as a process in which individuals consider the prevailing climate of opinion and refrain from expressing their views if they perceive them to be inconsistent with the majority before voicing their opinions (Hayes et al. 2005a). This behavior can be considered a defensive strategy developed to minimize social risks. In other words, it involves the conscious suppression or withholding of thoughts to avoid the loss of social approval (Das and Kramer 2010, Hayes et al. 2010).

Self-censorship refers to the deliberate avoidance of expressing personal thoughts, emotions, or views due to fear of rejection, criticism, or exclusion by one's social environment (Hayes et al. 2005a). It influences social functioning in multiple ways: while it may help preserve social reputation, it can simultaneously diminish interpersonal likability. Individuals who frequently self-censor often experience heightened levels of negative public self-consciousness (Hirt et al. 2003). Although in some contexts self-censorship bears conceptual resemblance to self-handicapping, these are distinct constructs. Self-handicapping refers to the deliberate creation of obstacles to provide excuses for failure or to attribute poor performance to external factors (Feick and Rhodewalt 1997). By contrast, self-censorship primarily stems from concerns over rejection, exclusion, or negative evaluation in social settings. Thus, it is more closely linked to the need for social approval. Individuals with a high need for social approval are more likely to comply with group norms and avoid conflict, thereby displaying stronger tendencies toward self-censorship. The present study, therefore, focuses on how individuals suppress themselves in social interactions due to their pursuit of social approval, a perspective that further clarifies the construct's place in Turkish literature and distinguishes it from related concepts.

Self-censorship can be viewed as a short-term strategy that enables individuals to maintain or project a favorable self-image (Feick and Rhodewalt 1997). However, despite its immediate benefits for self-esteem preservation, it may undermine self-concept and long-term well-being. Self-censorship not only damages psychological well-being over time but also impedes goal-directed behaviors. While it may temporarily protect self-esteem by diverting attention from threatening stimuli (McCrea and Hirt 2001), its long-term consequences include detrimental effects on mental health (Zuckerman and Tsai 2005). Prior research has linked self-censorship with heightened depression, low self-esteem, excessive other-orientation, increased public self-consciousness, perfectionism (Frost et al. 1990), social anxiety (Strube 1986), lower academic performance, and elevated levels of both depression and anxiety (Kearns et al. 2008, Arazzini et al. 2014). The phenomenon of self-censorship has also been explained through the “spiral of silence” theory, a widely cited framework in public opinion research (Noelle-Neumann 1974). According to this theory, individuals remain silent when their opinions contradict the dominant view in society, fearing social isolation, criticism, or the withdrawal of approval. Recent research has revisited this theory within digital communication contexts, showing that similar dynamics are at play in online communities. For example, Zhao et al. (2025) found that Reddit users were significantly less likely to share their views when their opinions were in the minority. Likewise, Yuen and Lee (2025) demonstrated that individuals observing each other in social settings reinforce silence, thereby strengthening self-censorship behaviors.

In contemporary contexts, individuals may refrain from expressing their views to avoid negative consequences such as disapproval, exclusion, or misunderstanding. Self-censorship is often shaped by psychological mechanisms such as social anxiety and rejection sensitivity. Social anxiety refers to fear of negative evaluation in social settings (Leary 1983), while rejection sensitivity describes the tendency to overreact to potential rejection with heightened vigilance (Downey and Feldman 1996). Perceived social support may moderate the intensity of these processes. For instance, a study among Chinese youth found that perceived social support influenced digital media use, which in turn influenced online political participation, with social support acting as a mediating factor (Yang et al. 2025). Similarly, recent workplace studies have shown that self-censorship is strongly related to fear of social isolation, burnout, and job satisfaction (Springer 2024). In academic environments, researchers have also reported self-censoring their views due to fears of reputational harm or social sanctions on free expression (Clark et al. 2024). Collectively, these findings highlight that a lack of social support mechanisms may increase the likelihood of self-censorship. Perceptions of social support and self-construal are particularly important in shaping individuals' tendencies to self-censor. Those with high levels of perceived social support may be more inclined to communicate openly and spontaneously. In contrast, individuals with low levels of support may adopt a more cautious, restrained style of expression. Likewise, self-construal plays a critical role in this dynamic. Individuals with an individualistic self-construal are often more confident in expressing their views, while those with relational or collectivistic self-construals may prioritize group harmony and thus engage more frequently in self-censorship.

