

Is Self-Criticism Really a Trigger of Psychological Problems? An Analysis of Self-Criticism in the Context of Turkish University Students

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the concept of self-criticism in the context of Western and Eastern cultures and to examine graduate students' perceptions regarding this concept. When reviewing the Western literature, researchers have generally associated the idea of self-criticism with psychopathology, while researchers in Eastern cultures typically interpret the notion of self-criticism positively. This qualitative study consists of three stages and uses open-ended questions to measure the perceptions of students from different graduate programs with regard to self-criticism. The researcher asked the students about their perceptions toward self-criticism in the first stage, questions about the concepts they'd associated with self-criticism in the second stage, and questions involving metaphors about what students liken to self-criticism in the third stage. Within the scope of the research, the researcher accessed 41 students for the first stage, 52 students for the second stage, and 32 students for the third stage. In all three studies conducted within the scope of this research, it was concluded that self-criticism is not perceived negatively in Turkish culture but rather evaluated as positive. Although there have been a few negative themes, self-criticism is generally perceived as a concept that brings people well. The most crucial aspect that makes this research valuable is that it provides a critical perspective on the pairing of self-criticism with psychological problems in the psychology literature. It is understood that self-criticism is seen as an essential source of individual development in Turkish culture rather than being the source of psychological problems. When the psychology literature is examined, it is seen that self-criticism is generally considered the trigger of psychological problems. Self-criticism is regarded as a situation that harms self-esteem. However, in eastern cultures, self-criticism is accepted as a prerequisite for a healthy identity. In this study, this conclusion was reached in three stages.

Keywords: Self-criticism, interview, metaphor, qualitative research, experience

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Introduction

Churchill said the following about self-criticism, “Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.” The main thing that is meant by self-criticism as a word is that criticizing oneself disturbs people at some point, but this disturbance also indicates a problem that other people have. The Turkish Language Association (TDK, 2020) defines self-criticism as “the judgment one makes about one’s own behavior.” In a way, self-criticism is a search for the reasons behind the negative situations a person experiences in the face of daily events. It can also be expressed as the ability a person has to judge themselves, to take on the problems they encounter without blaming others, and to direct the necessary criticisms regarding these problems. Undoubtedly, seeing one’s own mistakes and learning from them is a positive critical situation for human maturity. However, when considering the limits of self-criticism, using the phrase “double-edged sword” would not be wrong. As such, addressing self-criticism under three categories will facilitate how to understand and use self-criticism correctly. The first of these categories is excessive self-criticism, the second is lack of self-criticism, and the third is constructive self-criticism. These three categories also constitute the primary purpose of the study.

The Three Dimensions of Self-Criticism

Although self-criticism is a prevalent concept, defining and understanding it correctly are imperative because defining a concept accurately allows every relevant segment to be handled and analyzed correctly. In this context, the correct approach would be to consider the idea of self-criticism in three ways and to explain all three points in detail, because examining and analyzing only one aspect of self-criticism makes seeing its other dimensions impossible. As a result, Figure 1 shows the different consequences each of the three dimensions of self-criticism has.

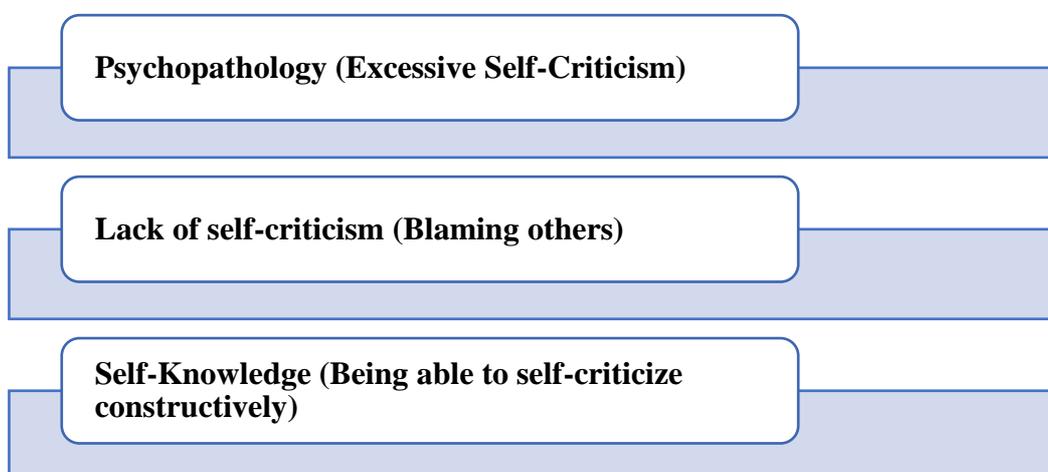


Figure 1. The dimensions of self-criticism. (Okan, 2021).

As a result, how the concept of self-criticism is handled in the literature needs to be examined in these three contexts.

Excessive Self-Criticism (Psychopathology)

