

## Summary

# Social Representations of Peace among Secondary Education Students

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Galtung (1985) argues that just one global and holistic conceptualization of peace is not possible because, like humanity, “*the concept of peace is fragmented*” (p. 155). A quick review of the literature on peace studies, enabled by the joint efforts of social sciences and peace activism, shows that a unique definition of peace is still not possible (Christie, Tint, Wagner & Winter, 2008; for a detailed review see, Büyükkakıncı, 2018). Therefore, it is an important scientific challenge to evaluate the contents and functions of different conceptualizations of peace in various societies.

We chose the Social Representations Theory developed by Moscovici (1988) as the theoretical framework of this study. Social representations contain a system of values, ideas, and practices that serve to make sense of the social order by communication through shared codes of the social-historical background of the society as well as the individuals (Sammüt & Howarth, 2014). Social representations operate through the processes of anchoring and objectification to familiarise novel situations and events in society (Moscovici, 1984). Therefore, the production of social representations follows social changes or significant events that challenge society, just as during the resolution process in Turkey corresponding to our data collection period. In such a social change, it would be a strategic academic goal to reveal the *collective view of the social representation* of peace (see Wagner, 1995).

Sarrica and Wachelke (2012) demonstrated that social representations of peace and war are not contrary to each other. That is to say, social representations of war are relatively stable and central, whereas social representations of peace constitute of lots of equally important and peripheral elements (Sarrica & Wachelke, 2012). Moreover, these representations vary in terms of group membership and context (Sarrica, Leone, Cadorin & Siag, 2011). On the other hand, Van der Linden, Bizumic, Stubager and Mellon (2011) state that social representations of peace show a close resemblance in almost all

previous studies in various countries. Accordingly, most of the answers given to the definition of peace were generally compatible with Galtung’s positive (e.g., presence of peace and serenity) and negative (e.g., absence of war and violence) peace concepts. From a socio-developmental perspective, researchers indicated that the peace concept develops later and with a more complex way in comparison to war (Sarrica, 2007). For instance, negative and positive peace concepts develop only by the age of twelve (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998).

Peace studies in Turkey can be summarized as the evaluation of peace education programs (e.g., Memişoğlu & Çatlak, 2016), the examination of teachers’ beliefs and opinions on peace education (e.g., Demir, 2011), attitudes towards peace (Öztaşkın, 2014), or scale development studies on attitude toward peace (e.g., Kılcan, 2018). In a relevant study, Eryılmaz (2009) demonstrated that female secondary education students have more positive attitudes towards peace than males.

The current study prioritizes secondary education students to examine social representations of peace because developmentally, they can conceptualize peace at an abstract level, and they already had peace education in their curriculum. Although the main research question is “*How does youth in Turkey conceptualize peace?*”, with a descriptive design, we also examined (1) attributions of responsibility towards peace, (2) representations of obstacles against peace, and (3) beliefs on the efforts to achieve peace. Besides, we revealed how the social representation of peace is associated with the sample’s demographics by comparing categories of gender, age, and region.

## Method

### Participants

We recruited 535 secondary education students from forty-one high schools located in different regions

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and cities in Turkey ( $M_{age} = 16.01$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ; Female = 325, 61.5%). Most of the participants ( $N = 373$ , 73.3%) live in the Marmara region. Most of them define their family as either middle income ( $N = 270$ , %50.6) or high income ( $N = 200$ , %37.5) and the number of siblings ranges between 0-18 ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ).

### Materials and Procedure

In the survey, we asked participants the meanings of peace as a concept (i.e., Questions 1 & 2), their attribution of responsibility towards peace (i.e., Questions 3 & 4) and their experiences of peace (i.e., Questions 5 & 6) in addition to demographic information and informed consent forms. We collected data between March and September 2015, mostly in classrooms or school environments from forty-one high schools located in fourteen cities. The implementation of the survey lasted approximately thirty minutes.