Social support is a critical variable in understanding tendencies toward self-censorship. Human beings, as inherently social creatures, require interaction and connection with others (Topbay 2016). Cassel (1974) defined

social support as feedback provided by significant others that helps shape individuals' behavior in positive ways. Yıldırım (1998) described it as the totality of psychological and social assistance received from one's social environment. Social relationships, ranging from dyadic bonds to intergroup interactions, constitute the foundation of social support (Dülger 2009, Topbay 2016).

Perceived social support refers to an individual's subjective appraisal of the availability and adequacy of general or situation-specific support received from their social environment (Demaray and Malecki 2002). This construct has been closely associated with mental health outcomes (Cohen and Wills 1985). According to Zimet et al. (1990), perceived social support primarily stems from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. Cohen and Wills (1985) further categorized social support into four types: esteem support, informational support, social companionship, and instrumental support. Numerous studies have demonstrated the protective effects of social support on psychological well-being (Cohen and Wills 1985, Yıldırım 1998). Specifically, individuals with higher levels of social support tend to express themselves more openly and exhibit lower tendencies toward self-censorship. Hayes et al. (2005a) found that low perceived social support was associated with greater reluctance to express personal views, thereby increasing self-censorship. Similarly, individuals with limited social support were more likely to withdraw and suppress expression due to concerns over disapproval (Das and Kramer 2013).

Self-construal, reflecting how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships with others, may also play a pivotal role in this relationship. The self has been defined as the lens through which individuals perceive the world, guiding values, attitudes, and behaviors (Markus and Kitayama 2003). It is a dynamic process shaped by close relationships and social interactions (Banaji and Prentice 1994, Markus and Kitayama 2003). As Kağıtçıbaşı and Cemalcılar (2015) note, the self not only structures interpersonal communication but also shapes how individuals perceive both themselves and their environment.

Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) conceptualized the self as a social product, shaped by interactions and continually developing in response to social contexts. The answer to the question "Who am I?" forms the self-concept, which reflects beliefs about one's identity and characteristics (Kağıtçıbaşı and Cemalcılar 2015). Self-construal, therefore, captures how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others (Cros et al. 2011, Vignoles et al. 2016). It is generally examined in three dimensions: individual, relational, and collective self (Triandis 1995, Hofstede 2001). Individuals with an individual self-construal value autonomy, prioritize personal goals, make independent decisions, and tend to be competitive. Those with a relational self-construal emphasize close relationships, consider the perspectives of significant others, and show greater cooperation. Collective self-construal emphasizes loyalty to group norms and values, with behaviors guided by the collective's welfare (Kağıtçıbaşı and Cemalcılar 2015).

Previous studies showed that self-construal significantly influences social behavior and expression. Individuals with individual self-construals tend to express their views more comfortably, whereas those with relational or collectivistic self-construals are associated with stronger tendencies toward self-censorship due to conformity pressures (Das and Kramer 2013). Perceived social support also varies by self-construal: individuals with individualistic orientations tend to seek support from personal sources, while those with relational and collectivistic orientations emphasize reciprocity and belonging (Singelis 1994, Markus and Kitayama 2003). Thus, self-construal may serve as a mediator in the relationship between social support and self-censorship, reflecting not only individual differences but also broader cultural values. In individualistic cultures, self-esteem is often rooted in personal achievement and autonomy, whereas in collectivistic cultures it is grounded in social harmony, relational connectedness, and approval (Markus and Kitayama 1991, Heine et al. 1999). Such cultural dynamics help explain why conformity to social norms tends to be stronger in collectivistic cultures, often linked with rejection sensitivity (Lee and Ahn 2011). Social anxiety is also more prevalent in collectivistic contexts, where group cohesion is strongly emphasized (Okazaki 1997). Taken together, these findings suggest that self-construal may serve as both an individual and cultural mediator in the relationship between social support and self-censorship.

This study is among the few that investigate self-censorship, social support, and self-construal within a cultural framework using a mediation model. Most prior studies (Hayes et al. 2005b, Das and Kramer 2013) examined these variables in dyadic contexts without systematically testing the mediating role of self-construal. Moreover, the majority of existing studies have been conducted in Western cultural settings, leaving limited evidence on how these dynamics manifest in collectivist-oriented cultures such as Turkey. By simultaneously examining individual, relational, and collective self-construals, this study investigates how the effect of social support on self-censorship varies across different cultural contexts. In doing so, it fills a theoretical gap and provides an original contribution to the fields of social psychology, communication studies, and cultural psychology.

