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*Research Article*

## Predictive Relationship Between Values, Self-Compassion and Humor Styles of Adolescents

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### Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between values, self-compassion and humor styles of adolescents. The study group consisted of a total of 563 high school students, 258 female (45.8%) and 305 male (54.2%) studying in various districts of Istanbul. The average age of 563 high school students selected via random sampling method was 17.41 years. Human Values Scale was used to determine human value levels of adolescents; Self-Compassion Scale was used to determine their self-compassion values; and Humor Styles Scale was used to determine their humor levels. Data regarding personal characteristics was acquired using Descriptive Characteristics Form prepared by the researcher. During the study, a structural equation modelling analysis was performed with AMOS 19 software in order to determine and test the relationships between variables of values, self-compassion and humor styles of adolescents. According to study findings, predictive relationships between values and humor styles of adolescents demonstrated a positive linear relationship. Predictive relationships between humor styles and self-compassion of adolescents also showed a positive linear relationship. Similarly, predictive relationships between values and self-compassion of adolescents depicted a positive linear relationship.

### Keywords

Value • Self-compassion • Humor styles • Adolescence

\* This research is based on the first author's master's thesis.

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Value is an intangible measure that is useful for determining the importance and worth of something, and rewards, benefits and valuable qualities of something (Ulusoy & Dilmaç, 2016). Value is defined as preferring a certain circumstance over another. Values are not only a source of human behaviors, but they also serve to judge those behaviors. Values describe what humans find important and indicate their preferences, wishes and desired and undesired situations. In organizational culture, on the other hand, values are the source of criteria used to evaluate the works and behaviors of employees and the indicator of desired and undesired situations in organizations (Erdem, 2003).

Value is described as a benchmark that demonstrates individuals what they must and must not experience and what they must and must not do and which one of them is better (Uygur, 2016). Hökelekli (2006), defines value as a mental process that guides and affects our actions and thoughts. He explains that value is the underlying reason of all human behaviors. In addition to mental processes, values can also be assessed as beliefs that help us determine which behaviors are right, good and sacred and which behaviors are bad and wrong.

Value is a notion regarding individuals' feelings, thoughts, ideas and behaviors. Value is a determining factor in formation of human behaviors, and it also decides how these behaviors will occur. Values play an effective role in social anxieties and forgiveness which are based on human relationships. Therefore, social scientists state that value plays a significant role in explaining human behaviors. Beliefs, moral principles and standards adopted by social groups or individuals can also be described as values. They influence individuals socially and culturally in different ways (Isler & Dilmaç, 2016).

Values possessed by adolescents are considered to have great effects on their self-compassion levels or, in other words, their thoughts on sense of self. Neff, Hseih, and Dejithirat (2005) coined the term self-compassion, a construct derived from Buddhist philosophy that conceptualizes psychological well-being. The concept of self-compassion is used to mean being kind and compassionate towards others in the western literature, while the teachings of Buddhist philosophy emphasize that an individual must be compassionate toward oneself and suggest that individuals cannot show others the compassion they fail to show themselves (Akin, 2009). From this point of view, we can define self-compassion as individuals' thoughts on their sense of self (Brown, 1999; Kornfield, 1993).

Self-compassion is defined as being sensitive, open-minded and supportive about other people's problems, beside one's own problems, and helping them mitigate such difficulties. In other words, self-compassion involves taking a non-judgmental attitude toward other people's failure possibilities, empathizing with and unconditionally accepting people who are experiencing difficulties, and offering kindness to such people and raising awareness in others (Neff, 2003a ; Wispe, 1991).

Although the concept of self-compassion entails that one must avoid harsh self-criticism for failing to achieve goals, it does not mean that one's failing should go unnoticed and unrectified. It means that the actions needed by individuals for psychological health must be encouraged with patience and gentleness. Thus, self-compassion should not lead to a negativity with regard to the weaknesses observed in self, rather, it is the lack of self-compassion that is more likely to lead to passivity and negativity. Self-compassion is a strong motivating force for growth and improvement. For example, parents with compassion for their children may impose unpleasant restrictions on their children to encourage a healthy development. Such restrictions imposed by parents are not punitive, but are infused with kindness, love and concern for their children's well-being.

Similarly, having compassion for oneself requires giving up harmful behaviors –even if difficult– and encouraging oneself to change these behaviors in order to further one’s well-being (Neff, 2003b).