We implemented a three-stage qualitative content analysis (Bilgin, 2006; Harré, 1997) to the data by using an open coding technique (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Initial codes were reviewed at the first stage; then, a three-step hierarchy such as subthemes, themes and categories were generated at the second stage independently. At the third stage, each of the researchers re-coded randomly selected twenty percent of the others' codes (Haley, Thomas, Petre & De Roeck, 2008). Interrater reliability is calculated as 91.5% ( $AC_1 = .915$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.89, .94]), and then, we examined the relationship between demographics and categories through chi-square analysis by using SPSS software.

## Results

### Frequencies of Categories

#### 1. What does peace mean?

We generated 794 codes, 65 subthemes, 24 themes, and 11 categories from answers to the first question. The most frequent themes about the meaning of peace were in categories of "Quality of Life" ( $F = 240$ , 30.5%), "Interpersonal Relationships" ( $F = 228$ , 28.9%) and "Symbols" ( $F = 73$ , 9.3%). "Countries/Systems" ( $F = 7$ , 1.3%) and "Absence of Negativity" ( $F = 11$ , 2.1%) were the least frequent answers to this question.

#### 2. Are we in peace?

Eighty participants answered "Yes" ( $F = 80$ , 16.3%) while 352 participants answered "No" (71.5%) to this question. The ones that are not sure constituted "Relatively" ( $F = 51$ ; 10.4%) category. Nine participants (1.8%) did not answer this question (i.e., "Don't know" category).

#### 3. What should be done to achieve peace?

We generated 729 codes, 75 subthemes, 24 themes and 10 categories out of the answers to this question. "Ideals Bring Peace" ( $F = 184$ , 24.2%), "Possible/Impossible Peace", ( $F = 145$ , 19.1%), "Peace through Social Transformation" ( $F = 91$ , 12.1%) were the most frequent categories while "Utopia & Dystopia" ( $F = 13$ , 2.4%) and "Ideological Peace" ( $F = 14$ , 2.6%) were the least frequent ones.

#### 4. Whose responsibility is the most to establish the peace?

We generated 714 codes, 47 subthemes, 15 themes and six categories out of the answers to this question. "Humanity" ( $F = 310$ , %44), "State" ( $F = 234$ , 33%) and "National Authorities" ( $F = 65$ , 9%) were seen as the most responsible agents for the peace. The least common categories were "Peace People" ( $F = 5$ , 1%), which refers to either peace activists or anti-peace supporters, and "Other" ( $F = 52$ , 7%) which was constituted by answers that do not comply with other categories.

#### 5. What can you do to achieve peace?

We generated 608 codes, 67 subthemes, six themes and five categories out of the answers to this question. Since this question asks about individual efforts, the most frequent category was "Individual-Level Changes" ( $F = 167$ , 31.21%), followed by "Abstract Attempts" ( $F = 124$ , 23.17%) which refers to vague efforts about peace and "Societal-Level Changes" ( $F = 103$ , 19.25%) which refers to the efforts that can be done in favour of peace collectively.

#### 6. Is peace important in your daily life?

Two-hundred-eighty-nine participants answered "Yes" (54.1%), 117 participants answered "No" (21.9%), and 18 participants answered "Partially" ( $F = 18$ , 3.4%). There were 67 irrelevant answers marked as "Out of Category" (12.52%), while 44 participants (8.2%) did not answer the question at all.

### Gender Differences

We found gender differences in the distribution of themes. In the third question, women used "Individual Transformation" and "Ideals Bring Peace" themes more than men [ $\chi^2 (9, N = 513) = 18.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. In the fourth question, women employed "Humanity" more than men while men employed "State," "Peace people" and "Other" more than women as the responsible agents [ $\chi^2 (5, N = 519) = 35.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

In the fifth question, regarding individual responsibility, men employed more "Concrete Solutions" category while women's responses accumulated more in "Interpersonal-Level Changes" category [ $\chi^2 (4, N =$

528) = 26.27,  $p < .001$ ]. Besides, women answered less negatively than men to the sixth question ( $\chi^2(4, N = 528) = 20.34, p < .001$ ).