It is hypothesized that self-construal acts as a mediator in the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship. Self-construal determines how individuals interpret the support they receive from their social environment and how such perceptions shape their expressive behaviors. This perspective is grounded in Markus and Kitayama's (1991) cultural self theory, which explains how self-construal (individualistic vs. collectivistic) influences cognitive and emotional processes. According to this framework, individuals with an individualistic self-construal may view social support as a resource for personal empowerment. In contrast, those with a collectivistic orientation may interpret it as a means of preserving group harmony and cohesion. Consequently, the influence of social support on self-expression is likely moderated by one's self-construal. Indeed, prior studies highlighted the importance of self-construal in understanding social support-seeking behaviors and their psychological outcomes (Singelis 1994, Kim et al. 2008). The present study, therefore, investigates whether self-construal functions as a mediating variable in the pathway from social support to self-censorship.

Based on the above framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Perceived social support negatively predicts self-censorship tendencies.

H2: Individual self-construal mediates the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship.

H3: Relational self-construal mediates the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship.

H4: Collective self-construal mediates the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship.

Method

This study, which aimed to examine the relationship between self-construal, self-censorship, and social support, employed a correlational survey design. Correlational designs are descriptive research models that aim to identify the degree of association between two or more variables without making causal claims (Karasar 2012, Büyüköztürk et al. 2020). Such designs contribute to understanding research problems by revealing correlations among existing variables.

Procedure

The data collection process was carried out online between January and February 2021. The survey, prepared using Google Forms, was disseminated to voluntary participants via WhatsApp and social media platforms. Online survey forms were used in the data collection process, and data were obtained from accessible, voluntary participants through a convenience sampling method. The Research and Ethics Committee of Düzce University approved the study (17.12.2020 date and 2020/256 number), confirming that it was designed and conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Data were collected via online platforms by sharing a link containing the informed consent form and the measurement instruments, which explained the purpose and scope of the study, with the participants. Participants were required to confirm that they had read and understood the informed consent form, which detailed the purpose, scope, and confidentiality principles of the study. The questionnaire, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete, consisted of four sections. No payment or incentives were offered for participation in this study. A total of 400 completed questionnaires were collected, all of which were included in the analysis.

Sample

The study was conducted with 400 participants aged between 16 and 56. During the data analysis, 17 outliers were identified and removed from the dataset, resulting in a final sample of 383 participants ($M = 24.85$, $SD = 5.85$). Of these, 284 were women (74.2%) and 99 were men (25.8%). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Düzce University (Decision No. 2020/256, dated 17.12.2020). Inclusion criteria were being 16 years of age or older, having Turkish literacy, and fully completing the online questionnaire. Participants who failed to complete the survey or submitted multiple responses were excluded from the study.

Measures

Personal Information Form

The personal information form, developed by the researchers, gathered demographic information about the participants. It included questions on gender, age, marital status, and educational level. The form was designed

to describe the characteristics of the sample and to obtain control variables for analysis.

Relational-Individual-Collective Self-Aspects Scale

Originally developed by Kashima and Hardie (2000) and adapted into Turkish by Ercan (2011), this scale assesses individuals' self-construal. The scale includes three subdimensions:

1. Individualism: Defining oneself in terms of independence, autonomy, and personal attributes.
2. Relational orientation: Defining the self within the context of close relationships.
3. Collectivism: Defining the self based on group membership and belonging.

The scale consists of 27 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. In the original study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported as .73 for individualism, .68 for relational orientation, .77 for collectivism, and .86 for the overall scale. In the present study, reliability coefficients were .79 for individualism, .79 for relational orientation, and .83 for collectivism, indicating that the Turkish version of the scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability.

Willingness to Self-Censor Scale

The Willingness to Self-Censor Scale (WSCS), developed by Hayes et al. (2005a) and adapted into Turkish by Coşkun et al. (2008), measures individuals' tendency to refrain from expressing their thoughts and emotions due to social pressure or fear of negative evaluation. The scale is unidimensional, consisting of eight items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with two items reverse-coded. The original study reported a Cronbach's alpha of .83. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was .85, supporting the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

Developed by Eker et al. (2001), this scale measures individuals' perceptions of support received from their social environment. It includes three subdimensions: family support (4 items), friend support (4 items) and significant other support (4 items). The 12 items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher perceived social support. In the original study, Cronbach's alpha values ranged between .80 and .95. In the present study, reliability coefficients were .92 for family support, .91 for friend support, .97 for significant other support, and .89 for the overall scale. The Turkish version preserved the original factor structure and demonstrated high reliability in this study.