Self-compassion stresses the importance of avoiding harsh self-criticism and accepting one’s own faults (Neff, 2003a; Wispe, 1991). An individual with an improved sense of humor will find it easier to accept oneself (Martin, 2007). The concept of sense of humor started to be used in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and became a highly important concept within a short time (Martin, 2007). It began to be described as a desired personality trait in 1870s. During those times, having a sense of humor was considered a positive comment about a person and his/her personality, while saying that someone had no sense of humor gave a negative impression and such people refused to accept that they lacked sense of humor. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, sense of humor started to evolve and become a more complicated notion (Martin, 2007). Even though it continued to be perceived as an ability to entertain and humor other people, it began to encompass a number of other positive traits. Therefore, definitions were made for having a sense of humor and lacking a sense of humor. Individuals who were said to lack any sense of humor were characterized as being serious, selfish, strict and whimsical. The positive points of view about sense of humor are still recognized today (Martin, 2007).

Humor is both a process where people are funny and an action they perform to make others laugh. It can also be defined as mental processes that lead to the generation and perception of such an amusing stimulus. Furthermore, it can be described as an emotional reaction embodied in the amusement (Martin, 2007).

From a psychological perspective, the humor process consists of four main components which are: (1) emotional reaction, (2) social context, (3) cognitive-perceptual process, (4) vocal and behavioral expression of laughter (Martin, 2007).

A great number of researchers working both within and outside our field suggest that sense of humor has significant functions. Having or lacking sense of humor can be used as a basis for explaining human behaviors. In addition, people have different levels of humor and many agree on the fact that people do not have the same degree of humor. However, it is not clear for everyone what is actually meant when people are categorized as having sense of humor and lacking sense of humor (Yerlikaya, 2003).

Humor is a broad concept that encompasses everything said or done by someone, which is intended to make others laugh and regarded as “funny” by other people, as well as the mental processes that enable us to perceive these amusing circumstances and the emotional processes that enable us to enjoy them (Yerlikaya, 2009).

People may laugh even when they are alone watching a comedy film, remembering a funny experience or reading a funny story. These involve the regeneration of social phenomena. Not only is humor connected with the environment, but also one has to process and interpret information from one’s own memory or the environment in order to generate humor. Along with the mental reaction to humorous situations, a pleasant emotional reaction occurs as a result of the perception of humor. The feelings of pleasure and joy resulting from the perception of humor lead to emotional reactions such as smiling and laughing (Yerlikaya, 2009).

It is observed that one’s humor style creates a positive sense of self and makes that person more accommodating in social relationships and mild and conflict-alleviating in other environments.

Effects of values, self-compassion levels and humor styles of individuals on each other during adolescence, a critical period in personality development, are important in terms of the development of value judgments of

individuals, transfer of values by means of humor, accepting negative experiences through both self-compassion and values, and seeking solutions to such problems.

## Method

### Research Model

In the present study conducted by using a quantitative research paradigm, the objective is to determine the relationships between values, self-compassion and humor styles of adolescents and to test the relationships between these variables with the structural equation model. To this end, the study was conducted in accordance with the correlational survey model, a sub-type of general survey model. General survey models are researches aimed at reaching a general conclusion about a universe composed of a large number of components, conducted on the whole universe or on a sample or group of samples taken from the universe. General survey models allow correlational or single-subject researches (Karasar, 2015). Correlational survey models aim to detect whether a change between two or more variables co-exists or to determine the degree of such change (Karasar, 2015).

### Study Group

The study group consisted of a total of 563 high school students, 258 female (45.8 %) and 305 male (54.2%), studying in different districts of Istanbul. The average age of 563 high school students selected via random sampling method was 17.41 years.

### Measurement Tools

Human Values Scale, Self-Compassion Scale and Human Styles Scale were used in this study as data collection tools. In addition, descriptive characteristics form was used to determine the demographic characteristics of participants.

**Descriptive Characteristics Form.** It was developed by the researcher to collect information about a number of variables regarding adolescents. The descriptive characteristics form contains demographic variables such as adolescent's grade, gender, age, type of school, rank in the family, number of siblings, mother's educational status and father's educational status.

**Human Values Scale (HVS).** In the present study, the "Human Values Scale (HVS)" developed by Dilmaç (2007) for secondary education students was used to determine the human values of students. In this questionnaire, human values are measured with a total of 42 items in six sub-dimensions including: a. Responsibility (7 items), b. Friendship/Camaraderie (7 items), c. Peace-Loving (7 items), d. Respect (7 items), e. Tolerance (7 items) f. Honesty (7 items). It is a Likert-type scale, applicable both individually and in groups. Scale items are scored according to the 5-point "Likert Type" rating scale (A: Never, B: Rarely, C: Sometimes, D: Often, E: Always). Items are scored as A:1- B:2- C:3- D:4- E:5. High/Low scores indicate that individuals have higher/lower human values.

