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## Ostracism among Gifted Adolescents: A Preliminary Study in Turkey

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### Abstract

Ostracism has an influence on psychological and social functioning. The aim of this study is to examine ostracism among gifted students, with regard to gender and grade levels. Also, the relationship between ostracism and intelligence level was investigated. The study was conducted in a gifted education center, with 94 gifted students who were attending middle school (grades 5-8). The Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised Form were employed as data collection tools. According to the findings obtained from the study, it is concluded that ostracism did not differ in terms of gender among gifted students. Besides, being socially excluded may be higher in 8<sup>th</sup> grades than 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. Also in the study, a positive correlation was found between intelligence level and ostracism. Discussion and suggestions were also provided based on the results.

**Keywords:** gifted students, ostracism, exclusion, adolescents.



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## Introduction

One of the basic human motives is the need to belong. Asher and Coie, (1990) cited that numerous theories (e.g., Bowlby, 1973; Freud, 1930; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Sullivan, 1953) have stressed the importance of effective peer relationships and a sense of belonging for individuals' well-being and development. One of the most important factors that impede the establishment of positive social relationships or sense of belonging is the experience of social rejection or exclusion (Stout, 2009). Williams (2007) defined ostracism as being ignored or excluded by others. Ostracism is a universal social phenomenon that can be seen across all known human cultures (Williams, 2001). Ostracism also can be considered as one of the bullying types such as relational (Griffin & Gross, 2004) and indirect bullying (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). In contrast to overt forms of bullying, ostracism has no obvious external signs, and may therefore be more difficult for teachers and other adults to detect and prevent. There are many reasons of ostracism, but commonly ostracism is used for punishment or for relational aggression (Nezlek, Wesselmann, Wheeler, & Williams, 2012). Ostracism appears to occur throughout the lifespan (childhood, adolescence, adulthood etc.), in different social contexts (school, workplace, online etc.), and in both males and females. Ostracism can take place even in preschool years (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999).

Studies have shown the negative effects of ostracism or social exclusion on psychological and social functioning. For instance, ostracism was found as significantly and positively associated with depression, loneliness, a sense of inadequacy (Witvliet, Brendgen, Van Lier, Koot, & Vitaro, 2010), and peer victimization (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Ostracism also can lead to aggression (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003), poor affect regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarrocco, & Twenge, 2006; Sebastian, Viding, Williams, & Blakemore, 2010), delinquency (Catanese & Tice, 2005; Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer, 2006), neurotic, maladaptive, anti-social and destructive behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and internalized behavior problems such as social introversion or even suicidal tendencies (Catanese & Tice, 2005; Rutter & Behrendt, 2004). Ostracism also seems to negatively affect children's cognitive ability (Hawes et al., 2012).

Adolescents may be one of the groups most vulnerable to the negative effects of ostracism. Adolescents become more aware of, and concerned with, others' opinions and their self-consciousness is increasing (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006). Peers, rather than parents, become more important in shaping social behavior during adolescence (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Studies have shown that adolescents enjoy spending time with peers and are influenced by their peers (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977; Larson & Richards, 1991). Peer acceptance, popularity, and friendships are crucial competencies during adolescence (Espelage, 2002). Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer (2006), found that approximately 25% of participants reported being excluded over the past 30 days in the adolescent sample. Although girls experienced more relational bullying, boys reported more physical bullying (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). While age increases, there can be seen a decrease in exposure to physical bullying, but an increase in exposure to relational bullying that includes ostracism (Dolek, 2002; Perry, Perry, & Weiss, 1989; Rigby, Cox, & Black, 1997). Sirvanli-Ozen (2006) reported that in girls, there was a decline in different types of bullying with age, but not relational bullying; but in boys, only a decrease in teasing.

