



## EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVITY AND SUBMISSIVE BEHAVEIOR

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Akın  
Sakarya Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi  
[aakin@sakarya.edu.tr](mailto:aakin@sakarya.edu.tr)

Seydi Ahmet Satıcı  
Artvin Çoruh Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi  
[sasatici@artvin.edu.tr](mailto:sasatici@artvin.edu.tr)

Ahmet Rifat Kayış  
Kastamonu Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi  
[arkayis@kastamonu.edu.tr](mailto:arkayis@kastamonu.edu.tr)

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior. Participants were 307 university students. In this study, the Turkish version of the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and the Turkish version of the Submissive Acts Scale were used. The relationships between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior were examined using correlation analysis. Positive expressivity ( $r=-.38, p<.01$ ), negative expressivity ( $r=-.28, p<.01$ ), impulse strength ( $r=-.47, p<.01$ ) and total emotional expressivity scores ( $r=-.50, p<.01$ ) were found negatively associated with submissive behavior. Results were discussed in the light of the related literature.

**Key Words:** Emotional expressivity, submissive behavior.

### INTRODUCTION

Emotional expression is of vital importance to adaptive human functioning and plays a central role in psychopathology. Among theorists and practitioners in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, it is a common belief that people's mental health is related to how they express their emotions (Sloan & Marx, 2004). Particularly, psychotherapists with a psychodynamic or humanistic orientation emphasize the role of emotional expressivity for maintaining psychological and physical well-being and thus aim at improving their clients' access to and expression of feelings (Leising, Müller, & Hahn, 2007; Whelton, 2004). Research on both the verbal and the nonverbal expression of emotion can be found in numerous fields of psychology, such as health psychology (Fernandez-Ballesteros, Ruiz, & Garde, 1998), social psychology (Levine & Feldman, 1997), personality psychology (Abe & Izard, 1999), psychopathology (Buck, Goldman, Easton, & Smith, 1998), and so on (Trierweiler, Eid, & Lischetzke, 2002).

Emotional expressivity has been defined by Kring, Smith, and Neale, (1994) as "the degree to which an individual actively expresses emotional experience through verbal or nonverbal behaviors" (p. 934). On the other hand, Gross and John (1997) have proposed a heuristic model of the emotion process in which environmental cues trigger emotional response tendencies; these tendencies prepare the individual to mount a behavioral response, subject to a number of emotion regulation processes. In this model of emotion, emotional expressions are the behaviors that arise from emotional impulses (Gross & John, 1997).

Research on the relationships between emotional expressiveness and personality characteristics demonstrated that there was a connection between ability to express emotions and specific personality characteristics such as extraversion, dominance, and affiliation (Friedman, 1979; Friedman, Riggio, & Segall, 1980). Expression of emotions has also been shown to benefit physical health (Dobbs, Sloan, & Karpinski, 2007) in the general population (Sloan & Marx, 2004), as well as specific populations, such as women diagnosed with breast cancer



(Stanton et al., 2000) and older adults (Shaw et al., 2003). Emotional expression also plays a central role in psychopathology, including depression (Sloan, Strauss, & Wisner, 2001), schizophrenia (Earnst & Kring, 1999), and borderline personality disorder (Herpertz et al., 2001). Studies suggest that emotional expressiveness also plays an important role in interpersonal interaction (Geist & Gilbert, 1996; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; King, 1993; Long & Andrews, 1990; Sullins, 1991). Within interpersonal relationships, the tendency to be emotionally expressive may impinge on the extent of both spouses' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the relationship.

Submissive behavior means shying away from saying what he/she really mean and not seeking to achieve his/her needs, particularly when someone else has conflicting needs. Submissive behaviors may be viewed as non-hostile, non-coercive behavior characterized by considering the power, authority, or feelings of others, while denying or not standing up for one's own feelings and beliefs (Deluty, 1979, 1981a, 1985). Likewise, a submissive person is a shrinking violet who avoids upsetting others either because of fear or of compassion. When things go wrong, submissive people assume that they are to blame in some way and accept guilt when singled out by others.