**Self-Compassion Scale (SCS).** In the Self-Compassion Scale developed by Neff (2003b) and subjected to a Turkish reliability and validity study by Deniz, Kesici, and Sümer (2008), self-compassion is comprised of three main components: self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. These three main components are correlated with each other and divided into 6 sub-dimensions (Neff, 2003b) which are common humanity, isolation, self-kindness, mindfulness, over-identification and self-judgment. Scale items are scored according to

the five-point “Likert-Type” rating scale which ranges between “Almost always=5” and “Almost never=1. Items 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24 are positive while items 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 22, 23 are negative and must be reverse-scored. Items 1 and 22 were excluded from the scale because their item-total correlation was below .30 and the scale was applied as a 24-item scale.

**Humor Styles Scale (HSS).** Humor styles scale is a self-evaluation scale developed in order to measure the four dimensions of humor with regard to individual differences during its daily use (Martin, Puhlik, Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003) and adapted into Turkish language by Yerlikaya (2003). The scale covers four types of humor styles, two of which are beneficial while two are detrimental. These humor styles are referred to as self-enhancing humor, affiliative humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor. A 7-point Likert type rating scale is used with responses A: Strongly Disagree, B: Disagree, C: Slightly Disagree, D: Neutral, E: Slightly Agree, F: Agree, G: Strongly Agree. The range of obtainable scores is 7 to 56 points. High scores obtained from the sub-dimensions indicate that the respective humor style is used frequently. Affiliative (Social) Humor: 1\*, 5, 9\*, 13, 17\*, 21, 25\*, 29\* Self-Enhancing Humor: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30 Aggressive Humor: 3, 7\*, 11, 15\*, 19, 23\*, 27, 31\* Self-Defeating Humor: Items 4, 8, 12, 16\*, 20, 24, 28, 32\*1-7-9-15-16-17-22-23-25-29-31 are reverse-scored.

### Data Analysis

The present study determines the relationships between values, self-compassion and humor styles and tests the relationships between these variables with structure equation modeling analysis. Structural equation modeling is a statistical approach that reveals the reciprocal and causal relationships between observed and latent variables in order to test a theoretical model (Shumacker & Lomax, 2004). Structural equation modeling analysis was conducted with the AMOS 19 Program. In addition, percentage and frequency calculations of collected data were performed using SPSS 18 program package.

### Findings

In the obtained model  $X^2/sd = 4.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) data for nine exogenous values (social, career, intellectual, spirituality, materialism, human dignity, romantic, freedom and futuwwa (generosity and courage)) and four endogenous values (happiness, self-alienation, authentic lifestyle and acceptance of external influence) are found. Statistically, each path presented in the model was observed to be significant. The Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (NFI), The Tucker-Lewis coefficient fit index (TLI) and other fit indexes demonstrate that the model has a highly good fit (Table-1). Each of the two-way correlations between endogenous data observed in the model has high values and is statistically significant. Such significance is also influenced by correlation values generated from the sub-dimensions of values scale.

Table 1

*Statistical Values for the Fitting of Structural Equation Model*

Measurement	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Fit Index Values of the Model
( $X^2/sd$ )	$\leq 3$	$\leq 4-5$	4.16
RMSEA	$\leq 0.05$	0.06-0.08	0.08
SRMR	$\leq 0.05$	0.06-0.08	0.07
NFI	$\geq 0.95$	0.94-0.90	0.95
CFI	$\geq 0.97$	$\geq 0.95$	0.95

GFI	≥ 0.90	0.89-0.85	0.90
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.89-0.85	0.89
TLI	≥ 0.95	0.94-0.90	0.92

Following results are concluded from the fit values in Table 1:  $\chi^2/sd = 4.16$ , RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.07, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.89 and TLI = 0.92. The table demonstrates that the model has the desired fit values (Bollen, 1989; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Byrne, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; Tanaka & Huba, 1985). Figure 1 shows the tested single-factor model. All the paths shown in the model are significant at 0.001 level.