A person who can learn from their mistakes through self-criticism undoubtedly reveals their maturity and is a critical condition. However, sometimes people can blame themselves excessively even when they are not at fault. The literature has shown that certain psychopathological conditions may occur as a result of this. Thompson and Zuroff (2004) revealed self-criticism to give rise to psychopathology, expressing self-criticism as one having hard-to-achieve expectations while simultaneously constantly feeling the fear of not being approved by others. Put more clearly, self-criticism that leads to pathology involves a situation where individuals themselves are overburdened and have unrealistic expectations that are difficult or impossible to achieve. Doğan and Sapmaz (2013) found individuals with high levels of self-criticism to have high personal standards, to overvalue themselves, and as a result to excessively focus on themselves. As a result, they experience extreme stress. Excessive self-criticism, a feeling of loss, and worthlessness may form alongside the failures that accompany the stress (Bergner, 1995; Blatt, 2004). Likewise, Blatt (2004) stated the main reasons behind why individuals who criticize themselves excessively are in this situation as: having parents who inhibit and control their children, restrict them from moving freely, and reject them. They stated that this situation prevents the formation of self-perception in these individuals. Some researchers have also discussed this situation with regard to early childhood experiences (Blatt, 1974; Blatt & Homann, 1992). Namely, the feeling of exclusion, excessive pressure, and worthlessness an individual is exposed to in early childhood may cause that person to blame themselves at a high level and therefore fall into pathological situations by placing excessive burdens on their self-acceptance. Blatt (1974) touched upon two fundamental problems in individuals with autonomy problems, stating the first to be dependence and the second to be self-criticism. Mendelson et al. (2002) emphasized that individuals who have experienced negative experiences in their childhood have excessive self-criticism in their attempts to become autonomous, and this situation causes extreme pressure on the self. Murphy and Bates (1997) conceptualized the attempts individuals in this situation make to become self-reliant as occurring in two ways: excessive self-criticism and attempts to be overly independent, both of which hurt the self, due to the extreme effort required. Cantazaro (2007) stated excessive self-criticism and perfectionism to make the individual vulnerable to depression. Hence, the differences between constructive self-criticism and excessive self-criticism essentially reflect two sides of the same coin.

Some empirical studies have shown anxiety to play a vital role in how individuals with excessive self-criticism tendencies use their daily energy. In a survey conducted with volunteers, Mongrain and Zuroff (1995) found excessive self-criticism to be related to self-preservation.

Likewise, overly self-critical people were observed to report more goal-setting anxiety with regard to achievement. This finding supports people's excessive self-criticism being an excessive reflection of the attempt to become autonomous. Just as with depression and anxiety, Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory essentially provides a theoretical framework for addiction and excessive self-criticism. As mentioned before, individuals with problematic attachment orientation have been stated to possess different internal working models regarding themselves and others. Notably, individuals with attachment anxiety tend to feel unworthy of attention and have a negative model of internal functioning. This situation paves the way for an individual's fear of abandonment and dependent behaviors. Therefore, an individual's attachment anxiety will contribute to nurturing an overly self-critical personality style, as identified by Blatt (1974). Murphy and Bates (1997) as well as Zuroff and Fitzpatrick (1995) also stated a positive and moderate relationship among attachment anxiety, addiction, and self-criticism. In a sense, excessive self-criticism appears to be directly related to attachment anxiety. Yamaguchi and Kim (2013) stated excessive self-criticism to be a concept that has attracted the attention of some researchers because it leaves adolescents and adults vulnerable to depression and psychological disorders.

Lack of Self-Criticism

The situation opposite excessive self-criticism involves individuals who apply no self-criticism but instead blames others for adverse conditions. Çam and Akgün (2007) made a classification for this by considering the accusation in two ways: self-blame and blame of others. They stated that by condemning others, a person tries to avoid taking responsibility by putting it on someone else. When one blames themselves, they create excessive self-criticism by taking all responsibility. A person who blames others results in conflicts, and a person who blames themselves prevents disputes. However, this will also cause the person to experience internal conflicts. Excessive self-criticism has been stated above to lead to psychopathologies. However, if a person constantly criticizes others or blames others without criticizing themselves, this is not a conscious or voluntary situation. It is instead generally viewed as hiding, suppressing, reflecting, or manifesting emotional reactions subconsciously. Therefore, the person is often unaware of their responses, cannot determine their reactions, and has difficulty expressing themselves properly (Çam & Akgün, 2007). Or instead of self-criticizing, one tries to justify themselves by directing the criticisms they should direct to themselves to others.

In some cases, criticizing or blaming others may be overt; sometimes a person seeks to make others feel guilty by exploiting emotions. Bertram et al. (2011) stated a moral side to blaming others without criticizing them. In this case, they emphasized that individuals who want to cover up their problems by blaming others should focus on their cognitive structures first. Based on this case, Bertram et al. (2011) developed a mental model to determine the underlying reasons why people

blame others without self-criticizing. According to this model, individuals generally use blame more to avoid situations that hurt them.

Meanwhile, Lozano and Laurent (2019) stated that people blame others rather than self-criticize. People are seen to prefer to blame others in order to save their damaged image (Fein et al., 2003; Greenberg & Pyszczynsk, 1985) and to appear stronger in the environment (Synder, 1987). Individuals who have not developed the skill of constructive self-criticism in particular are observed to exhibit behaviors such as criticizing others to avoid negative social evaluations (Leary, 2007). For this reason, such individuals blame others in order to protect themselves and divert attention (Peterson & Baret, 1987). The main reason for this is that these individuals lack the courage to face themselves. Individuals who were constantly blamed in their childhood are more likely to show such tendencies. Lozano and Laurent (2019) found several reasons to underly an individual's tendency to blame others rather than admit their mistakes. They expressed these as exclusion and learning in social settings. Likewise, individuals who do not self-criticize but instead blame others noteworthyly say that doing what others do regularly would be wrong if they did it. This situation can be interpreted as the manifestation of a moral contradiction and inconsistency. Therefore, talking about a constructive self and personality structure in situations of excessive self-criticism or of no self-criticism is incorrect, because in one case, the person invites psychopathological situations by placing extreme burdens on themselves, while in the other case, they prefer to blame others by redirecting the self-criticism they should place on themselves. Both situations negatively affect the individual's psychological health and formation of a healthy ego structure and cause the individual to misrepresent themselves.