Statistical Analysis

To determine the required sample size for the planned analyses, a power analysis was conducted using the G*Power program. With a statistical power ($1-\beta$) of 0.80 and a significance level (α) of 0.05, the required sample sizes were calculated as 85 for $f^2 = .15$, 155 for $f^2 = .08$, and 244 for $f^2 = .05$. Data were collected from 400 participants, and after removing outliers, the final sample size of 383 was deemed adequate for analysis (Cohen et al. 2003). To ensure the appropriateness of the data set for the chosen analyses, assumptions of normality were tested. Outliers were identified and removed based on Mahalanobis distance ($p < .01$) and standardized z-scores (± 3). Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among self-censorship, social support, individual self-construal, relational self-construal, and collective self-construal. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to assess the predictive effects of social support and self-construal (individual, relational, collective) on self-censorship. In the first step, self-censorship was entered into the model, followed by social support in the second step, and finally, the self-construal subdimensions in the third step. To test the mediating role of self-construal, bootstrapping analyses were conducted using 10,000 resamples with Model 4 of the PROCESS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). Data analyses were performed using SPSS 24.0.

Results

To test the suitability of the dataset for analysis, Mahalanobis distance values were examined. Seventeen cases with values below .01 were identified as outliers and removed, leaving a final dataset of 383 participants. Descriptive statistics such as skewness and kurtosis indicated that the data were normally distributed. Correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among the variables. Descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis, and correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, perceived social support was negatively correlated with self-censorship ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$) and positively correlated with individual self-construal ($r = .40$, $p < .01$), relational self-construal ($r = .40$, $p <$

.01), and collective self-construal ($r = .25, p < .01$). Self-censorship was significantly and negatively associated with individual self-construal ($r = -.20, p < .01$), but no significant relationships were observed with relational ($r = .04, p > .05$) or collective self-construal ($r = .09, p > .05$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived social support	-				
2. Self-censorship	-.13*	-			
3. Individual self-construal	.40**	-.20**	-		
4. Relational self-construal	.40**	.04	.62**	-	
5. Collective self-construal	.25**	.09	.43**	.70**	-
M	67.27	12.36	54.25	51.52	47.38
SD	13.97	5.91	5.88	6.45	8.45
Skewness	-.71	.17	-.92	-.48	-.55
Kurtosis	-.16	-.29	1.42	.06	.17

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Prediction of Self-Censorship

To examine whether social support and self-construal predicted self-censorship, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Results are summarized in Table 2. In Step 1, perceived social support significantly and negatively predicted self-censorship, $F(1,381) = 6.51, p < .05, \beta = -.13$. In Step 2a, individual self-construal was added to the model. Both perceived social support and individual self-construal significantly predicted self-censorship, accounting for 4% of the variance in the model. In Step 2b, relational self-construal was entered, and together with perceived social support, significantly predicted self-censorship, explaining 2% of the variance.

Finally, in Step 2c, collective self-construal was added, along with perceived social support, and both significantly predicted self-censorship, explaining 3% of the variance. Notably, when individual self-construal was included in the model (Step 2a), the effect of perceived social support on self-censorship decreased (from $\beta = -.13$ to $\beta = -.05$) and became nonsignificant, suggesting a potential mediating role of individual self-construal in this relationship. To formally test this effect, mediation analysis was conducted.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis predicting self-censorship

Variables	R ²	ΔR^2	B	Standard error	β	t	p	F
Step 1	.01							6.51
Perceived social support			-.05	.02	-.13	-2.55	.01	
Step 2a	.04	.039						8.77
Perceived social support			-.02	.02	-.05	-1.01	.30	
Individual self-construal			-.18	.05	-.18	-3.29	.001	
Step 2b	.02	.02						5.70
Perceived social support			-.07	.02	-.17	-3.23	.001	
Relational self-construal			.11	.05	.12	2.19	.029	
Step 2c	.03	.029						6.79
Perceived social support			-.06	.02	-.16	-3.15	.002	
Collective self-construal			.96	.03	.13	2.64	.009	

Mediation Analysis: Role of Individual Self-Construal

Several conditions must be met to establish mediation: (a) the independent variable (perceived social support) must predict both the dependent variable (self-censorship) and the mediator (individual self-construal); (b) the mediator must significantly predict the dependent variable when included in the model; and (c) the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be reduced or rendered nonsignificant when the mediator is included (Baron & Kenny, 1986). These conditions were satisfied in the present analyses. A linear regression analysis was conducted to test whether the independent variable predicted the mediator. The results

indicated that perceived social support significantly and positively predicted individual self-construal, $F(1,381) = 75.92$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .40$.