Figure 1. The path diagram of the study's model

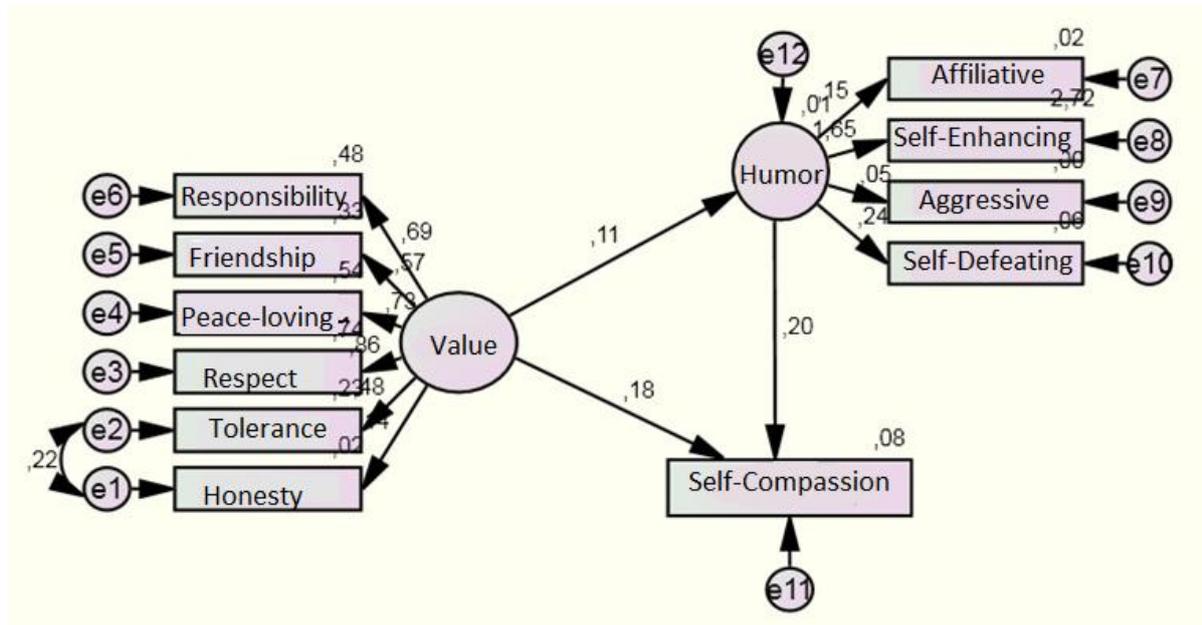


Table 2

Model for Predictive Correlations Between Values, Humor and Self-Compensation

Predictive Variable	Dependent Variable	Direct Effect	Standard Error	Critical Value
Value	Humor	0.11	0.05	2.67*
Humor	Self-Compensation	0.20	0.09	4.85*
Value	Self-Compensation	0.18	0.07	4.36*

<sup>a</sup>Total Effect = Direct Effect + Indirect Effect, \* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ .

It is understood from the table that the independent variable that affects humor ( $t = 2.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) is the value variable. The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found as  $\beta = 0.11$ . Predictive correlations between values and humor styles of adolescents reveal a positive linear correlation. In other words, the results show that adolescents' sense of humor will increase as their values increase.

It is determined in the model that the most important variable that affects self-compassion ( $t = 4.85$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) is humor styles and the correlation coefficient value for this factor was found as  $\beta = 0.20$ . Predictive values between humor styles and self-compassions of adolescents demonstrate a positive linear correlation. Finding obtained as a result show that adolescents' self-compassion will increase as their sense of humor values increase.

It is observed in the model that an important variable that affects self-compassion ( $t= 4.36, p<0.01$ ) is values. The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found as  $\beta= 0.18$ . Predictive correlations between values and self-compassions of adolescents indicate a positive linear correlation. In other words, the results show that adolescents' self-compassion will increase as their values increase.

### Discussion and Interpretation

Self-compassion, humor styles and values of adolescents, the study group of the present study, were investigated and findings are discussed and interpreted in this section.

According to the findings; in the analysis between the sub-dimensions of self-compassion scale which are self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, over-identification and the sub-dimensions of human values scale which are Peace-Loving (7 items), Honesty (7 items), Respect (7 items), Friendship/Camaraderie (7 items), Tolerance (7 items), Responsibility (7 items), a positive linear correlation was observed between two variables. It was revealed that self-compassion levels of adolescents would increase as their values increased.

Self-compassion refers to being more constructive and understanding toward oneself instead of blaming oneself when one is upset and confronted with personal failings, thinking that negative experiences are also a part of life, moving away from a negative point of view and offering functional solutions to the happenings (as cited in Deniz & Sümer, 2010; Neff, 2003). Individuals learn to deal with negative experiences by correcting them or offering functional solutions to them instead of abstaining from such negative experiences. This process is realized thanks to the values and self-compassion levels of individuals (Deniz & Sümer, 2010).