Constructive Self-Criticism (Self-Knowledge)

Constructive self-criticism is undoubtedly an indication of a very healthy maturity and high virtue, unlike cases where people self-criticize to much or not at all. At some point, the most important thing that stands out is awareness of one's reactions, recognizing and trying to correct one's mistakes, self-criticizing without blaming others, and, more importantly, knowing oneself. The person who knows others and themselves is both aware of the events occurring in the external world as well as those taking place in the inner world. When examining the literature on psychology, a negative perception is generally seen to exist regarding self-criticism, and studies have been conducted to reduce the effects of this negative perception.

Scientists with a cognitive and analytical perspective have argued individuals to exhibit symptoms of depression due to a perceived threat to the self as a result of excessive self-criticism (Beck, 1983; Blatt & Zuroff, 1992). The common point of these studies is that people with depression exert excessive self-criticism; at the same time, excessive self-criticism is also an essential factor in the development and emergence of depression (Campos et al., 2010; Lerman et al., 2012; Ehret et al.,

2015; Joeng & Turner, 2015). The dominant viewpoint in Western studies in particular being toward the psychopathological consequences of self-criticism has already been stated. However, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), the theorists of positive psychology, conducted studies to alleviate the harmful effects of self-criticism on depression. They presented the positive contributions both healthy family support and support related to self-esteem have in reducing a person's symptoms of depression (Abela et al., 2012). However, another concept that positive psychology has presented as an important factor against excessive self-criticism is self-compassion (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). Self-compassion has been argued to effectively reduces symptoms in individuals with depression (Baer et al., 2012). Self-compassion and compassion are essential in establishing a positive relationship with oneself emotionally, being sincere with oneself, and accepting oneself without being judgmental (Zhang et al., 2013). Concepts and suggestions about self-compassion are seen to have occurred in many studies. Neff (2003) stated a person who forms their own self-wellbeing to be able develop love and empathy toward themselves and therefore be gentler toward themselves.

Present Study

Whether expressed with regard to self-compassion, self-wellbeing, or other ways, researchers are seen to be looking for a more positive foundation for self-criticism. The concepts of empathy, awareness, compassion, and self-knowledge are seen to be used in particular with self-criticism. Suppose every individual self-criticism is considered harmful. In this case, people will not be able to develop self-awareness, self-recognition, become aware of their shortcomings, or learn from their mistakes and move toward something better. Therefore, modeling constructive concepts will allow one to see the positive points of self-criticism more clearly and thus enable these positive points to be correctly positioned in social and academic life as well as in the context of psychology. Determining the position of self-criticism and gaining new information about it are imperative. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to determine how self-criticism is perceived in Turkish culture, because such a study will also provide an opportunity for comparing with studies that have been conducted so far.

Method

Stage 1

The first stage of the study examines and identifies the perceptions and experiences regarding self-criticism for individuals studying at the postgraduate level. In this context, these graduate students have been asked semi-structured questions based on their experiences with self-criticism.

Model

This stage of the research involves a qualitative study conducted to reveal the perceptions and experiences graduate students have regarding self-criticism. Due to the survey asking about graduate students' experiences, this part of the study was designed using the phenomenological study design. Özet (2014) stated phenomenological studies to examine different people's experiences about the same phenomenon. Likewise, Creswell (2007) expressed the aim of phenomenological studies to be to reveal the ordinary experiences different people have with regard to a phenomenon.

Participants

Students studying at the postgraduate level in different universities of Istanbul represent the universe of this research. From this universe, 41 students studying at the postgraduate level have been reached. The attempt was made to call students from different departments as much as possible, and interviews were conducted with the students on a voluntary basis. Before the interviews, the students were informed that the study was about self-criticism, and care was taken to select students who had something to say about this subject. The purposeful sampling method has been used in this case. Patton (2014) allowed situations to be selected that are rich in the required information. Therefore, graduate students have been preferred as they are thought to have good knowledge about self-criticism. Within the scope of the research, data were collected from a total of 41 participants (25 females, 16 males). Of the participants, 32 are at the master's level, and nine are at the doctorate level. Their age range between 24 and 40.

Data Collection Tool

Semi-structured open-ended questions developed by the researcher were used as data collection tools in the scope of the research. At the same time, a demographic information form was also added by the researcher and used. Each participant was asked five questions to reveal their experiences with self-criticism.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the research were audio recorded. Next, the audio files were converted to text. The transcribed files were subjected to content analysis with the help of the package program Maxqda 20, and the main themes and sub-themes were formed.

Stage 1 Findings

The themes and sub-themes related to the concept of self-criticism as a result of the interviews are shown in Figure 2.

