



## The Predictive Role of Homophobia and Unconditional Self-Acceptance on Respect of Differences in Psychological Counselor Candidates

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**Abstract:** This research was conducted to investigate the predictive role of homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance on respect of differences in psychological counselor candidates. Participants were 239 psychological counselor candidates. The Respect of Differences Scale, the Homophobia Scale, and the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Scale were used to collect the data. Path analysis was used to determine the influences of variables on respect of differences. The independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to determine differences between participants in terms of gender and grade. The results of the analysis indicated that homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance are predictors of respect of differences, and place of living and traditionally have an indirect effect on respect of differences. In addition, female participants reported a higher level of respect of differences than male participants. Similarly, first year college students reported a higher level of respect of differences than fourth year college students.

**Keywords:** *Homophobia, unconditional self-acceptance, respect of differences, path analysis.*

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### Introduction

The differences among the individuals and the attitude towards the differences are getting more important in recent times. As a matter of fact, diversities and differences are no longer regarded as threats to the integrity and unity, but rather they have been seen as social richness. In this line, living together with individuals with different characteristics has become a requirement rather than an option. However, this requirement has brought up some issues related to sustainability of social order such as acceptance of differences and non-conflict. The easiest way to achieve this is to assimilate the concept of multiculturalism and to be able to respect the differences (Ferguson, 2008). Multiculturalism is to be aware of language, religion, race, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, disability and other cultural values (APA, 2002). Since, each community has different traditions, customs, institutions, values, thoughts behaviors and political practices; multiculturalism requires the different demands to have to be fulfilled under equal conditions (Ozben, 1991). The multicultural understanding referred to here is not only the respect of differences but also for ensuring the legal equality (Ozdasik, 2009).

When the literature is examined, it is seen that the concept of "difference" is often used to specify the differences of human characteristics. Differences include several concepts such as identity, experiences, ethnic or geographic background, beliefs, values, age, gender, political perspective, work experience, physical competence, educational status, family status, personality and lifestyle (Foxman & Easterling, 1999). Differences have three components: innate differences, acquired differences and organizational differences. Innate differences include gender, race, age, ethnicity, mental/physical competences, and sexual orientation. Such differences have an important influence on the shaping basic self-esteem and world-view. Acquired differences include location, religion, work experience, education, socioeconomic status, marital status, family status, and income level. Organizational differences include the field of study, seniority, union membership and department (Oksuz & Guven, 2012). Differences are also classified as information-based differences, social category differences and value differences. Information-based differences are differences which are based on knowledge and point of view that individuals have in the group such as level of education, work experience, and expertise. Social category differences include certain differences between individuals

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such as race, gender, and ethnicity. Value differences are the differences that emerge when the group's goals are different from their aims and mission (Jehn, Nortcraft & Neale, 1999)

It is stated that respect of differences is not a positive or negative attitude towards the actions of an individual but, on the contrary, it is accepting the differences as a natural process, not attributing them to the individual and respecting the individual differences. Therefore, respect for differences contains the autonomy of the individual (Guven, 2012). Respect for differences necessitates communicating in a proper way with a respectable object or person and a certain value attitude towards respectable object or person and to be aware of this value that directs a person to do a certain behavior (Raz, 2001).

Homophobia is a construct that is thought to be related to respect for differences. The concept of homophobia, which expresses negative attitudes towards individuals with different sexual orientation, can be handled with respect to differences. Variety reactions and approaches have been exhibited in various societies towards homosexuality (Guney, Kargi & Corbaci-Oruc, 2004). While some cultures have an accepting attitude toward them, in many societies homosexuals face negative attitudes, problems and are treated badly and are suffered oppression (Baird, 2004; Selek, 2001). The most common examples of homophobia are negative emotions, attitudes and/or behaviors towards people with different sexual orientations and identities such as homosexuality, bisexuality, and transsexuality (Budak, 2003). Based on this, cultural and social norms tend to define sexual tendencies except heterosexuality as sexual perversion and exclude them (Goregenli, 2004). This definition and exclusion triggers negative stereotypes and attitudes towards homosexuals and causes them to appear as discriminatory behaviors such as fear, hate, verbal and/or physical violence and threats (Sakalli-Ugurlu & Ugurlu, 2004).

