

GENDER PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

Recently, “gender” has become one of the most frequently addressed terms to explain the inequalities between women and men. It has become the center of attention because it explains the inequalities between women and men not in terms of biological differences but instead in terms of social and cultural differences. This study tries to determine the gender perceptions of preservice teachers through the views of 647 preservice teachers. The most significant finding of the study is that gender perceptions of the preservice teachers support the patriarchal structure. The results of the study show that, among the male and female preservice teachers, gender perceptions of male preservice teachers reflect a stronger traditional view which seems to support inequalities.

Key words: *gender roles, woman, inequality, preservice teacher.*

JEL Classification: Z19

1. INTRODUCTION

The term gender, unlike biological gender, is defined as “gender position” or “gender identity” which is determined socially and culturally, and therefore its scope may change historically and from one society to another. With this meaning, gender not only determines the gender difference but also unequal power relationship between genders (Berktay, 2000:16). Thus, difference between women and men is constructed socially and culturally as well as biologically; and it includes identity features and roles relevant to women and men (Dokmen, 2004; Kirman, 2004; Johnston et.al., 2001). Because of this, gender is not a simple “socializing” process that would be called as woman’s roles and man’s roles. It is a term that is formed according to and reproduced by different power relationships in the society.

The role of education in the reproduction of gender roles and their transmission to coming generations can not be ignored. Educational systems form a microcosmos

of the gender system of the society, and give legitimacy to existing social relationships and practices (Tan et.al., 2000:25). White emphasizes that no curriculum, policy or program is innocent ideologically or politically; and curriculum is interconnected with social class, culture, sex, and power issues (McLaren, 1989:185). However, education contains within itself the potential of providing a climate for women to become aware of their power and the mechanisms that weaken their power, as well as the potential of reproducing traditional sexist attitudes (Tan et.al., 2000:26). Thus, it is expected that individuals should have a more equitable and non-traditional perception related to areas such as social life, family and marriage. However, in Turkey with traditional social structure, the position of women is determined substantially by these traditional roles and status. Family, husband and children determine the borders of desired living space of women. It is so that, housework, child care, and preparing spouse for reproduction would be seen as the reasons for the existence of women. Although equal in number, representations of two genders in social context and professional life differ (Aslan, 1997).

There are various studies related to gender roles in literature (Rosenkrantz et.al., 1986; Trommsdorf and Iwawaki, 1989; Kimberly and Mahaffy, 2002; Keith and Jacqueline, 2002; Vefikuluçay et.al., 2007; Yılmaz et.al., 2009). This study aims to determine the gender perceptions of Gaziosmanpaşa University Education Faculty final year students and preservice teachers taking pedagogical formation training at the same university.

2. METHOD

The study is in survey model. Population of the study includes a total 971 final year students, and preservice teachers attending pedagogical formation program in 2010-2011 educational term at the Gaziosmanpaşa University Education Faculty. Data were collected directly from the population without any sampling. Questionnaire was used to collect data¹. The questionnaire consisted of two parts; personal information of the students in the first part, and perceptions of the students about roles were tried to be determined using a total 26 statements. Five point likert scale was used. Questionnaire was applied by the researcher between 6-17 May 2011, and 647 final yera students and preservice teachers out of 971 were reached. Thus, the percentage of participants reached was 67%.

¹ The research titled "Views of the University Students about Gender Roles" (Yılmaz, D.V., Zeynepoğlu, S., Kocaöz, S., Kısa, S., Taşkın, L., Eroğlu, K., 2009) was used in the development of the questionnaire.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows 15 (SPSS 15) was used in the analysis of data. Frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic data were obtained, and these data were used to describe the population. Gender role perceptions of preservice teachers were determined according to their agreement to the statements. Attention was given to whether their perceptions differentiate according to their gender. Independent Samples t-Test technique was used for differentiation analysis because data were continuous and in equal intervals, and comparisons were in the form of groups of two. This analysis was performed in the scope of students' professional lives and social lives. In the statistical analysis, significance level was taken as $\alpha = .01$.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Findings Related to Demographic Data

Of the students participating in the study, 59.7% were women, 40.3% were men, and 92.4% were unmarried. Average age of the students was 23.2 years, average house income was 1,535 TL., and average number of sisters and brothers was 3 excluding the student herself/himself.