### Age Differences

In order to analyze age differences, we created a categorical dummy variable by the median of age (16.00). In the first question, participants under sixteen used less “*Quality of Life*” and “*Social order*” themes than the ones over sixteen. On the other hand, they referred to “*Interpersonal Relationships*” category more than older ones [ $\chi^2(10, N = 500) = 30.62, p < .01$ ].

Another significant difference between ages was observed in the third question. While responses of participants over 16 accumulated less in “*Societal Suggestion*” category, they were more in “*Ideals Bring Peace*” category [ $\chi^2(9, N = 510) = 17.39, p < .05$ ]. Another significant difference between age categories was in the fifth question. While responses of participants over 16 were less in “*Societal Suggestion*” category, they used more “*Ideals Bring Peace*” as an effort towards peace [ $\chi^2(9, N = 510) = 17.39, p < .05$ ].

### City and Region Differences

There was a significant difference in the first question between participants who live in villages and cities. Participants who live in villages indicated “*Interpersonal Relationships*” more than others [ $\chi^2(20, N = 501) = 52.75, p < .001$ ].

Another significant difference was between participants who live in different regions. Participants from western Turkey referred to “*Symbols*,” “*Countries/Systems*” and “*Quality of life*” categories more than the ones who live in other regions, and they referred less to “*Interpersonal Relationships*” [ $\chi^2(30, N = 486) = 56.30, p < .01$ ]. In the fourth question, a significant difference revealed that participants who live in eastern Turkey used “*State*” theme more. In contrast, the ones from western Turkey used more “*International Authority*” as the responsible agent for peace [ $\chi^2(18, N = 501) = 34.27, p < .01$ ].

## Discussion

Youth in Turkey explains peace through a peaceful and safe life, constructive close or societal relationships. Our findings reveal that social representations of peace among secondary education students are mostly in line with Galtung’s (1985) positive peace concept. However, the path to peace is possible through an ‘ideal’ human or life among the youngsters. Therefore, peace is possible through positive interpersonal and societal relationships instead of solely individual efforts. On the other hand,

participants refer to an impossible peace concept along with pessimist and destructive ideas. Besides, peace also is perceived in terms of social change and rights-based improvements. These diverse peripheral elements of representation of peace are compatible with previous studies (see Sarrica, 2007; Sarrica & Wachelke, 2010; 2012, Van der Linden & Licata, 2012). Yet, different from previous studies, we also found some novelties: the concept of peace is based on social transformation and interpersonal relationships in terms of rights and principles instead of a utopic harmony. Second, ideological peace is also found as another peripheral element (e.g., Kemalist, Islamist, or Federative). Furthermore, for the first time, we revealed the attributions of responsibility towards peace. For instance, participants raised an abstract social agent under “*humanity*” or “*all of us*” themes referring to groups or categories which participants are still feeling a member, or “*all of the people*” or “*everyone*” themes referring to an external and ambiguous group and finally “*society, the people, the nation*” referring collective structures that allow participants to exclude their responsibility.

Our findings partly confirm gender differences (Sarrica, 2007) since we do not find differences in the concept itself but other aspects of peace. Women were focusing more on concrete suggestions and interpersonal relations than men. They also bear responsibility by employing humanity instead of abstract concepts and institutions. We also showed that age was an important factor when it comes to peace that it becomes more complex by age (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998). Lastly, location affected both content of and attribution of responsibility towards peace. In western Turkey, peace seemed to be more symbolic and related to the quality of life, whereas youngsters from eastern Turkey envisaged a more interpersonal peace under the responsibility of the state.

This study demonstrates that peace should be evaluated as a dynamic process rather than a stable state. In Turkey, it is essential to diversify peace education programs according to region, age, and gender. It should be noted that the distribution of the regions is not equal and there was a political turmoil around the resolution process in Turkey during the data collection that obscure the generalizability of our findings.

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