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Discriminatory Attitudes Relationship to Attachment Styles, Self-construal and Sociodemographic Variables in University Students

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Abstract

Forms of discrimination such as racism, homophobia, and sexism have been negatively affecting the individuals that are being exposed to these both in daily life and in public aspect. In this study, the relationship between discriminatory attitudes, attachment styles, self-construal and sociodemographic variables were examined. Differences in discriminatory attitudes in terms of gender and class level variables were also investigated. The sample of the study consisted of 279 university students attending the different departments of a faculty of education in a public university in Turkey. The data were collected with Sociodemographic Data Form, Discriminatory Attitudes Scale, Relational, Individual and Collective Self-Aspects Scale and Relationship Scales Questionnaire. The data were analyzed via SPSS software. According to the results of the study, homosexual discrimination is significantly and positively related to relatedness sub-scale of Self-Aspects Scale. Discrimination against woman was found as significantly and positively related to secure attachment style, on the other hand secure attachment style was found as significantly and negatively related to discrimination against foreigners. The socio-demographic variables like religiosity, political ideology, the level of contact with different cultures and a number of the books read within a year were found as significantly related to discriminatory attitudes. Also, differences in discriminatory attitudes by gender and class level were found. In relation with these findings, suggestions for further studies were presented.

Keywords: discrimination; discriminatory attitudes; university students; education;

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1.Introduction

The culture we grow in offers a framework of reference for each of us as to how we perceive the world and the others. Culture is an important factor determining our attitudes towards what is different from us. Within a specific culture, thoughts are developed towards different cultural groups through both the process of socialization and the influence of mass media. These thoughts are often not products of arduous efforts, but are based on mental estimation of what the individuals in that culture look like. Often different groups are categorized, and certain features are generalized to that group by ignoring individual differences. This economic, categorizing and generalizing tendency of the human mind can lead to discrimination between "us" and "others" and the development of hostile attitudes towards individuals from different cultures (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2012; Plous, 2003; Stangor & Thompson, 2002). Discrimination, one of the elements of the outgroup hostility, refers to negative behaviors towards individuals from different cultural groups stemming from the fact that they belong to the certain cultural group (Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 2003). To ignore the existence of people because of their race, ethnicity, gender, or any cultural group membership, not to make eye contact with them, to prevent them from accessing some opportunities, to support traditional racism or anti-immigration policies are examples of such negative behavior (Al Ramiah, Hewstone, Dovidio & Penner, 2010). Despite a more sensitive and tolerant approach is adopted today towards many cultural groups that have clearly been discriminated, ostracized and ill-treated in the past, researches show that discriminatory practices towards some groups (women, social classes, ethnic, racial and religious minority groups) are still valid (Carliner, Sarvet, Gordon & Hassin, 2017; Hood, Bradley & Ferguson, 2017; Layton & Smith, 2017; Mantey, 2017). Individuals exposed to discrimination have to cope with the resulting psychological and physical health problems (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes & Garcia, 2014; Schunck & Reiss, 2015; Vaclair , Marques, Lima, Abrams, Swift & Bratt, 2015).

It has been shown that education, together with politics, business life, society and family life, is one of the areas in which discriminatory behavior is valid (English, Lambert & Ialongo, 2016; Esen, 2013; Hood, Bradley & Ferguson, 2017; Umana- Taylor, Wong, Gonzales & Dumka, 2012). Students are exposed to discriminatory behaviors and practices at school from other students, teachers and other school personnel (Mantey, 2017). Discrimination in schools can be seen in the forms of unfair punishment of students due to a certain cultural group membership, preventing access to academic resources, giving them bad names, using humiliating language or making unfair evaluations (Byrd & Andrews, 2016). Racial/ethnic and gender-based discrimination is more prevalent than other forms of discrimination in schools (Byrd, Carter & Andrews, 2016) while the risk of depression (Cristini, Scacchi, Perkins, Santinello & Vieno, 2011), social externalization, dropping out of school, decrease in academic achievement (Umana-Taylor et.al, 2012), involvement in crime (Le & Stockdale, 2011) and the deterioration of school-family interaction (Iruka, Curenton & Eke, 2014) increases for discriminated students. Even though they are fair when evaluating student achievements, teachers cause students from different ethnic origins to underperform their abilities by developing negative attitudes and creating low expectations against them (van Ewijk, 2011).