3.2. Views of the Students about Gender Roles

Table 1 shows the views of the students about statements regarding professional life according to their genders. The response of female students to the statement "Women should get permission to work from their husbands" was 46.6% strongly disagree while 64.8% of the male students responded to this statement as undecided, agree, or strongly agree. "A woman does not need to work if her husband is well off" statement was strongly disagreed by 59.3% of the female students, and agreed or strongly agreed by 31.6% of the male students. One fourth of the female students and half of the male students strongly agreed on "Men should be given priority to get a job in times when unemployment is high" statement. "The reason for the classification of professions as woman's and man's professions is that women and men have different skills from birth" statement received responses of agreed or strongly agreed by 38.4% of female students and 55.8% of male students. "Men are more suitable for management positions because they have decision making skills" statement was strongly disagreed by 58.5% of the female students whereas it was agreed or strongly agreed by 47.6% of the male students. "Between women and men working at the same status, it is normal to give priority to men in promotion" received response of strongly

disagree from 79.2% of female students, and agree or strongly agree from 14,7% of male students.

Table 1. Distribution of the Students About Statements Related to “Professional Life” According to Their Genders

Statements	Gender		1 ²	2	3	4	5	Total
Women should get permission to work from their husbands.	F	N	179	124	57	13	11	384
		%	46.6	32.3	14.8	3.4%	2.9	100.0
	M	N	26	66	41	26	102	261
		%	10.0	25.3	15.7	10.0	39.1	100.0
A woman does not need to work if her husband is well off.	F	N	229	85	35	17	20	386
		%	59.3	22.0	9.1	4.4	5.2	100.0
	M	N	81	68	29	21	61	260
		%	31.2	26.2	11.2	8.1	23.5	100.0
Men should be given priority to get a job in times when unemployment is high.	F	N	125	89	56	50	61	381
		%	32.8	23.4	14.7	13.1	16.0	100.0
	M	N	44	25	28	35	126	258
		%	17.1	9.7	10.9	13.6	48.8	100.0
The reason for the classification of professions as woman’s and man’s professions is that women and men have different skills from birth.	F	Nr	46	101	89	68	79	383
		%	12.0	26.4	23.2	17.8	20.6	100.0
	M	N	31	42	42	53	92	260
		%	11.9	16.2	16.2	20.4	35.4	100.0
Men are more suitable for management positions because they have decision making skills.	F	N	221	69	53	19	16	378
		%	58.5	18.3	14.0	5.0	4.2	100.0
	M	N	47	33	54	60	62	256
		%	18.4	12.9	21.1	23.4	24.2	100.0
Between women and men working at the same status, it is normal to give priority to men in promotion.	F	N	301	43	21	6	9	380
		%	79.2	11.3	5.5	1.6	2.4	100.0
	M	N	142	43	36	17	21	259
		%	54.8	16.6	13.9	6.6	8.1	100.0
Professions such as teaching and nursing are more suitable for women.	F	N	83	89	78	59	75	384
		%	21.6	23.2	20.3	15.4	19.5	100.0
	M	N	46	57	62	34	57	256
		%	18.0	22.3	24.2	13.3	22.3	100.0
Policy is more of a man’s profession.	F	N	165	98	56	37	27	383
		%	43.1	25.6	14.6	9.7	7.0	100.0
	M	N	70	43	45	46	56	260
		%	26.9	16.5	17.3	17.7	21.5	100.0
Women can not give orders to men in professional life.	F	N	300	47	26	7	5	385
		%	77.9	12.2	6.8	1.8	1.3	100.0
	M	N	121	35	55	23	27	261
		%	46.4	13.4	21.1	8.8	10.3	100.0

² Numbers assigned to the agreement levels; “1” Strongly disagree, “2” (Tend to) Disagree, “3” (Neither agree nor disagree)Undecided, “4” (Tend to) Agree, “5” Strongly agree.