As shown in Figure 1, perceived social support positively predicted individual self-construal, which in turn negatively predicted self-censorship. Both the direct and total effects of social support on self-censorship are presented in the model. The 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect did not include zero $[-.09, -.01]$, confirming the significance of the mediation effect. Although regression analyses were conducted to test the mediating role of individual self-construal in the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship, the mediation effect was not found to be significant.

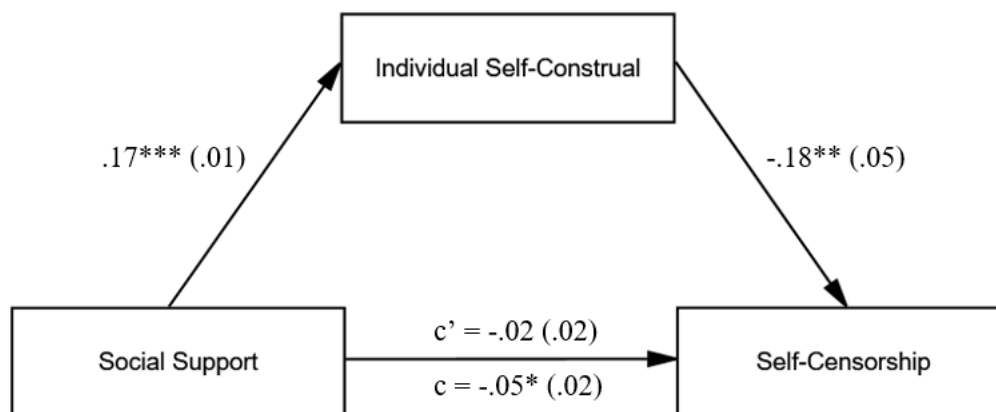


Figure 1. Mediating role of individual self-construal in the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship

Path coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors presented in parentheses. Path c' represents the direct effect of perceived social support on self-censorship, whereas path c represents the total effect. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of self-construal in the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship. The findings demonstrated that perceived social support significantly and negatively predicted self-censorship, indicating that individuals who perceive higher levels of support from their social environment are more confident in expressing themselves and less inclined to suppress their opinions. These findings are consistent with prior research highlighting the beneficial effects of social support on psychological well-being (Zimet et al. 1990). It also supports previous findings indicating that social norms and observations within one's environment reinforce self-censorship (Mihailidis and Viotty 2017, Yuen and Lee 2025). Similarly, Demaray and Malecki (2002) demonstrated a positive association between social support and psychological well-being. These results are consistent with Cohen and Wills' (1985) buffering hypothesis, which posits that social support acts as a buffer against the adverse effects of stressful life events (Çam and Ögülmüş 2021). Accordingly, individuals who feel psychologically secure due to social support may be less likely to censor themselves.

However, the findings also revealed that social support does not operate uniformly across all forms of self-construal. Results from hierarchical regression analyses showed that relational and collective self-construals, when combined with social support, positively predicted self-censorship, indicating that individuals with these orientations may interpret social support in ways that prioritize group harmony, relationship maintenance, or social equilibrium. In such contexts, social support may enhance the need for external approval and reinforce conformity to group norms, thereby restricting open self-expression. Thus, social support can sometimes serve not as a facilitator of free expression but as a mechanism of social control.

A central finding of this study is that individual self-construal significantly mediated the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship. This result aligns with Markus and Kitayama's (1991 2003) theoretical propositions, which argue that individuals with an individualistic self-construal express themselves more independently and are guided by intrinsic motivation. For these individuals, social support is interpreted as a source of personal empowerment, enabling more confident expression. The literature similarly emphasizes that those with an individualistic self-construal place greater value on freedom of expression (Singelis 1994,

Triandis 1995). Bar-Tal (2017) also reported that self-censorship tends to be stronger in collectivist contexts and weaker in individualistic ones. Furthermore, the present findings are consistent with research by Ciarrochi et al. (2007), which demonstrated the role of self-construal in shaping the influence of environmental factors such as social support on self-efficacy and resilience.