Teachers may reflect their attitudes towards different cultures to their professional practices as a product of their own cultures The research carried out in Turkey in recent years show that the students report the practices related to gender-based discrimination in schools (Esen, 2013), teachers have a tendency to stigmatize in the prejudice dimension (Yaman & Gungor, 2013), teachers perceive discrimination from other teachers and managers in terms of political opinion, socioeconomic status, gender, and marital status. Also, the discrimination exists among the teachers and the students in terms of socioeconomic status and physical appearance (Kepenekci & Nayır, 2014). The discriminatory

attitudes that teachers have, as mentioned above, can cause psychological, social and academic problems in the students who are exposed to it, and students can also prepare an atmosphere conducive to the development of prejudices and negative stereotypes towards different cultures. This seems to make it important to address the variables that can affect the discriminatory attitudes of teachers and prospective teachers. Based on this, it is aimed in this research to examine the discriminatory attitudes of the prospective teachers and the variables related to these attitudes. It is expected that the research will contribute to the content of the studies to be made for reducing the power such negative attitudes and give students' awareness of their discriminatory behaviors during the university education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The research was performed in the spring term of the 2014-2015 academic year with the participation of 279 students from different undergraduate programs of education faculty of a state university located in the northeast of Turkey. 68.1 % of the participants are female, and 31.9% of them are male. The distribution in respect of ethnic origin is as 83.9% Turkish, 9% Kurdish, 3.6% Laz and 3.5% other nationalities and ethnicities (Turkic States, Circassian, Zaza and Hamsheni). 15.7% of the students are studying at 1st grade, 22.6% of them at 2nd grade, 34.1% of them at 3rd grade, and 27.6% of them at 4th grade. 76.2% of the students have reported that they are coming from middle income families.

2.2. Procedure

The permits required for the collection of data were obtained from the faculty. The measurement tools were applied within a one week period during course hours by the researcher. After determining the aim of research and that the participation in research is on voluntariness basis, the measurement tools were provided to the volunteering students. All students gave their informed consent prior to take part in the study as a source of data. The students answered all the questions within a period of about 40 minutes.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

2.3.1. Sociodemographic Data Form.

Sociodemographic Data Form was prepared by the researcher. It consisted of questions relevant to students' gender, class level, ethnic origin, GPA, religiosity, political ideology and number of books read within one- year period. In the determination of political ideology, a rating from 1 to 7 (1= excessively conservative, 7= excessively liberal) was used. The religiosity level was rated in the same manner from 1 to 7 (1= very low, 7= very high), and it was required from the students to select the degree that suits them. GPA was taken as measure for academic achievement and it was determined according to the 4.00 grading system.

2.3.2. Discriminatory Attitudes Scale

The scale was developed by Gomleksiz, Poyrazlı and Vural (2008). The scale used in the study was a five-point Likert scale, which consists of 21 items. The scale consists of four factors as discrimination

against homosexuals (Cronbach's alpha= .88), discrimination against women (Cronbach's alpha= .87), discrimination based on race-ethnicity and religion (Cronbach's alpha= .61) discrimination against foreigners Cronbach's alpha= .51). In this study, total point obtained from the scale is also used and Cronbach's alpha value of whole scale was calculated to be .87.

2.3.3. Relational, Individual and Collective Self-Aspects Scale

The scale was developed by Kashima and Hardie (2000) in order to assess the self-construal. Relational, Individual and Collective Self-Aspects Scale consists of 10 questions (30 items in total) as "I regard myself as..." and each reflecting the three self-construal dimensions as "someone with his or her own will, individual (individualistic), "a good partner and friend (relational)", a good member of my group (collectivistic)". The scale is a seven-point Likert type (1= Definitely don't agree, 7= Completely agree). The scale was adapted to Turkish by Ercan (2011). In the adaptation study, the Cronbach Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated as .73 for the individualism sub-scale, .68 for the relatedness sub-scale, .77 for the collectivism sub-scale, and .86 for the whole scale.