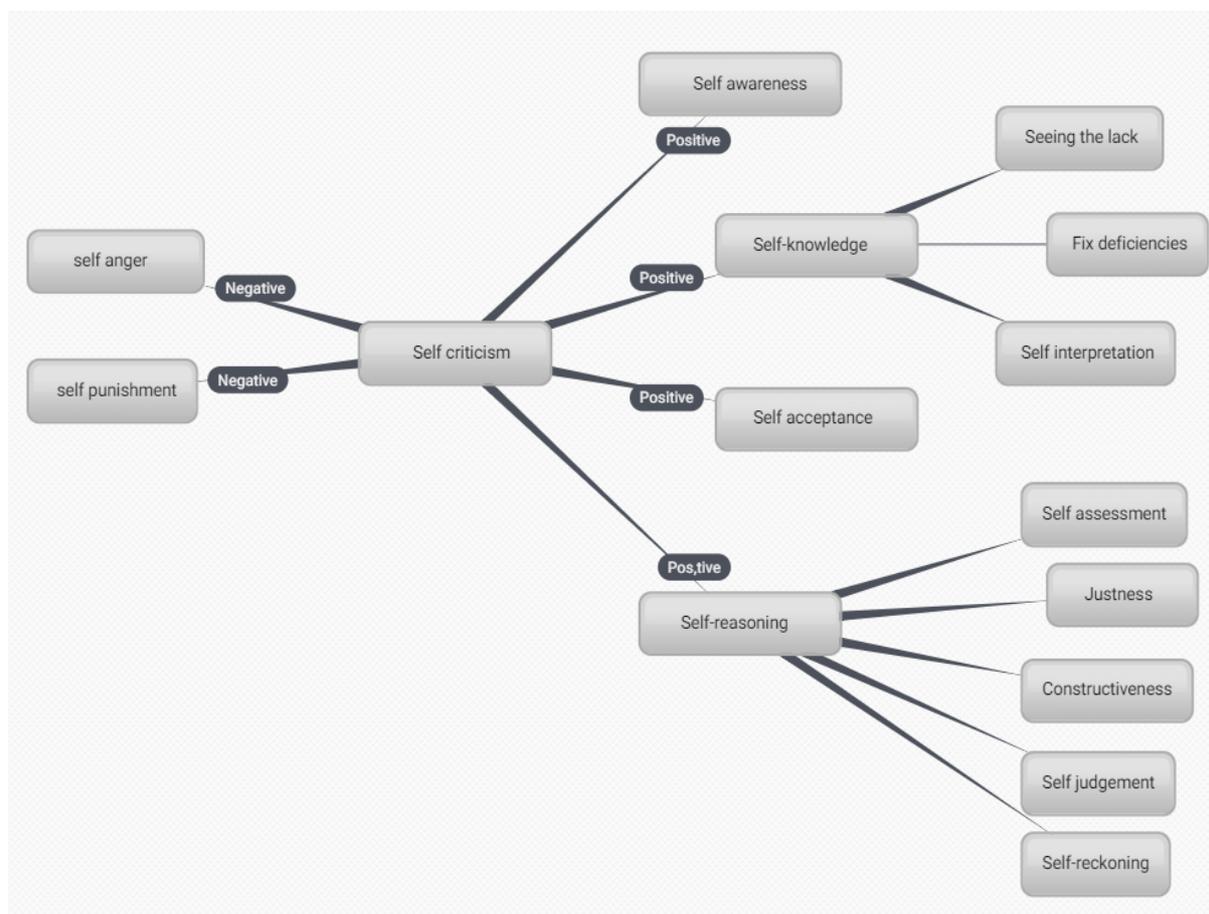


Figure 2. Self-criticism and its sub-themes after the interviews.

According to these results, the participants mainly emphasized the positive and constructive aspects of self-criticism. However, some participants rarely emphasized the negative aspects of self-criticism. As seen in Figure 2, the themes of self-anger and self-punishment were obtained in this context. When looking at the positive themes, these are seen to be self-acceptance, self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-reasoning. Some of the expressions the participants used while obtaining these themes are as follows:

- Self-criticism skills may also be a prerequisite for self-knowledge/self-actualization. (P1)
- Self-recognition means identifying the things within oneself, thinking these are incomplete and wrong, and acting toward improving them. (P3)
- Self-criticism reminds me of self-knowing. Unless a person knows oneself, they cannot even self-criticize. (P7)
- When I self-criticize, I can see my shortcomings and the aspects I need to constructively correct. (P9)
- For example, I know my shortcomings and limitations when I self-criticize in addition to what I can do. (P11)

- In my opinion, self-criticism is the ability of an individual to judge their behaviors and thoughts. (P12)
- Self-criticism means evaluating oneself with an external eye. For example, I look at what I do with an external eye when I go through hard times and can distinguish between right and wrong. (P13)
- Self-criticism involves positive and negative self-evaluations. It should be positive because one should know the good aspects and appreciate them and see the harmful aspects and repair the situations they cause. (P17)
- Self-criticism means being able to act in terms of one's capacities and being aware of one's shortcomings and abilities. (P19)
- Self-criticism means awareness of one's right and wrongs, deficiencies, and excesses. (P22)
- I think self-criticism means being aware of our mistakes and deficiencies and acting honestly with ourselves. (P23)
- I believe self-criticism is one of the most extraordinary good things one can do for oneself. Sometimes even those closest to us do not tell us the truth. (P27)
- Self-criticism is the ability to evaluate what the self does with high awareness. (P33)
- While self-criticism may be positive, it is something I always do negatively where I punish myself. (P39)

Stage 1 Conclusion and Discussion

Themes were formed as a result of the phenomenological interviews about how university students perceive the concept of self-criticism. The obtained themes reveal that some inferences need to be made psychologically. The study data show self-criticism to consist of six themes. While four of these themes are positive concepts, two consist of negative ideas. The following positive themes have been arrived at: self-acceptance, self-awareness, self-judgment, and self-knowledge. The negative themes are self-anger and self-punishment. Although negative themes did form, most of the participants were observed to generally associate self-criticism with positive concepts. For self-criticism in particular, sub-themes were obtained that involve important skills such as seeing one's deficiencies, making constructive evaluation, and correcting one's deficiencies. Meanwhile, some researchers who are particularly interested in the psychopathological dimension of self-criticism (Bowbly, 1969, 1973, 1980; Blatt & Homann, 1992; Bergner, 1995; Murphy & Bates, 1997; Thompson & Zuroff, 2004; Blatt, 2004; Cantazaro, 2007; Yamaguchi & Kim, 2013) have found university students to generally consider self-criticism as a positive concept. Therefore, researchers who constantly focus on the negative aspects of self-criticism should also focus on the positive aspects. Of course, looking at the results obtained from the interviews, some negative aspects of self-criticism were also seen to have been emphasized. However, this should not bring self-criticism to an

utterly negative point. On the contrary, knowing that too much of anything can be harmful, excessive self-criticism can also be said to include various adverse situations.