Individuals with different sexual orientations are more at risk because they are exposed to discriminatory behaviors and are more likely to experience problems such as suicide attempts, school dropouts, mental disorders (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). For these reasons, The Psychiatric Association of Turkey and the Sexual Education Treatment and Research Association have held a press conference in 2015 and stated that educational administrators must consider of the physical and psychological developments of homosexual students immediately. However, it was emphasized that educators should be a guide for these young people instead of being a strict advocate of traditional norms. In addition, it is stated that if educators do not have adequate information and are not sensitive about sexual differences, a safe educational environment for these students cannot be ensured and the homophobic attitudes towards these individuals cannot change. In this respect, it is important for psychological counselors not to have homophobic attitudes and to respect differences to both to be role models for colleagues and to provide counseling services at a sufficient level.

Another variable considered to be related to respect for differences is the unconditional acceptance. Unconditional acceptance is classifying "others, self, and life" in an unconditional way. Unconditional self-acceptance is accepting one's own traits, characteristics, achievements and goals without the need for social approval (Ellis, 1973). Respect for differences is related to unconditional acceptance of others, but as far as our knowledge no research has examined the relationship between respect for differences and unconditional self-acceptance. However, it is thought that the ability of individuals to accept themselves unconditionally supports their acceptance of others unconditionally. As a matter of fact, it is emphasized that the "unconditional acceptance of life" and "unconditional acceptance of others" are the basic components of a healthy relationship (Levinson & Ellis, 2005) and for this reason the clients should make an effort to accept themselves unconditionally during therapy sessions (Ellis, 1973). It is also expected that the irrational beliefs which are associated with unconditional self-acceptance (Davies, 2006; Thompson & Waltz, 2008) may have an influence on attitudes and acceptance of differences among individuals.

In short, the attitudes of psychological counselors towards students with different ethnic backgrounds, language, religion, sexual orientation, and cultural characteristics and their level of respect for differences affect the quality of school life and social life of students.

In this context, psychological counselors need to have a high level of respect for differences to support students with different characteristics or traits effectively in their education life and to provide them counseling services at a sufficient level. For this reason, it is important to determine the variables that affect the respect of differences level of the psychological counselor candidates. In this study, the variables that affect the respect of differences level of the psychological counselor candidates were examined and the following questions were answered:

1. What are the levels of psychological counselor candidates' respect for differences, homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance?
2. Do homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance have a predictive role on respect for differences?
3. Does the level of respect for the psychological counselor candidates differ significantly by gender and grade level?

## Methodology

### *Research Model*

This study which aimed to investigate the predictive role of homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance on respect of differences in psychological counselor candidates was conducted according to the general survey model. The general survey model can be defined as a screening approach conducted on populations composing of a large number of people in order to reach a general idea regarding the population. This model is employed by screening the population as a whole or a certain group or sample within the population (Karasar, 2009).

### *Participants*

In this study, convenience sampling method was carried out with 239 university students at Psychological Counseling and Guidance department of a state university in Turkey. In the convenience sampling method which is one of the non-randomized sampling types, sample is selected from the population according researcher's judgments (Hasiloglu, Baran & Aydin, 2015). In this study, because the fit indices of the model were examined by path analysis, the conditions of the number of sample were considered for path analysis. In path analysis, HOELTER value gives the maximum number of sample. In addition chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) value estimates whether the sample is appropriate for the population, and  $\chi^2/df$  value less than 3 indicates that the model tested good fit with the actual data in the event (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In this study HOELTER value was found to be 254, and  $\chi^2/df$  value was found to be 1.43. According to these results, it was assumed that number of sample was proficient.

In the study, 72% of the participants were female (n=172) and 28% of the participants were (n=67). Of the total number of students, 23% (n=55) of the participants were first year college students, 29.3% (n=70) were second year college students, 22.2% (n=53) were third year college students and 25.5% (n=61) were fourth year college students. The mean age of participants was 20.49.