In contrast, relational and collective self-construals did not exhibit significant mediating effects between social support and self-censorship. This outcome may be explained by the tendency of individuals with these orientations to interpret social support in terms of adherence to group norms, belonging, and maintaining social balance (Hofstede 2001, Kağıtçıbaşı and Cemalcılar 2015). For such individuals, group harmony takes precedence over personal expression, often leading to greater self-censorship. McCrea and Hirt (2001) similarly argued that individuals who define themselves in relation to others are more likely to censor their opinions when facing the risk of negative evaluation.

These findings gain further significance when considered in the cultural context of Turkey, a society characterized by strong collectivist tendencies. Prior literature suggests that individuals in collectivist cultures shape their attitudes and behaviors in line with group norms and display greater caution in expressing dissenting views (Noelle-Neumann 1974, Bar-Tal 2017, Yuen and Lee 2025). In this context, low perceived social support may exacerbate tendencies toward self-censorship, while self-construal may further shape this dynamic. Specifically, individuals with individualistic orientations may feel freer to express themselves in supportive environments, whereas those with relational or collectivist orientations may suppress their views to preserve group harmony. Thus, the present study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on social psychology, particularly within the Turkish cultural context.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of considering self-construal not only in individual psychological processes but also in understanding how environmental factors such as social support are perceived and translated into behavior. The way individuals interpret and structure social support is just as important as the amount of support they receive. For example, individuals with an individualistic self-construal may interpret social support as providing autonomy and expressive space, thereby reducing self-censorship. This interpretation is also consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, particularly the concepts of self-regulation and personal agency.

In conclusion, this study revealed that individuals with higher levels of perceived social support tend to report lower levels of self-censorship, and this relationship is especially pronounced among those with an individualistic self-construal. Individual self-construal functions as a transformative mechanism in linking social support with expressive behavior. These results underscore the importance of considering self-construal as a key variable in social psychological processes. In both counseling settings and communication-based interventions, evaluating individuals' self-construal alongside their perceptions of social support may provide more effective strategies for overcoming self-censorship and related barriers to communication.

This study has several limitations. First, because the sample was based on voluntary participation, the generalizability of the findings is limited. The gender distribution of participants was imbalanced, requiring caution when interpreting results across genders. Data collection via online surveys may also have introduced social desirability bias, and multiple participations could not be fully prevented. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences regarding the relationships among variables. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the interplay between social support, self-censorship, and self-construal.

Conclusion

This study examined the mediating role of self-construal in the relationship between perceived social support and self-censorship. The findings revealed that individuals with higher levels of perceived social support reported lower tendencies toward self-censorship, and this effect was particularly pronounced among those with an individual self-construal. Social support appears to enhance individuals' sense of psychological security, thereby facilitating more open self-expression. However, this effect varied depending on individuals' self-construal orientations. The mediating role of individual self-construal underscores the importance of self-related perceptions in shaping interactions with the social environment.

By contrast, relational and collective self-construals did not demonstrate a mediating role in this relationship. This suggests that individuals with these orientations may interpret social support primarily in terms of group harmony and relational considerations, leading them to adopt a more cautious approach to self-expression. Overall, the findings highlight that self-construal is linked not only to internal psychological processes but also to broader social adjustment and communication dynamics.

From an applied perspective, the results suggest that both perceived social support and self-construal should be considered in educational contexts, particularly in relation to students' self-expression skills, social interactions, and psychological well-being. School-based interventions that strengthen students' perceptions of social support may help reduce self-censorship tendencies. Guidance and counseling services can play a key role in helping individuals recognize their self-construal and develop adaptive strategies for self-expression. Teachers and academics can also contribute by fostering classroom environments that support freedom of expression and encourage nonjudgmental communication, thereby reducing students' inclination toward self-censorship. Psycho-educational programs implemented in educational institutions may further help students identify their sources of social support, become aware of their self-construal orientations, and mitigate the negative effects of self-censorship behaviors.

Future research could extend these findings by including diverse age groups and cultural contexts to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal and experimental designs would allow for a stronger assessment of causal relationships among variables. Moreover, investigating additional contextual factors—such as teacher attitudes, school climate, and peer relationships—through multilevel models could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social support and self-construal jointly shape self-censorship tendencies.

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