Stage 2

Stage 2 of this study asked graduate students to say the first five concepts that come to mind regarding self-criticism. This study aims to compare their responses with the data obtained from the first stage in order to place the idea of self-criticism on a more solid foundation. The students were limited to five answers in this context. However, they were free to say whatever they wished within these five answers.

Model

The model for this stage of the research has been determined as the scanning model. This stage attempts to conceptualize graduate students' thoughts regarding the concept of self-criticism.

Participants

The universe of the second study is again graduate students. Because collecting data from postgraduate students was thought to be more appropriate for making a better comparison of the data obtained in the first stage, an online question was prepared for the second stage, and the graduate students were asked to write the first five concepts that come to mind in terms of self-criticism. This stage uses simple random sampling as the sampling method as the students who'd filled out the questionnaire are accessed at random. Within the scope of this stage of the research, a total of 52 students were accessed (36 females, 16 males).

Data Collection Tool

The following question was asked along with the questions containing demographic information as a data collection tool, "What are the top five concepts that come to mind in terms of self-criticism?"

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the graduate students were first entered into a word file for processability. Next, this file was transferred to Maxqda 20. In vivo coding was done first here. Afterward, the concepts were gathered under various themes and the final pieces obtained.

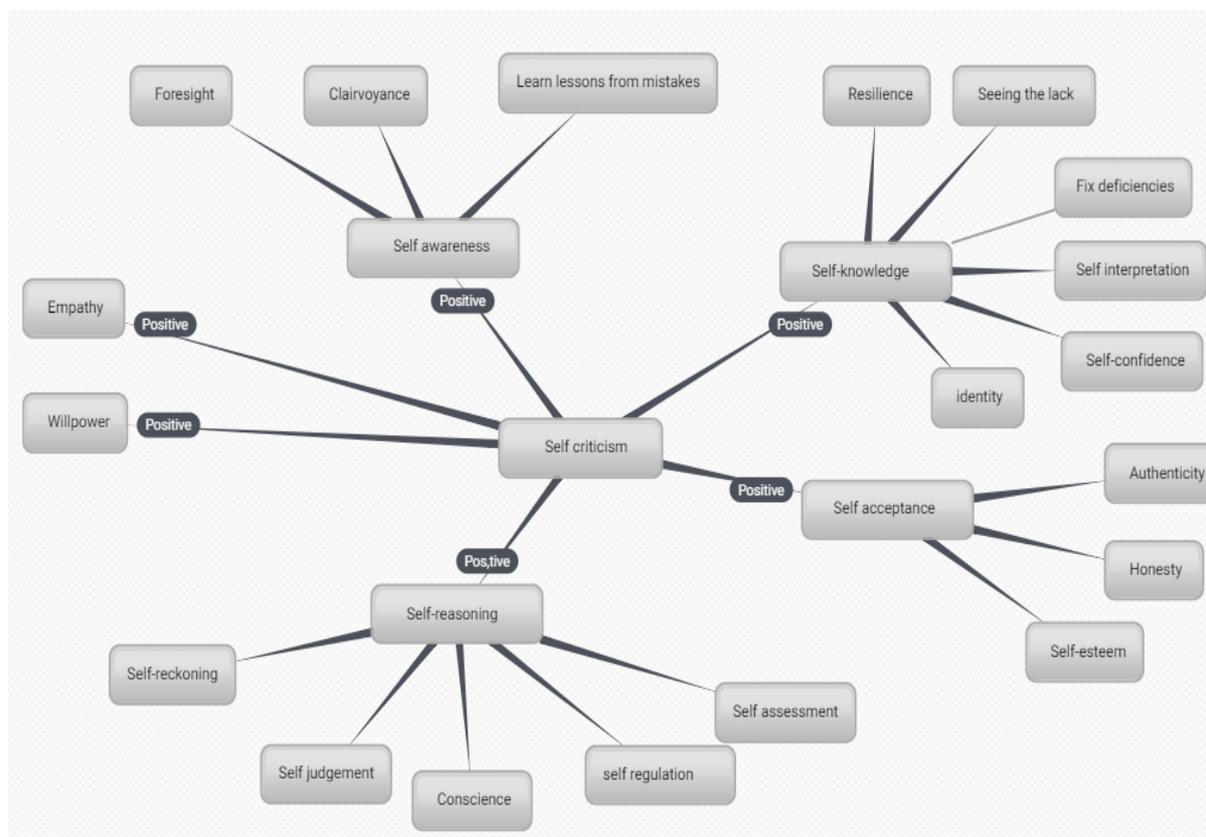


Figure 3. Self-criticism and its sub-themes according to the conceptual answers.

This stage of the study was conducted to determine the concepts related to self-criticism. Figure shows the names of the discovered themes. According to the answers given, themes such as self-acceptance, awareness, empathy, will, reasoning, and self-acceptance emerged.

When examining Figure 3, some of the obtained themes are seen to have sub-themes. Accordingly, the sub-themes for the theme of self-awareness are foresight, clairvoyance, and learn lessons from mistakes. The subthemes for the theme of self-acceptance are authenticity, self-esteem, and honesty. The subthemes for the theme of self-reasoning are self-reckoning, self-judgment, self-assessment, conscience, self-regulation, and self-assessment. The subthemes for the theme of self-knowledge are seeing what's lacking, fixing deficiencies, self-interpretation, resilience, identity, and self-confidence.