Responses to the statement “Professions such as teaching and nursing are more suitable for women” were agree or strongly agree by 34.9% of female students and 35.6% of male students. Female and male students showed similar tendencies regarding this statement. “Policy is more of a man’s profession” statement received responses of strongly disagree by 43.0% of female students and agree or strongly agree by 39.2% of male students. It was observed that one fourth of female students gave the response of strongly agree. “Women can not give orders to men in professional life” statement received strongly agree response from 1.3% of female and 10.3% of male students.

According to the results of t-Test performed on the average points regarding the perceptions of preservice teachers about gender, differences between female and male student responses to 8 out of 9 statements related to professional life were found statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The only statement related to professional life where there were no differences was “Professions such as teaching nursing are more suitable for women” ($t_{(638)} = 1.02$; $p < 0.01$). Female students ($\bar{X} = 2.88$) and male students ($\bar{X} = 2.99$) had “Agree” response with similar values.

Table 2 gives the views of the participant students related to the statements regarding social life according to their genders. “In a low-income family, only boys should be educated” statement received strongly disagree response from 90% of female and 79.1% of male students whereas “Head of the family should be the man” statement received agree or strongly agree response from 11.2% of female and 54.4% of male students. Responses to “Women should not live alone” statement were agree or strongly agree by 22.2% of female and 54.2% male students. The percentage 22.2% by female students is a significant finding for this statement. Again, “Women should not go out alone at night” statement received strongly agree response by 18.8% of female and 43.8% of male students which is a significant rate. While “Female patients should not be examined by male doctors” statement received the response “strongly disagree” from 71.6% of female and 52.7% of male students, “Women are more emotional, dependent and passive” statement received agree or strongly agree response from 25.2% of female and 46.1% of male students, and “Men are rational and more ambitious” statement received agree or strongly agree response from 15.1% of female and 52.0% of male students. Responses to the statement “I would not feel uncomfortable by the presence of colleagues with different sexual preferences at the school I will work” were “strongly disagree” by 27.5% of female and 39.8% of male students, and to the statement “I would not feel uncomfortable by the

presence of students with different sexual preferences at the school I will work” were also “strongly disagree” by 27.8% of female and 41.0% of male students. There were statistically significant differences ($p < .01$) between genders in 8 out of 10 statements related to social life. In two statements “I would not feel uncomfortable by the presence of colleagues with different sexual preferences at the school I will work” ($t_{(644)}=1.31$; $p < .01$) (female: $\bar{X}=2.65$; male: $\bar{X}=2.49$), and “I would not feel uncomfortable by the presence of students with different sexual preferences at the school I will work” ($t_{(644)}=0.89$; $p < .01$) (female: $\bar{X}=2.59$; male: $\bar{X}=2.49$), female and male students gave similar responses of agreement.

Views of the students related to statements regarding “Social Life” according to their genders are given on Table 3. “The most important duty of woman is to take care of her children and family” statement received agree or strongly agree response from 28.8% of female and 56.6% of male students, “Working prevents woman from being a good mother” statement received agree or strongly agree response from 7.8% of female and 41.3% of male students. “Giving birth to a male child raises the status of woman” statement received strongly agreed response from 1.8% of female and 5.0% of male students. Of the 94.6% of female and 92.3% of male students gave strongly disagree response to the statement “It is normal for a man to cheat on his wife” while 4.2% of male students gave agree or strongly agree response to the same statement. “The woman to be married must be virgin” statement received strongly disagree response from 40.5% of female students and strongly agree response from 67.2% of male students.