Another group of the population for whom ostracism could have particularly negative effects may be gifted children. Social acceptance is also important for gifted children. For example, gifted middle school students cited developing relationships mostly as the concerns of the students (VanTassel-Baska & Olszewski-Kubilius, 1989). Williams and Gerber (2005) reported that gifted children often complain about being ostracized by other children in their classroom. In a sample of 432 gifted 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, Peterson and Ray (2006) revealed that 67% of them had been subjected to name-calling (e.g., geek, nerd), mostly due to their appearance and giftedness. Almost half (46%) of the participants had experienced at least one of 13 kinds of bullying (e.g., teasing, name-calling, threatening, knocking books to the floor, pushing, hitting, beating) during the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The percentage of boys who were victims, decreased during 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, but not the percentage of girls.

Peers isolate gifted children from social interactions due to being gifted stereotyped as nerds (Swaitek & Dorr, 1998; Vanderbrook, 2006). Gifted adolescents often think of themselves as different from their non-gifted peers (Rinn, 2006; Swaitek & Dorr, 1998). Similarly they are viewed as different by others (Gross, 1998; Rinn, 2006). Some researchers claimed that gifted adolescents are prone to intense isolation (Cassady & Cross, 2006; Gross, 1998). Because of the fact that gifted adolescents communicate differently by using more advanced vocabularies, peers consider gifted students as odd (Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Gifted adolescents also tend to think and act differently than non-gifted peers (Bailey, 2011). Nichols (1990, as cited in Rimm, 2002) found that the most popular group was gifted boys. On the other hand, gifted girls were found to be the least popular, behind non-gifted boys and girls. Woods and Wolke (2004) found that high achieving students are at a high risk of experiencing social exclusion from their peers in a sample of 1,016 school children. In one study, 15% of successful women saw social isolation as their most negative school experience (Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 1999). Over excitability (Piechowski & Cunningham, 1985), psychological androgyny (Hébert, 2002), not asking for help easily (Peterson, 2002), and developmental asynchrony (Silverman, 2002) may be related with a vulnerability to ostracism among gifted students. Also, gifted students may live in fear that their intellectual level leads to a risk of social rejection (Gross, 1989; Robinson, 2008).

In Turkey, there have been no studies focused on the prevalence of ostracism among gifted adolescents. But in a comprehensive study of 7,000 adolescents between the ages of 12-18 about adolescence in Turkey, 11% of participants reported exposure to teasing, social exclusion and humiliation; with 69% of them stated their friends as the perpetrator (General Directorate of Family and Community Services, 2013). There has been some research about bullying in Turkey. For instance, Burnukara and Ucanok (2012) found that 31.9% of a sample composed of 868 adolescents between the ages of 12-18, were involved in bullying. In the study, boys experienced more physical victimization, whereas girls reported more relational bullying. They found also victimization tends to decrease as the school years progressed. According to research findings about bullying among adolescent in Turkey, it is observed that the victim/student ratio ranged from 9.3% of students (Pekel, 2004) up to 41.3% (Kartal & Bilgin, 2009).

The present preliminary study aimed to examine gender and grade differences in being ostracized among gifted adolescents who have attended grades 5-8. In addition, the relationship between the experience of ostracism and intelligence score will be investigated in the study. In doing so, it was aimed for the first time to investigate the experience of

ostracism and related factors among gifted adolescents in Turkey. As mentioned previously, no study about ostracism with gifted population has been found. The reason why middle school students have been selected is that researchers have found that the rate of bullying increases during the middle school years, and decreases during high school years (Espelage & Horne, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001). Adolescents aged 13 and 14 have a strong focus on peer acceptance (Harris, 1995; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Researches about ostracism among the gifted are necessary for understanding and preventing ostracism. The determination of any relationship between intelligence score and ostracism may be critical for meeting the needs of gifted students in both home and school settings. This study also will be useful to develop programs for the prevention of ostracism. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- Does ostracism differ according to gender and grades among gifted students?
- To what extent are ostracism and intelligence score interrelated?