Stage 2 Conclusion and Discussion

The second stage of the study was conducted to determine which concepts self-criticism is related to in the minds of university students and obtained some results. Students were asked to write the first five concepts that come to mind in terms of self-criticism. When categorizing the given answers, the responses are seen to be grouped under six different themes: self-awareness, self-acceptance, empathy, self-knowledge, self-reasoning, and willpower. Various sub-themes related to

these were also reached at the same time. When examining both themes and sub-themes, no student was seen to express any negative concepts among the first five concepts that come to mind in terms of self-criticism. All students only had positive ideas come to mind regarding self-criticism. Therefore, this result shows a similar effect as that in the first stage. It also presents data that contrasts with the findings of researchers who've dealt with self-criticism only from a psychopathological perspective (Bowbly, 1969, 1973, 1980; Blatt & Homann, 1992; Zuroff, 2004; Blatt, 2004). This situation indicates that self-criticism should be viewed from different perspectives.

Stage 3

The third stage of the study is a metaphor study with graduate students that aims to reveal the metaphors students associate with self-criticism and the characteristics from which these result. As in the second stage, this stage seeks to compare the results obtained from phenomenological interviews in order to obtain the most accurate data and results regarding self-criticism.

Model

This stage is a metaphor study. Rich findings are obtained about concepts through metaphors, which count as qualitative data collection tools (Patton, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Metaphors can be used both as descriptive and comparative tools in understanding social phenomena (Silman & Şimşek, 2006).

Participants

The population of this study is graduate students in Istanbul. With the help of the online data collection tool created within the scope of the research, a total of 32 students (18 females, 14 males) were reached. Due to random participation being provided in this study, simple random sampling has again been the sampling method.

Data Collection Tool

The following fill-in-the-blank statement was used to reveal metaphors about self-criticism and was prepared online as a data collection tool:

- resembles self-criticism because

In addition to this statement, a form regarding various demographic information was also included.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was performed on the data obtained within the scope of this stage. The primary purpose here is to arrive at themes based on the obtained data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Accordingly, the responses acquired from the students were grouped under similar metaphors. Both the creatures to be likened to and why they were associated with have been divided into separate categories. Likewise, some students' metaphors have been provided in quotations. Accordingly, the participant responses have been identified under four categories: 1) Coding data, 2) Finding themes, 3) Organizing the data according to codes and pieces, and 4) Interpreting the findings (Ekiz, 2009; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Stage 3 Findings

Figure 4 shows the tabulated form of the findings obtained within the scope of this stage of the research. According to this, the themes of self-awareness, empathy, self-acceptance, willpower, self-reasoning, self-knowledge, and difficulty have been obtained.

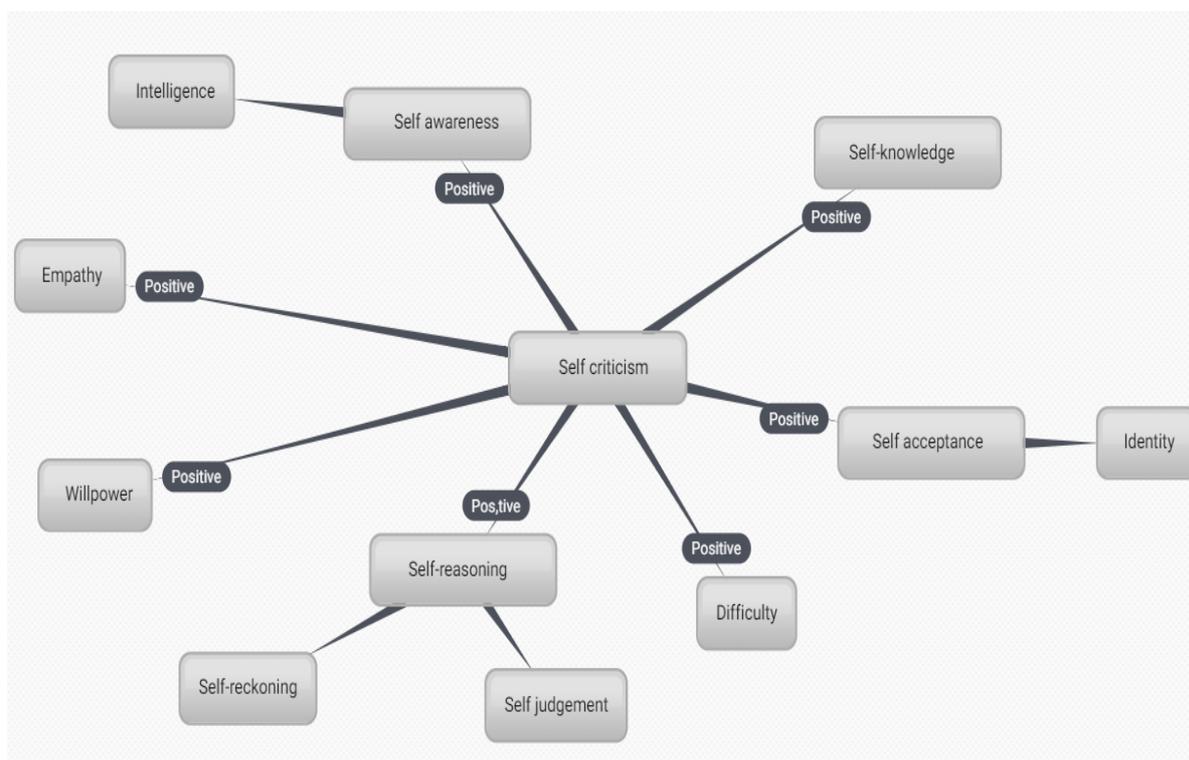


Figure 4. The theme and sub-themes of self-criticism according to the metaphor analysis.

Table 1 shows the results obtained upon examining what was obtained from the metaphor stage of the study.