Table 2. Distribution of the Students Related to Statements Regarding “Social Life” According to Their Genders

Statements	Gender		1	2	3	4	5	Total
In a low-income family, only boys should be educated.	F	N	343	29	6	1	2	381
		%	90.0	7.6	1.6	.3	.5	100.0
	M	N	204	15	19	15	5	258
%		79.1	5.8	7.4	5.8	1.9	100.0	
Head of the family should be the man.	F	N	198	92	52	17	26	385
		%	51.4	23.9	13.5	4.4	6.8	100.0
	M	N	48	39	32	38	104	261
%		18.4	14.9	12.3	14.6	39.8	100.0	
Women should not live alone.	F	N	112	105	80	38	47	382
		%	29.3	27.5	20.9	9.9	12.3	100.0
	M	N	29	47	43	40	101	260
%		11.2	18.1	16.5	15.4	38.8	100.0	
Women should not go out alone at night.	F	N	93	105	73	41	72	384
		%	24.2	27.3	19.0	10.7	18.8	100.0
	M	N	26	47	39	33	113	258
%		10.1	18.2	15.1	12.8	43.8	100.0	
Female patients should not be examined by male doctors.	F	N	275	67	28	5	9	384
		%	71.6	17.4	7.3	1.3	2.3	100.0
	M	N	137	44	30	19	30	260
%		52.7	16.9	11.5	7.3	11.5	100.0	
Women are more emotional, dependent and passive.	F	N	96	105	87	54	43	385
		%	24.9	27.3	22.6	14.0	11.2	100.0
	M	N	27	52	60	53	66	258
%		10.5	20.2	23.3	20.5	25.6	100.0	
Men are rational and more ambitious.	F	N	116	126	79	35	22	378
		%	30.7	33.3	20.9	9.3	5.8	100.0
	M	N	24	42	57	68	65	256
%		9.4	16.4	22.3	26.6	25.4	100.0	
I would not feel uncomfortable by the presence of colleagues with different sexual preferences at the school I will work.	F	N	106	95	82	33	69	385
		%	27.5	24.7	21.3	8.6	17.9	100.0
	M	N	104	53	33	14	57	261
%		39.8	20.3	12.6	5.4	21.8	100.0	
I would not feel uncomfortable by the presence of students with different sexual preferences at the school I will work.	F	N	107	110	69	31	68	385
		%	27.8	28.6	17.9	8.1	17.7	100.0
	M	N	107	44	39	18	53	261
%		41.0	16.9	14.9	6.9	20.3	100.0	

Table 3. Distribution of the Students Related to Statements Regarding “Private Life” According to Their Genders

Statements	Gender		1	2	3	4	5	Total
The most important duty of woman is to take care of her children and family.	F	N	84	115	75	64	47	385
		%	21.8	29.9	19.5	16.6	12.2	100.0
	M	N	23	41	49	47	100	260
		%	8.8	15.8	18.8	18.1	38.5	100.0
Working prevents woman from being a good mother.	F	N	172	113	70	20	10	385
		%	44.7	29.4	18.2	5.2	2.6	100.0
	M	N	47	63	42	51	56	259
		%	18.1	24.3	16.2	19.7	21.6	100.0
Giving birth to a male child raises the status of woman.	F	N	337	33	7	2	7	386
		%	87.3	8.5	1.8	.5	1.8	100.0
	M	N	192	29	16	10	13	260
		%	73.8	11.2	6.2	3.8	5.0	100.0
It is normal for a man to cheat on his wife.	F	N	365	16	4	0	1	386
		%	94.6	4.1	1.0	.0	.3	100.0
	M	N	241	5	4	6	5	261
		%	92.3	1.9	1.5	2.3	1.9	100.0
The woman to be married must be virgin.	F	N	156	49	49	32	99	385
		%	40.5	12.7	12.7	8.3	25.7	100.0
	M	N	25	17	18	25	174	259
		%	9.7	6.6	6.9	9.7	67.2	100.0
Only male children should have the right to have the decedent's estates.	F	N	362	18	2	1	1	384
		%	94.3	4.7	.5	.3	.3	100.0
	M	N	218	9	17	7	9	260
		%	83.8	3.5	6.5	2.7	3.5	100.0
Using violence by man on woman in the institution of marriage could be acceptable when he is right.	F	N	338	35	10	0	2	385
		%	87.8	9.1	2.6	.0	.5	100.0
	M	N	167	50	29	9	6	261
		%	64.0	19.2	11.1	3.4	2.3	100.0
Woman should keep it as a secret if she is beaten by her husband.	F	N	315	47	12	1	7	382
		%	82.5	12.3	3.1	.3	1.8	100.0
	M	N	172	37	26	10	11	256
		%	67.2	14.5	10.2	3.9	4.3	100.0