## Methodology

This study was designed as a descriptive and relational study. The participants were a convenience sample of students identified as gifted, who were participating in an afterschool enrichment program. The study included 94 gifted students who attended the Enderun Talented Children Center, which provides afterschool services for gifted children in Bagcilar, Istanbul. To be admitted to the center, the following steps are in place: (1) firstly, a student should be nominated by the teachers via an online nomination checklist on the center's website; (2) after being nominated by their teachers, students have to pass a threshold score in a group intelligence test; (3) after the group intelligence test, students should achieve a score of 130 or more from an individual intelligence test; (4) if a student's test score is between 120-130, the center conducted a creativity test and students should score 70% or more creativity score for admission. Therefore, one of the admission criteria for the center is a 120 (or more) IQ score. The center asked no tuition fee from the students. The mean IQ score in the study was 128.5,  $SD=6.4$ . While 46.8% of gifted students were girls, 53.2% were boys. In terms of grade level, 15 (16%) students were in grade 5; 31 (33%) students were in grade 6; 25 (26.6%) students were in grade 7 and 23 (24.5%) students were attending to grade 8.

In the present study, The Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents was used to evaluate the perceptions of being ignored and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised Form was employed to assess intelligence score. In addition, a personal information form, that included information about gender and grade level, were also distributed in the study. Detailed information about the data collection tools is given below.

*The Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents (OES-A)*, developed by Gilman, Carter-Sowell, DeWall, Adams, and Carboni (2013), validated this scale composed of 11 items. This self-report measure was designed to assess an individual's perceptions of being ostracized. It has two factors: 'ignored by' (5 items) or 'excluded from' (6 items) the social group. The scale items represent general perceptions of being ostracized and are not specific to any one source. All items begin with the stem "In general, others . . ." followed by wording that reflects each ostracism subtype. The response to each item is made on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1-never, 5-always). Higher scores from the scale reflect higher levels of perceived ostracism. Akin et al. (2014) adapted the scale into Turkish. They found the Turkish version

of the scale had two factors (ignored and excluded) as the original form. Internal consistency reliability coefficients of the Turkish version were .93 for the ignored subscale, and .90 for excluded, and .89 for the overall scale. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was found as .87 for the overall scale, and changed from .84 to .86 for the two subscales.

*Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised Form:* Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R), which was used to determine the intelligence score of gifted children who participated in the study, was developed by Wechsler in 1974 (as cited by Oner, 1997). The scale has two different subscales; verbal and performance. Standardization of the scale for Turkish culture was completed by Savasir and Sahin (1995), based on a sample of 1,639 children, aged between 6 and 16 years old. Split-half reliability of the scale was found as 0.97 for verbal, 0.93 for the performance subscale, and 0.97 for total score. Correlation between subscales varied between 0.51 and 0.86 in their Turkish adaptation study.

The study was based on voluntary participation and informed consent was taken from parents of the gifted children. Participants were assured of total confidentiality with regard to their ratings. The respondents were informed about the aim of the study and what to consider during the application. The application of the ostracism scale was conducted as a group in the talented center and lasted for about 30 minutes. WISC-R was conducted with all candidate students for admission to the center by psychologists working full-time in the center and have been certified to administer the WISC-R test.

Before analyzing the research data, missing or wrong data were examined. First of all, descriptive statistics of the scale were computed in order to determine gifted students' perceptions of being ostracized and intelligence score. In order to find out whether the scores were distributed normally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. Since the scores did not show normal distribution, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H non-parametric tests, were used in order to find out any differences according to participants' gender and grades. Spearman correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between the subscales for ostracism and intelligence scores. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

### Findings

Findings from statistical analysis of the obtained data will be the major focus in this section. Firstly, descriptive statistics obtained from the scales that were used in the study were given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Descriptive Statistics of WISC-R and OEAS-A Scores

Variables	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
WISC-R	94	120	145	128.56	6.48
Ignored Subscale (OES-A)	94	5	20	7.62	3.65
Excluded Subscale (OES-A)	94	6	30	14.29	6.31
Total (OES-A)	94	11	46	21.90	8.73