Table 1. Results regarding metaphors

Frequency	Resemblance	Feature
1	Whale	Awareness
2	Child	Questioning/Self-knowledge
1	Scorpion	Self-questioning
3	Dog	Precision Scales/Reasoning
1	Crow	Intelligence
1	Hedgehog	Self-acceptance
2	Sunflower	Self-knowledge/Self-knowledge
1	Leaf	Turning green Again
1	Panda	Rarely questions
3	Lion	Self-acceptance/knowing/ willpower
4	Cat	Not caring / positive and negative situations / logical
1	Animals	Withdrawal (Accounting)
2	Plant	Knowing your limits / Awareness
1	Lizard	Reform
1	Rabbit	Awareness
1	Human	Being tough
2	Ant	Sure/determined
1	Mirror	Awareness
2	That	Be your own
1	Bamboo tree	Patience, perseverance
32	Total	

Some of the answers from this stage's participants are presented below:

- Self-criticism is like a whale because people are not very aware of its size as it doesn't surface often. Everyone would be aware of how big it was if it constantly surfaced.
- Self-criticism is like a 3-5 yr. old child in my opinion because they require questioning and learning with reasons. These children also want to question and find out the reason for everything and take steps accordingly.
- Self-criticism is like a scorpion because it's an animal that can show its venom to itself when necessary.
- Self-criticism is like dogs maybe because dogs show us things we can't see through their sense of smell. Self-criticism is like putting ourselves on a delicate scale and being an honest trader.
- Self-criticism is like a hedgehog because it has thorns as one of its features. They accepted themselves with their thorns and live with them. Although everybody criticizes them for this, that's how it is.
- I guess self-criticism is like a sunflower because if we accept the sun as its self-criticism that provides the inner control of the sunflower; the sunflower changes its direction depending on the movements of the sun and its position; It can be interpreted as changing the behaviors constructively based on one's self-criticism.

- Self-criticism is like a tree leaf because just as leaves fall from time to time, they come back to the tree branches; self-criticism is also necessary from time to time.
- Self-criticism could be like a panda because self-critical people, like the panda, are also going extinct. It decreases daily.
- Self-criticism is like a cat because it is cute and beautiful, often peaceful, but at some moments, some words and behaviors make you so angry that that cat can scratch and leave yourself wounded.
- Self-criticism is like a poppy flower. When the poppy flower begins to grow, it grows from one side and starts to tilt its head slowly, neither too much nor too upright. Self-criticism is such a thing: You are neither too upright nor tilt your head too high; you're fair to yourself.
- Self-criticism is like water, because self-criticism is as important and valuable as water and a great blessing for a person. Of course, for those who know the value of water ...
- I compare it to a bamboo tree because not everyone can easily self-criticize. But if he continues patiently, he can see his shortcomings and reach the highest part of his potential.

Stage 3 Conclusion and Discussion

The third stage of the research consists of revealing the conceptual framework of self-criticism through metaphors. For this purpose, the statement “..... resembles self-criticism because” was handed to the participants to fill in, and this is how their answers were received. The metaphors obtained were first tabulated as to which living thing and with what characteristics had they compared self-criticism to. After this stage, the themes and sub-themes were formed. When examining the themes and sub-themes, self-criticism was again seen to only be associated with positive concepts, just as in the second stage of the study. All students' metaphor perceptions about self-criticism are understood to have been expressed using positive ideas. Therefore, this result shows a similar effect to the first and second studies. Consequently, the correct approach would be for researchers to direct their point of view toward positive rather than negative self-criticism.

Summative Assessment

This study was conducted to reveal how university students perceive self-criticism and formed by combining three different stages; it is seen to have also arrived at some significant results. In particular, self-criticism has often been viewed negatively in psychology literature. However, when looking at the answers the participants gave, self-criticism is seen to mostly be perceived as a positive situation. Due to doing the modeling based on the data obtained being thought to be correct, the results obtained from all three stages are gathered under a single roof in Figure 5.