2.3.4. Relationship Scales Questionnaire

This questionnaire of 30 items was developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) in order to assess the attachment patterns of adults. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Sumer and Gungor (1999) through a study performed with university students. It is being expected from the participants to answer the phrases such as "I don't easily trust people", "I know that I'll find people by me when I need" by using a 7 point rating system (1= Definitely doesn't define me, 4= Partially defines me, 7= Completely defines me). The scale consists of four factors namely secure, fearful, dismissive and preoccupied attachment styles. In the reliability studies of the scale, the reliability values for test-retest were found in between .54 and .78.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using SPSS, version 15.0. Descriptive statistics were used in obtaining sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used in determining the relationship of religiosity, political ideology, academic achievement, self-construal and attachment styles and number of books read within a one year period to discriminatory attitudes. One-way ANOVA was used in the determination of differences in respect of class level in discriminatory attitudes. And the differences based on gender were determined by independent samples *t* test.

3. Findings

3.1. Correlation between study variables

According to the results of the Pearson correlation as can be seen in Table 1, academic achievements were not found as significantly related to the discrimination types. Religiosity was found as significantly and positively related to discrimination against women ($r=.23$, $p<.01$) and discrimination against homosexuals ($r=.14$, $p<.05$). On the other hand, political ideology (the level of perceived liberalism) were significantly and negatively related to the discrimination against woman ($r=.12$, $p<.05$) and discrimination against homosexuals ($r=.14$, $p<.05$) The contact level with different cultures was found as significantly and positively related to discrimination against woman ($r=.15$,

$p < .01$) but negatively related to discrimination based on race/ethnicity ($r = .13$, $p < .05$) and discrimination against foreigners ($r = .13$, $p < .05$). The number of the books read within one year period was found as significantly and negatively related to discrimination against homosexuals ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$). As for attachment styles, secure attachment style was found as significantly and positively related to discrimination against women ($r = .16$, $p < .01$) and negatively related to discrimination against foreigners ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$). Only relatedness subscale of self-construal was found as significantly related to discrimination types, with discrimination against women ($r = .13$, $p < .05$).

3.2. Differences in Discriminatory Attitudes in terms of Gender

The results of the independent samples t-test presented in Table 2 showed that discrimination against homosexuals ($t = -2.47$, $p < .05$), discrimination against women ($t = -7.97$, $p < .01$), and discrimination against foreigners ($t = 2.92$, $p < .01$) differ in terms of gender. According to the results, male students have significantly higher scores than female students in discrimination against homosexuals and woman, on the other hand females' discriminatory attitude scores to foreigners were found significantly higher than males.

Table 1. The Results of Independent Samples t-test Regarding Differences in Discriminatory Attitudes by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	X	Sd	df	t	p
Discrimination against homosexuals	Female	190	23.01	6.14	167.87	-2.47	.01**
	Male	89	24.99	6.31			
Discrimination against woman	Female	190	18.52	5.72	174.54	-7.97	.00**
	Male	89	24.36	5.64			
Discrimination based on race-ethnicity and religion	Female	190	8.80	3.03	161.83	.32	.74
	Male	89	8.67	3.24			
Foreigner discrimination	Female	190	7.36	2.61	175.44	2.92	.00**
	Male	89					

** $p < .01$

3.3. Differences in Discriminatory Attitudes in terms of Class Level

According to the results of the One way ANOVA as can be seen in Table 3, only discrimination against woman differs in terms of class level ($F_{(3/275)} = 4.86$, $p < .01$). The source of this difference was examined with LSD multiple comparison test, and it was found that the freshmen's discrimination against woman scores is significantly lower than the senior students' scores.

Table 2. The Results of One Way ANOVA Regarding Differences in Discriminatory Attitudes by Class Level

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Discrimination against homosexuals	Between groups	280.78	3	93.59	2.42	.06
	Within group	10602.66.08	275	38.55		
	Total	10883.45	278			
Discrimination against women	Between groups	557.89	3	185.96	4.86	.00**
	Within group	10516.19	275	38,24		
	Total	11074.08	278			
Discrimination based on race-ethnicity and religion	Between groups	4.94	3	1.64	.17	.91
	Within group	2662.46	275	9.68		
	Total	2667.41	278			
Foreigner discrimination	Between groups	12.25	3	4.08	.58	.62
	Within group	1908.81	275	6.94		
	Total	1921.06	278			