### *Data Collection Tools*

The Respect of Differences Scale, the Homophobia Scale, and the Unconditional Self-Acceptance Scale were used to collect the data.

*The Respect of Differences Scale:* The Respect of Differences Scale (RDS) which was developed by Oksuz and Guven (2012) was used to determine psychological counselor candidates' respect for differences levels. The five-point Likert-type scale had response options ranging from (1) strongly disagree, (5) strongly agree. The 30-item RDS has three subscales: knowledge-based differences, social category differences, value differences. The three-factor structure explained 59.25% of the total variance. Higher scores indicate more respect for differences. The item-test correlations of the thirty items ranged from 0.30 to 0.83. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the RDS was calculated as 0.94, and the concurrent validity coefficient was 0.70. In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the RDS was .78.

*The Homophobia Scale:* The Homophobia Scale (HS) which consist of 25 items developed by Hudson and Ricketts (1980). In the current study, a 23-item Turkish form adapted by Sakalli and Ugurlu (2001) was used. HS items consist of expressions about attitudes towards homosexual individuals and are rated using a six-point Likert-type rating scale with ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). High scores from the scale indicate a high level of homophobia. In addition, by calculating the arithmetic average of the total score obtained from the scale, the participants can be divided into two groups according to their average score based on low and high homophobia levels. The Cronbach alfa coefficient was calculated for the original form and for the Turkish forms respectively as .90 and .94. In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the HS was .95.

*Unconditional Self-Acceptance Scale:* Unconditional Self-Acceptance Scale (USAS) which contains expressions of self-unconditional acceptance of individuals was developed by Kapikiran and Kapikiran (2010). The seven-point Likert type scale has 19 items. The USAS has two subscales which are conditional self-acceptance, unconditional self-acceptance. The two-factor structure explained 36.77% of the total variance. To determine the discriminant validity of UCSAS the Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale, the Autonomy Sociotropy Scale and the Brief Symptom Inventory were used and USAS was found significantly associated with them. Cronbach alfa coefficient of the USAS was calculated as .76 while test-retest correlation was found .62. Item-total score correlations ranged between .40 and .72. In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the USAS was .65.

*Personal Information Form:* A personal information form which was developed by the researcher was used to collect data on demographic variables including age, gender, grade and place of living etc.

### *Data Collection*

The current study was conducted with the ethical permission of the Research Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences. The data collection tools were applied in May 2018. The data were collected from psychological counselor candidates who are studying at the Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department in Samsun. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study by the researcher before the application and all data collected

voluntarily. The instruction about how to respond the measurements were given above the scale. Hard-copy scales were distributed and it took 15 minutes to complete the scale.

### *Analysis of Data*

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the levels of respect of differences, homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance of university students. Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was applied to determine whether the data were distributed normally. It is preferable to use K-S test when the sample size is greater than 35 (McKillup, 2012). According the K-S test results, p-value for RDS was .03 ( $p < .05$ ), p-value for HS .00 ( $p < .05$ ), and p-value for USAS was .20 ( $p > .05$ ). If the calculated p-value is larger than .05, it can be said that the data distributed normally (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). But also in K-S test, it is indicated that the distribution is affected by the sample size and should be used in conjunction with descriptive methods (Sprent & Smeeton, 2007). The analysis of the distributions of the data on the skewness and kurtosis coefficients is defined as descriptive methods (Abbott, 2011). If the coefficients of skewness and kurtosis are between +1 and -1 and are close to 0, the distribution can be accepted as normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In this study, kurtosis and skewness values for RDS scores were calculated as .445 and -.601, for HS scores were calculated as -.746 and -.495, and for USAS scores were calculated as -.146 and .122 respectively. As a result of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients, it was determined that the data have a normal distribution, thus parametric tests were used to analyze the data.