Table 1 shows the mean scores obtained from the scales in the study. The participants' mean scores of excluded subscale ( $M=14.29, SD=6.31$ ) were higher than those of ignored subscale ( $M=7.62, SD=3.65$ ). Students' mean score of cognitive intelligence (WISC-R) was  $128.56 SD=6.48$ . In order to examine whether the scores obtained from total and subscales of the Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents differ according to gender, the Mann Whitney U test was used. The findings obtained as a result of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The Mann-Whitney U Test Results of Ostracism Scale In Terms of Gender

Subscales	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	z	p
Total	Boys	50	50.97	2548.50	926.50	-	.18
	Girls	44	43.56	1916.50		1.31	
Ignored	Boys	50	49.20	2460.00	1015.00	-.99	.50
	Girls	44	45.57	2005.00			
Excluded	Boys	50	50.12	2506.00	969.00	-.66	.32
	Girls	44	44.52	1959.00			

Mann-Whitney U-tests were used to evaluate gender differences in the ostracism scores. Table 2 shows there was no statistically significant difference between the gender of gifted students in terms of total and subscale scores of ostracism (for total score  $U= 926.50, p>.05$ ; for ignored score  $U= 1015.00, p>.05$ ; and for excluded score  $U= 969.00, p>.05$  ). It is seen that gifted boys had a higher mean rank compared to gifted girls in total and subscale scores, but that these differences were not statistically significant. A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate the grade level differences (grade 5-8) on median change in ostracism scores among gifted students.

**Table 3.** Kruskal Wallis H Test and Mann Whitney U Test Results of Ostracism Scale In Terms of Grade Levels

OES-A Scores	Groups	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$	sd	p	Differences
Total (OES-A)	Grade 5	15	44.83	6.98	3	.07	
	Grade 6	31	47.06				
	Grade 7	25	38.82				
	Grade 8	23	59.26				
Ignored	Grade 5	15	48.03	1.23	3	.74	
	Grade 6	31	46.94				
	Grade 7	25	43.66				
	Grade 8	23	52.09				
Excluded	Grade 5	15	43.70	8.19	3	.04	6-8 ( $U= 235$ ) 7-8 ( $U= 171$ )
	Grade 6	31	46.90				
	Grade 7	25	38.60				
	Grade 8	23	60.46				

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate the differences among four different grades (grades 5-8) on median change in ostracism scores. According to Table 3, Total and ignored score of ostracism did not significantly vary in terms of grade differences ( $p>.05$ ). On the other hand, there were significant differences between excluded sub score of ostracism

and grades ( $\chi^2(3) = 8.19, p < .05$ ). Follow-up Mann-Whitney U-tests were conducted to evaluate pair differences among the four grade groups. Results indicate a significant difference between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders ( $U = 235, p < .05$ ). A statistically significant difference also existed between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in terms of excluded score of ostracism ( $U = 171, p < .05$ ). The excluded score of ostracism was higher for 8<sup>th</sup> grade than for 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grades. Excluded scores did not differ significantly between other grades. In order to reveal the relationships between ostracism (total, ignored, excluded score) and intelligence score among gifted students, the correlation analysis was conducted. Information about correlation analysis is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Spearman’s Correlations Between Ostracism Scores and Intelligence Scores

Variables	1	2	3	4
1-WISC-R	1			
2-Ignored Subscale	.178	1		
3-Excluded Subscale	.257*	.416**	1	
4-Total Score	.264*	.643**	.950**	1

N = 94 \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

Table 4 presents Spearman’s correlations between total score, ignored subscale, excluded subscale of OES-A and WISC-R score. WISC-R score were significantly correlated with total and excluded subscale score of ostracism ( $r = .264, p < .05$  and  $r = .257, p < .05$  respectively), but was not significantly correlated with ignored subscale scores of ostracism ( $r = .178, p > .05$ ) among gifted students.