**p<.01

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the present study show that level of religiosity is significantly and negatively related to discriminatory attitudes towards women and homosexuals. In studies conducted with individuals from different religions (Muslim, Christianity, Judaism), there was a positive relationship between sexism and religiosity (Burn & Busso, 2005; Gaunt, 2012; Maltby, Hall, Anderson & Edwards, 2010; Tasdemir & Sakalli-Ugurlu , 2010). From this point of view, the findings of the present study are similar to the related literature in terms of the relationship between religiosity and discrimination against women. In addition, it has been reported that sexism is addressed in the dimensions of benevolent and hostile sexism while religiosity has a positive relationship mostly with the benevolent sexism (Burn & Busso, 2005; Gaunt, 2012) and the relationship between religiosity and sexism is more visible in males than in females (Maltby et.al., 2010; Tasdemir & Sakalli-Ugurlu, 2010). In studies examining the relationship between homosexual discrimination and religiosity, religiosity has been shown to be associated with negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Johnson, Brems & Alford-Keating, 1997; Schwartz & Lindley, 2005; Whitley, 2009). In the religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, sexual relations between individuals of the same sex are banned and considered "sin" (Marsh & Brown, 2011). Therefore, it is expected that as the level of religiosity of a person from a certain religion increases, he or she will develop attitudes respecting to the ban and restrictions of the religion. The positive relationship between the level of religiosity and discriminatory attitudes toward homosexuality is interpreted in this way. On the other hand, in this research, discriminatory attitudes towards women and homosexuals have been found to have lost their power as the degree of

perceived liberalism increases. Political viewpoints have been dealt with in many researches related to attitudes toward different cultural groups (Christopher & Mull, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Laythe, Finkel & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Woodford et al., 2012) and in general, the level of liberalism appears to be related to positive attitudes towards women, homosexuals and individuals from different races/religions. Conservatism is characterized by features such as resistance to evaluating and considering new views and perspectives, loyalty to the social traditions, and exclusion and condemnation of members of the community who contradict them (Laythe et al., 2001). Liberals, on the other hand, generally tend to believe in equality, take into account different alternatives to moral, religious and political issues, and have a tolerant attitude (Chambers, Schlenker & Collisson, 2013). In this research, the negative relationship between the degree of liberalism and the discrimination of women and homosexuals, supporting of past research findings, can be interpreted by the liberals' flexibility and tolerance in moral and political matters and belief in the equality.

In the present study, the level of interaction with the individuals from different cultures, as it is expressed by participants, was found to be significantly related only to discrimination towards women from the sub-dimensions of discriminatory attitudes, which is unexpectedly a positive relationship. In recent years, in the context of multicultural perspective, gender and sexual orientation have also been considered as cultural identity descriptors, and the gender issue is evaluated within the context of multiculturalism. It has been shown that negative attitudes towards different racial and ethnic origins (racism, social prejudice) are related to negative attitudes towards women and homosexuals (Ficarrotto, 1990; Sidanius, 1993). When examining theoretical views on the level of cultural interaction, it is concluded that the level of cultural interaction will reduce prejudice and discrimination among different cultures in the presence of certain conditions and change the direction of the attitude to positive (Allport, 1980, as cited in Aronson et al., 2010). Therefore, the finding that the level of cultural interaction is positively related to women's discrimination appears to be inconsistent with the relevant literature, despite there is no fully comparable research. The number of books the participants read in the last year was found to be negatively related to homosexual discrimination. In this research, the number of books read in the last one year was considered as an element of intellectual ability and it was aimed to reveal how they relate to discriminatory attitudes. Sidanius and Lau (1989) argue that the more cognitively complex the individual is, the less extreme and polarized of their political and social attitudes will be. From this point of view, as the number of books read in the last year increases, it is possible that students are more likely to encounter more events, situations and characters in the books; therefore, their attitudes could become more flexible against different situations and individuals.

In the present study, only secure attachment style showed a significant relationship with discriminatory attitudes. Secure attachment was found to be significantly and positively related to the discriminatory attitudes toward women, and negatively related to the foreign discrimination. The relevant literature suggests that discriminatory attitudes are more frequently observed in insecurely attached individuals (Boag & Carnelley, 2012; Boccato, Capozza, Trifiletti & Bernardo, 2015; Gormley & Lopez, 2010; Hostra, van Oundhoven & Buunk, 2005). In a similar study, it was found that sexism scores were higher in individuals with insecure (fearful and avoidant) attachment styles (Okutan & Buyuksahin-Sunal, 2011). Therefore, the positively related relationship between secure attachment style and discrimination against women found in the current research seems to be contradictory to the related literature. Gender discrimination includes hostile sexism, which is about seeing women as at a lower status, weaker than men and dependent on men, and benevolent sexism having milder prejudices towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1997), including protection, glorification and love of women. Based on this, it can be stated that the positive relationship between secure attachment and

female discrimination in this study may be due to benevolent sexist tendencies of securely connected participants.