“Only male children should have the right to have the decedent’s estates” statement received strongly disagree response from 94.3% female and 83.8% male students whereas “Using violence by man on woman in the institution of marriage could be acceptable when he is right” statement received undecided, agree, and strongly agree from 3.1% of female and 16.8% of male students. “Woman should keep it as a secret if she is beaten by her husband” statements was undecided, agreed or strongly agreed by 5.2% female and 18.4% male students. There were statistically significant differences ($p < .01$) between genders in 7 out of 8

statements related to private life. “It is normal for a man to cheat on his wife” statement did not differ according to gender.

4. DISCUSSION

Except some privileges women had in the historical process, women have been pushed aside almost always in political, social and economic life; have not fully used the opportunities to educate and develop themselves; and have not been able to use some of their rights in community legal order. After the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, conditions of women improved rapidly both in professional and social life with the rights given to them. However, they have not come through their subordinated position. Male-dominant point of view has its rules from professional life to social life. This point of view highlights the traditional roles of women and approach them with these roles, and therefore it values women as far as they are “good mothers” and “good wives”. The same point of view shows its effect in labor market where “female-specific” and male-specific” professions are defined. The low level of education women have supports their subordinated position and affects the employment types available for women. This process regarding women starts with different upbringing styles of girls and boys in the family, and adopted gender roles are supported and enhanced within the educational system. Gender prejudice is reproduced in the context of curriculum, course books, and teacher attitudes within the educational system. This condition, directly related to the formation of gender in individuals, prevents women from benefiting from human rights equally with men.

The study examines the perceptions of preservice teachers in three dimensions: professional life, social life, and private life (family and the institution of marriage). One of the significant findings of this study is that male students have more traditional points of view than female students, and these points of view support the gender discrimination. Also, it was found out from the results of the study that some of the common perceptions supporting gender inequality are adopted by female and male students similarly. For example, statement “Professions such as teaching and nursing are more suitable for women” where there were no statistically significant differences related to professional life was agreed in similar ways by both female and male students (Table 1). In fact, in a study by Gönüllü and İçli (2001), women thought teaching and civil service as suitable professions for girls, and medicine, engineering and attorneyship for boys. However, statistics related to teaching show that there are limited number of women in the administration level of these professions. According to data from

the year 2007, while 49% of the teachers at elementary schools were women, only 8.8% of the headmasters at the same level schools were women. Data supporting gender inequality is not limited to this profession. It is also quite similar in public sector. Again, according to data from the year 2007, there are no woman governors or undersecretaries. Female deputy governor is 1.2%, female deputy undersecretary 2.5%, and female district governor is 1.8% (KSGM, 2008:49). Traditional point of view describing woman with her household responsibilities, and discriminatory practices in labor market, along with the low level of education women receive have important role in participation of women in labour force and employment. It is quite clear that teachers have a significant role in the transmission of this traditional view to coming generations. Results of this study are similar to the results of studies conducted by Vefikuluçay et.al. with final year students of Kafkas University (Vefikuluçay et.al., 2007), and Yılmaz et.al. with final year students of Hacettepe University (Yılmaz et.al., 2009). Same statements were used in both studies, and male students were found to have more traditional points of view than female students which is the same with this study.