### Conclusion and Discussion

This preliminary study examined the perceived ostracism among gifted students. According to the result of the analyses, ostracism among gifted students showed no significant difference in terms of gender. Although the boys ostracism scores (total, excluded, ignored) were higher than those of the girls, these differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, some studies (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Paquette & Underwood, 1999) focusing on middle childhood among normal population yielded no significant gender differences about relationally victimization, whereas some studies (e.g., Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Schäfer, Werner, & Crick, 2002) showed that girls are more relationally victimized than boys among normal population. Several researches (e.g. Kerr & Foley Nicpon, 2003; Kerr & Multon, 2015) perceived that gifted girls are more like gifted boys than like other girls. Therefore this similarity may influence the research result. In addition, gifted boys may be at risk of social isolation, if they do not demonstrate athletic ability to peers (Kerr & Cohen, 2001) and if they are viewed as feminine by peers (Martino & Blye, 2006; Smith, 2007). So these potential risks may be result in higher scores of ostracism among gifted boys.

Another result of the study was that there were no significant differences between grade levels in terms of ostracism except excluded sub score. The excluded score of ostracism was higher for 8<sup>th</sup> graders than for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders among gifted students. Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen (1992), claimed that ostracism seems to increase with



age. But in this study, only the excluded score tended to increase by age. The explanation about this tendency can be that older friends are desirable to gifted children, due to the fact that they seek cognitive peers (Gross, 2002a, 2009). But in the Turkish school system, after 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students leave the middle school to attend high school. Therefore, gifted 8<sup>th</sup> graders cannot find cognitive peers within their schools and as a result, they may feel exclusion or isolation from the social context. Grade schools may lead to discourage formation of cross-age friendships for gifted children.

In addition, it was seemed that intelligence score and ostracism had a positive correlation. Namely, while intelligence increases, also ostracism increases. Robinson (2002) stated that asynchrony between gifted children's advanced intellectual or cognitive abilities and psychosocial development can be exacerbated by degree of giftedness. This asynchrony may lead to more ostracism among gifted children who have higher intelligence scores. Also, some studies (e.g., Freeman, 1979; Gross, 2002b, 2004; Robinson, 2008) found that more likely, the highly gifted have difficulty finding friends; having too few friends. Moderately gifted students were found as being more popular, more socially active, and more socially valued than were the highly gifted (Dauber & Benbow, 1990). These results also support the findings of the study about correlation between ostracism and intelligence level.

In conclusion, this research indicates that being socially excluded and ignored did not differ in terms of gender among gifted students. On the other hand, being socially excluded may be higher in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade than for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Also, intelligence level and ostracism had a positive correlation in the study. This result can imply that highly gifted students may be more at risk of ostracism. Therefore, educators and experts may take preventative measures against the ostracism of gifted students, especially towards the end of middle school. The impact of ostracism can be detrimental to victims (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Therefore, schools should focus on identifying and helping those students experiencing ostracism.

Although, this preliminary study provided important insights about ostracism among gifted students, there were some limitations to note in the study. Firstly, the small sample size (n = 94) limits generalizability of the findings. It is possible, that with a larger and more diverse sample, results would be more significant. Secondly, results of this study relied on a self-reported measure, mainly based on students' own perceptions, which might lead to more positive than negative responses. Adding data from other parties, such as teachers, parents, and peers, and qualitative measures, such as observation and interviews would also strengthen the study. Also, gifted students in the study qualified for the gifted academic program by centers external to the schools. Therefore, other gifted students who do not get any special assistance or support should be examined in terms of ostracism. In addition, inclusion of a comparable group, such as non-gifted students would enrich our understanding of the ostracism among gifted. Silverman (1993) reports athleticism or humor will protect gifted boys from ostracism by peers. So the inclusion of various different characteristics (e.g., creative, humorous, talented areas etc.) of gifted students is recommended for future research as well. Because students give different responses to ostracism, another study may focus on the responses of the gifted students to ostracism.

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