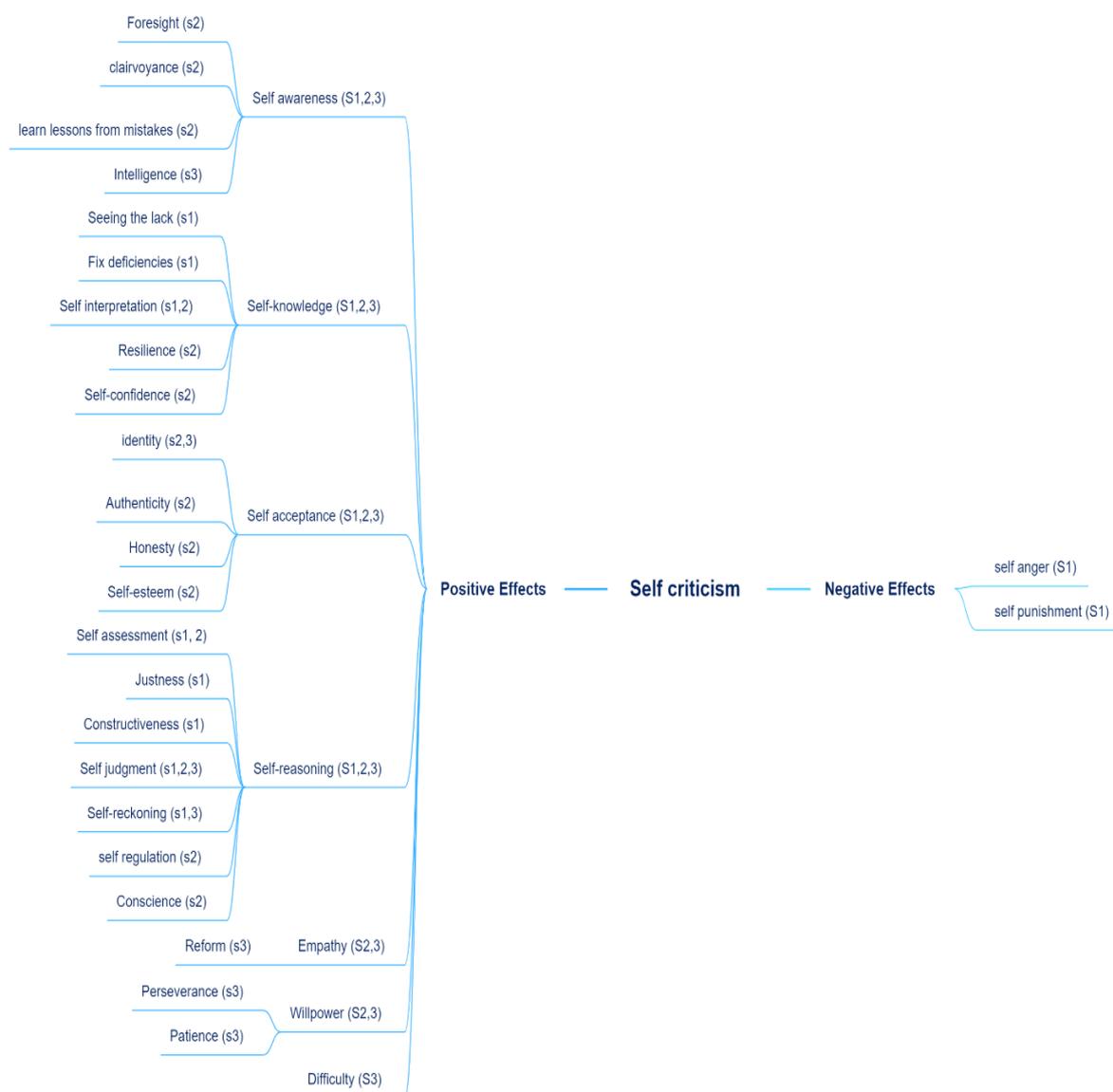


Figure 5. The self-criticism model based on the three stages (S1 = Stage 1, S2 = Stage 2, S3 = Stage 3).

The similar results from all three stages make this study very important. The theme and sub-themes obtained from all three stages can be seen by examining Figure 5. Only two sub-themes are seen to occur under the theme of negative effects: self-anger and self-punishment. These negative subthemes occurred only in Stage 1. No negative themes or sub-themes were obtained in Stages 2 or 3. This result shows reflecting on self-criticism, which is often viewed negatively, to be necessary.

Meanwhile, when examining the sub-themes for the theme of the positive effects of self-criticism, similar results are seen to have been obtained in practically all three stages. The self-awareness theme is one of the common themes in all three studies. Several sub-themes belonging to this theme were arrived at in Stage 2: foresight, clairvoyance, learn lessons from mistakes, and

intelligence. Again, three more themes were found to have been obtained from all three stages: self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-reasoning. The sub-themes for the theme of self-knowledge are: seeing what's missing, fixing deficiencies, self-interpretation, resilience, and self-confidence. The sub-themes for the theme of self-acceptance are: identity, authenticity, honesty, and self-esteem. Another common theme was the theme of self-reasoning, and its sub-themes have been found as: self-assessment, justness, constructiveness, self-judgment, self-reckoning, self-regulation, and conscience. The themes obtained from Stages 2 and 3 of the study are empathy and willpower. The only subtheme for the theme of empathy is reform. Willpower's subthemes consist of perseverance and patience. The theme of difficulty was only obtained in Stage 3. These results show self-criticism to have gained a more positive place in the minds of university students. Therefore, instead of looking at self-criticism as a negative concept, its positive aspects need to be looked at. In the research conducted by Yaylak (2020) with students, it was concluded that self-criticism is also an important value. In a study on school principals, it was stated that constructive self-criticism is important (Özcan, 2020).

Conclusion

This research differs from studies on self-criticism because it deals with self-criticism multidimensionally. As is known, the Western literature on psychology often associates self-criticism with negative psychological experiences. However, when looking at Eastern societies, self-criticism is known to be perceived as a favorable situation rather than a negative one. Therefore, the aim of this research is to reveal how the concept of self-criticism is perceived in Eastern society by combining the data obtained from three different stages. When considering the research results, although a few participants associated self-criticism with negative experiences, most emphasized the constructive aspect of self-criticism. Therefore, this study will contribute to researchers working in psychology in terms of examining constructive self-criticism.

Limitations, Future Research Directions and Policy Implications

Researchers continue their studies knowing some limitations exist. This study should be noted to have several limitations. It was conducted with accessible students; therefore, it was not conducted directly with people who have psychological problems and who self-critique. This situation may have caused self-criticism to appear different compared to studies describing it psycho-pathologically. However, the primary purpose of this study has been to show that self-criticism is not completely psychopathological. Another limitation is that all three stages were conducted with university students. Different results would have been obtained in this study had self-criticism been studied over a variety of sample groups. Therefore, to verify this study, similar studies with diverse populations and samples are needed. Another limitation is that the researcher also considers self-criticism to not

be a negative situation as it is commonly thought. Therefore, the researcher asked another researcher to analyze the data to eliminate this bias.

This study is thought to be able to be a guide for future studies. In particular, researchers working in psychology should also consider and examine self-criticism from this aspect. Conducting studies that will be handled positively will allow discussing the concept of self-criticism on the proper foundation. Therefore, the door to having researchers look at self-criticism from a new perspective is thought to have been opened through this research. This study is thought to be able to be a guide for future studies. In particular, researchers working in psychology should also consider and examine self-criticism from this aspect. Conducting studies that will be handled positively will allow discussing the concept of self-criticism on the proper foundation. Therefore, the door to having researchers look at self-criticism from a new perspective is thought to have been opened through this research.

Conflict of interest

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