There are opinions in the literature that the ingroup-outgroup distinction is clearer in collectivist cultures (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2004; Kagitcibası, 2012). In this study, among the dimensions of relatedness, individualism and collectivism that constitute self-construal, only the relatedness dimension showed a significant relationship with discriminatory attitudes; and a significant and positive relationship is found between relatedness and discrimination against woman. The individualism dimension of self-expression expresses the dimension reflecting the individual's unique and peculiar characteristics, which are different from others. The dimension of collectivism reflects the symbolic value between the individual and the community. The dimension of relatedness covers the individual's relation and identification with individuals in the vicinity (Ercan, 2013). It is the self-definition of the individual by referring to the criteria of relationship with others, the quality of these relationships, interpersonal roles, and the straits that the individual shares with those important to him (Kashima & Hardie, 2000). Despite the many anti-sexist policies and practices nowadays, the discriminatory attitudes of the significant proportion of the young people against women show that they have prejudices supporting the possible patriarchal family structure (Aslan, 2015). It is likely that an individual with a clear relational self-construal share a traditional viewpoint of friends and families on gender, because of the selfdom perception based on relationships and common straits with the people important to him/her. The relationship between relationality and discriminatory attitudes towards women is explained in this way.

In this study, male students were found to have significantly stronger discriminatory attitudes toward homosexuals and women, on the other hand, females were found to have significantly higher discriminatory attitudes towards foreigners. The findings about male students' higher discriminatory tendencies toward homosexuals and women is similar to the previous research findings. Homophobia (Mestvirishvili, Zurabishvili, Iakobidze & Mestvirishvili, 2016) is observed more common in males than in females. The social dominance tendency, which perceives that the cultural groups they belong to are superior, appears to be higher in men than in women (Sidanius, Pratto & Bobo, 1994). This ingroup and outgroup distinction which is more evident in males may lead to the fact that males have stronger discriminatory attitudes towards different sexual orientations and women. Females' stronger discriminatory tendencies towards foreigners than males can be explained by the fact that traditional gender roles. In many cultures, women are raised as they need strong security and protection (Taylor, Peplau and Sears, 2003). Female students' stronger discrimination tendency towards foreigners may be the result of this strong sense of security and protection. Another finding of the study shows that only the discriminatory attitudes towards women differ at the class-level. The discriminatory attitude scores of the 1st year students to women were significantly lower than the scores of the 4th year students. In a study conducted by Akar-Vural and Gomleksiz (2010), it is reported that there is no significant difference between the discriminatory attitude scores of university students in the first and fourth years. The discrimination against women refers to the exaggeration of biological differences between sexes, the combination of male gender with the power and status and seeing the women socially, politically and economically dependent on men and in a lower status than men (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Therefore, the findings of the current research on women's discrimination and class- level show that the students' gender role attitudes shift towards traditional throughout the four years. However, since the study was not conducted in longitudinal design, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the students in the 1st and 4th years have different intellectual competencies, personality traits and cultural backgrounds as well as the role of the university education.

This research was an effort to examine the variables relevant to discriminatory attitudes of the university students against women, homosexuals and individuals from different racial/ethnic origins and religions. Selecting the research sample from a single faculty is a limitation. However, it was found that variables such as religious orientation, political opinion, the level of interaction with different cultures, the number of books read in the last one year, attachment styles and self-construal were related to discriminatory attitudes, and discriminatory attitudes vary with the gender and the year level. Based on these findings, it may be suggested that the students should be given awareness on their beliefs and attitudes against different cultures and help them to question their negative beliefs and attitudes against the different one, theoretically and practically with courses having relevant content during the undergraduate education. In addition, since the students would much possibly encounter and work with the individuals who are different from them in terms of ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, socioeconomic level, etc., it seems important to include a course in the undergraduate education to develop awareness, knowledge and skills in students regarding cultural differences.

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