In a review of literature studies, according to the results of a study conducted by Dilmaç, Deniz and Deniz (2009), a positive relationship was found between self-compassion scores of students and values scale sub-dimensions of achievement, hedonism, self-control and stimulation, universalism, benevolence, conformity and security. A significant difference was observed between the sub-dimensions of values in terms of the gender variable and significant differences were also observed between the sub-dimensions of values in terms of the grade variable. In another study, the effects of moral values and self-compassions of prospective teachers on their forgiving behaviors were studied and, as a result, a positive significant relationship was found between moral values, self-compassion and forgiveness (Sarıçam & Biçer, 2015). In a study conducted by Özyeşil (2011), a positive significant relationship was detected between self-compassion levels of students and responsibility, a sub-dimension of values, and responsibility was a significant predictor of self-compassion.

According to another finding obtained from the study, the relationship between values and humor styles of adolescents indicates positive linear relationship between the values sub-dimensions of responsibility, friendship/camaraderie, peace-loving, respect, honesty, tolerance and the humor styles sub-dimensions of affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor. It was revealed that as the values of adolescents increased, their humor styles would increase as well.

As one of the most important notions that determines the level and style of interpersonal relationships and enables all the members of society to find a middle ground, value has a pivotal importance due to its role of uniting all fields of science that study human behaviors (Uygur, 2016). Dilmaç (1999) defines value as a criterion to resort to while evaluating human behaviors, happenings, people, their intentions, desires, individual

characteristics and objects. Fichter (2009) defines value in a descriptive manner. He defines value as everything that is advantageous for a person or a group, everything that is favorable and desired. Value is also an important criterion that brings significance and meaning to a culture and society.

In a review of literature studies pursuant to these results, a study by Kanat (2017) indicates a positive relationship between total value scores and positive humor scores of students. According to the findings, it was observed that humor scores of students increased as their value scores increased. In negative humor styles, however, the result was reversed and a negative relationship was observed between value scores and negative humor scores of students. Namely, their humor scores decreased as their value scores increased. This study shows that individuals with human values may view the life in a more positive light.

It was detected in the analysis that the most important variable that affected self-compassion was humor styles. A positive linear relationship was detected between self-compassion levels and humor styles sub-dimensions of affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor. In addition, study results reveal that self-compassion levels of adolescents would increase as their sense of humor increased.

Humor is a broad concept that encompasses everything said or done by someone, which is intended to make others laugh and regarded as “funny” by other people, as well as the mental processes that enable us to perceive these amusing circumstances and the emotional processes that enable us to enjoy them (Yerlikaya, 2009).

In a review of literature studies, we come across a study conducted by Çetin (2017) to investigate the relationship between humor styles and self-compassion levels of adolescents. The study was conducted in Yıldız Technical University with 258 students aged 17 to 21 years. According to the study findings, a positive significant relationship was observed between self-compassion and associative humor and self-enhancing humor styles and a negative significant relationship was found between self-compassion and self-defeating humor style. Also, no significant relationship was detected between self-compassion and aggressive humor (Çetin, 2017).

Individuals with high self-compassion levels are kind and understanding towards themselves rather than judgmental and critical. Thus, the concept of self-compassion serves as a buffer against negative experiences. It engenders positive feelings about themselves when life goes badly (Leary, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). According to Neff (2003), self-compassion is also a predictor of subjective well-being. Therefore, individuals with high compassion levels who exhibit no problematic behaviors such as overestimating negative feelings and thoughts have better and more positive life satisfaction levels psychologically than individuals lacking self-compassion (as cited in Deniz, Arslan, Özyeşil, & İzmirli, 2012). In a study conducted on the basis of this result, it was observed that humor styles had an impact on low subjective well-being. However, it was revealed that the self-enhancing humor style affected well-being not directly, but indirectly through self-efficacy. In short, the use of self-enhancing humor by individuals positively affects the subjective well-being levels (İlhan, 2005).

Since individuals with low self-compassion levels have weak skills of understanding themselves and others and dealing with their problems, their important social values such as responsibility and friendship/camaraderie, which are the sub-dimensions of values, are weak too. Thus, it is observed that people with self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles which are the sub-dimensions of humor styles are more mild-mannered, less distressed and avoid conflicts in their social lives.

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