Submissive behavior is found to be associated with well-being. For example, studies demonstrated that depressed people see themselves as inferior to others and tend to adopt submissive behavior (Allan & Gilbert, 1997; Gilbert & Allan, 1994). Furthermore, research showed that submissive behavior was negatively correlated with self-esteem (Ozkan & Ozen, 2008), academic achievement (Yıldırım & Ergene, 2003), social comparison (Cheung, Gilbert, & Irons, 2004) and positively with depression (Cheung et al., 2004; O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, & Gilbert, 2002), shame, rumination (Cheung et al., 2004), social anxiety, guilt, and fear of negative evaluation (Gilbert, 2000). In addition, Ongen (2006) found that comparative self-criticism and submissive behavior are independent predictors of depression in both high school and university students. It was also observed that there was no significant difference between the obese group and the normal weight group, in terms of submissive behavior (Odaci, 2007).

The current study examines the relationships between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 307 university students (164 (53%) were female, 143 (47%) were male) who were enrolled in mid-size state University, in Turkey.

### Measures

*Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ; Gross & John, 1995)*. Emotional expressivity was measured by using Turkish version of the Berkeley Expressivity Scale (Akin, 2010). This scale is a 15-item self-report measurement and consists of three sub-scales; positive expressivity, negative expressivity, and impulse strength. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree). Language validity findings indicated that correlations between Turkish and English forms were .83 for overall scale, .62 for positive expressivity, .81 for negative expressivity, and .75 for impulse strength Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model was well fit ( $\chi^2=193.04$ ,  $df=97$ ,  $p=0.00$ ,  $NFI=.96$ ,  $CFI=.98$ ,  $IFI=.98$ ,  $RFI=.95$ ,  $GFI=.95$ ,  $AGFI=.92$ ,  $RMSEA=.048$ , and  $SRMR=.048$ ). The internal consistency reliability coefficients varied between .74 and .84 and test-retest reliability coefficients varied between .67 and .81 for three subscales. Also the corrected item-total correlations ranged from .43 to .80.

Submissive Acts Scale (SAS). To assess submissive social behavior, the Submissive Acts Scale (SAS, Gilbert & Allan, 1994) is used. It contains 16 items and the participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on a 5-point likert scale ranging from this is a "very bad description of me" to "this is a very good description of me" (e.g., "Even if I don't like it, I do things just because other people are also doing them" and "I allow other people to criticize and let me down and do not defend myself"). Higher scores indicate more submissive social behavior (Gilbert & Allan, 1994). SAS was adapted to the Turkish population by Şahin and Şahin (1992). Alpha reliability of the Turkish version for the university sample was .74.

### Procedure

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related chief departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of scales, all participants were told about purposes of the study. In this research, Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to determine the relationships between dimensions of emotional expressivity and submissive behavior. These analyses were carried out via and SPSS 11.5.

### RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the variables used.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, and Inter-correlations of the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Positive expressivity	1				
2. Negative expressivity	.24**	1			
3. Impulse strength	.70**	.25**	1		
4. Total emotional expressivity	.82**	.62**	.87**	1	
5. Submissive behavior	-.38**	-.28**	-.47**	-.50**	1
Mean	21,65	25,80	31,54	78,99	34,79
Standard deviation	4,99	5,66	7,24	13,95	8,13

\*\* $p < .01$

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior. Positive expressivity ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ), negative expressivity ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ), impulse strength ( $r = -.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and total emotional expressivity scores ( $r = -.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found negatively associated with submissive behavior.

### DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior. Results indicated that there are significant relationships between these variables. Positive expressivity, negative expressivity, impulse strength and total emotional expressivity scores were found negatively associated with submissive behavior. Results from studies on the relationship between well-being and submissive behavior (Cheung et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2000; Gilbert & Allan, 1994; O'Connor et al., 2002; Ozkan & Ozen, 2008; Turkum, 2005) consistently showed that, submissive behavior is negatively associated with many indicators of well-being such as self-esteem, academic achievement. Nevertheless, emotional expressivity was found related positively to physical health (Dobbs, Sloan, & Karpinski, 2007), diminished depression (Sloan, Strauss, & Wisner, 2001). It also plays an important and positive role in interpersonal interaction (Geist & Gilbert, 1996; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; King, 1993; Long & Andrews, 1990; Sullins, 1991). In contrary depression (Cheung et al., 2004; O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, & Gilbert, 2002), shame, rumination (Cheung et al., 2004), social anxiety, guilt, and fear of negative evaluation (Gilbert, 2000) were found positively related to submissive behavior. Thus the negative relationships between emotional expressivity and submissive behavior are understandable.

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