One of the areas where gender discrimination is the most intensely experienced is the social life. It is possible to suggest that male participants of the study have a more traditional points of view than female participants. Here, an important finding is the low tolerance level of preservice teachers towards their colleagues or students with different sexual preference which does not change with gender (Table 2). The level of agreement regarding statements “Women are more emotional, dependent and passive” and “Men are rational and more ambitious” is important as it reflects a point of view which may affect the women’s position in both professional and social life. It is thought provoking that one fourth of male students reported strong agreement to both statements. Female and male students showed a more equitable point of view in statements such as “In a low-income family, only boys should be educated” and “Female patients should not be examined by male doctors”, a significant portion of both sexes reported disagreement regarding these statements. On the other hand, although preservice teachers disagreed with the statement “In a low-income family, only boys should be educated”, educational indicators are not supportive to this result. According to 2006 data, while the percentage of illiterate men is 4%, the percentage of illiterate women is 19.6% among the population above the age of 15. Difference between the percentages of girls and boys accessing education increases to the disadvantage of girls with the increase in education level starting from the elementary school in formal education. Responses of male students to the

statements “Women should not live alone” and “Women should not go out alone at night” being “strongly agree” with the percentages of respectively 38.8% and 43.8% are significant in that they show that women have some hardship in social life. It is even more worrying to know that the owners of those responses are going to start teaching in a few months.

According to Savran (2004:97), problems encountered in private life and characterized as individual are actually various facets of an entire social dominance system. These facets of the mentioned social dominance system were tried to be observed in the statements related to “private” life in the study.

Women’s position in private life is not an egalitarian reflection like in professional and social life. Responses to the statements “The woman to be married must be virgin” being “strongly agree” with the percentages 67.2% by male and 25.7% by female students are significant as they show that women are socialized by accepting sexual discipline and oppression mechanisms. In traditional societies like Turkey, women are brought up with such disciplined culture that they become their own guardian. Women internalize many values like “virginity” in the name of “decency” and “morals” which is in a way the reproduction of patriarchal system using women. Thus, there are number of studies showing the importance of virginity for both women and men (Öztürk, 1998; Gürsoy, 2004; Doğaner et.al., 2006; Dinçer, 2007; Vefikuluçay et.al., 2007; Yılmaz et.al., 2009). One of the prejudices traditional culture is most seen is the claim that working prevents woman from being a good mother. Present study confirms that this claim is accepted significantly especially by male students. Percentages of responses given to the statements “The most important duty of woman is to take care of her children and family” (female students: 12.2%, male students: 38.5%), and “Working prevents woman from being a good mother” (female students: 2.6%, male students: 21.6%) are noteworthy. On the other hand, violence against woman is one of the main issues in many developing and developed countries. According to 48 studies covering whole world population, 10-69% of women are subject to violence by their husbands or partners (Kong et.al., 2002). According to a study covering 1800 married women from 56 provinces in Turkey, one of each three women is subject to physical abuse, but nine tenth of women think it is not fair (Altınay, Arat, 2008). It is possible to suggest from the results of the present study that perceptions of preservice teachers related to violence against women are not in compliance with the traditional structure. The statement “Using violence by man on woman in the institution of marriage could be acceptable when he is right” received strongly

agree response from 2 of 338 female and 6 of 167 male students. Contrary to this, according to the findings of Turkey Population and Health Research (TNSA) conducted by Hacettepe University in 2003 with 8075 married women, 39% of women think that “woman can be beaten by her husband if she deserves it” (TNSA, 2003). In the present study, the statement “Woman should keep it as a secret if she is beaten by her husband” statement received strongly agree response from 7 of 315 female, and 11 of 172 male students. These findings are consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Altınay and Arat (2007). Their study revealed that majority of women did not perceive “domestic violence” as an issue to be solved within the family. The low level of agreement among the preservice teachers to this statement complies with the findings of the related study.

Views of preservice teachers, who have the potential power of affecting coming generations through educational system, related to gender roles are important in terms of overcoming inequality, and upbringing generations who are sensitive about gender. The study showed that male students have views supportive of more traditional and patriarchal structure than female students. The view that traditional patriarchal relationship types would be changed and give way to egalitarian approaches is not realistic. However, it is clear that there should be a starting point to change these relationship types. There may be two ways for that. First, teacher training programs should be revised with a gender equality perspective, and universities should have a budget to support projects related to elimination of gender inequality. Second, This issue should be emphasized by organizing symposiums and panels by the universities, especially educational faculties.

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