Path analysis was conducted to determine whether homophobia, unconditional self-acceptance, place of living and level of traditionality have a predictor role with respect for differences. Path analysis provides an estimate of the direct effects of the independent variable (e.g., place of living) on the dependent variable (e.g., respect for differences). This method estimates regression coefficients that represent the actor and partner effects, and provides a systematic and comprehensive overview of how these variables directly and indirectly affect each other. To determine the accuracy or strength of assumed relationships between the variables, path analysis was preferred. In addition, Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships among respect for differences, homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance levels of psychological counselor candidates'. The independent sample t-test was used to compare respect for differences scores between the males and females; a one-way ANOVA was used to determine the significant differences between grades. The data were analyzed using SPSS 21 and AMOS 22 statistical package. The significance of the obtained statistics was tested at .05 level. A test of significance was tested at .05 level of probability.

## Findings

### *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables*

Mean scores and standard deviations for all study variables of interest and the correlational relations among these variables are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Correlations among study variables and descriptive statistics for these variable*

	<b>Respect for Differences</b>	<b>Homophobia</b>	<b>Unconditional self-acceptance</b>
Respect for Differences	-	-.540*	.309*
<b>Mean</b>	123.25	94.92	78.26
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	12.252	27.921	10.990

\* $p < .001$

As presented in Table 1, the mean scores of respect for differences were 123.25 ( $Sd=12.252$ ), the mean score of homophobia were 94.92 ( $Sd=27.921$ ) and the mean scores of the unconditional self-acceptance questionnaires were 78.26 ( $Sd=10.990$ ). A negative and significant correlation was found between homophobia and respect for differences ( $r = -.540$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and there was a positive and significant correlation between respect for differences and unconditional self-acceptance ( $r = .309$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### *Results of Path Analysis*

A model based on previous literature on respect for differences has been developed. Direct and indirect effects of variables were acquired by path analysis technique and model fit indices were examined. Structural equation modeling provides a systematic and comprehensive way of addressing a complex research problem in a single process, by modeling the relationships between many dependent and independent variables compared to regression. In addition, the path analysis ensures to minimize the amount of error resulting from the measurement (Yener, 2007). The standardized coefficients of the pathways are shown in Fig. 1.

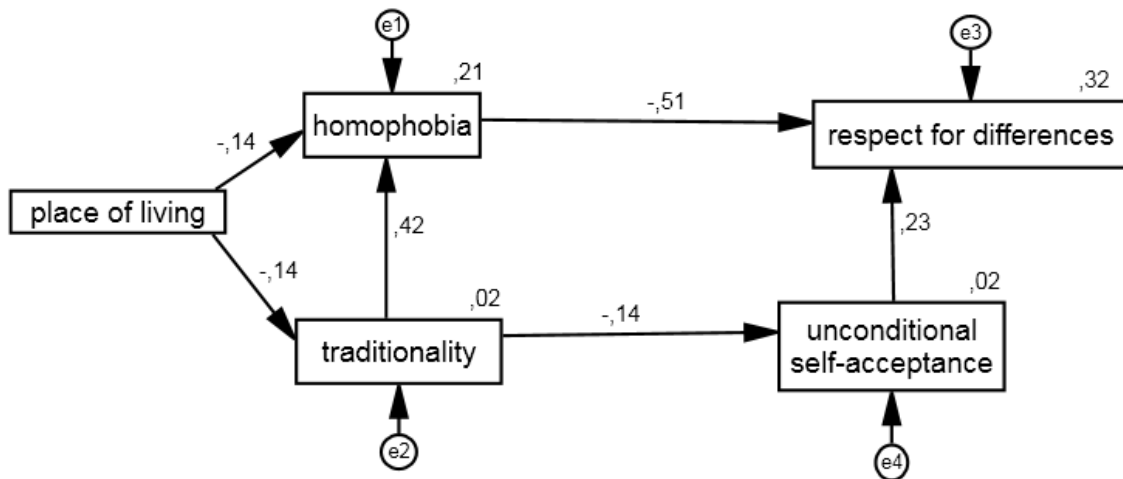


Figure 1. Standardized coefficient values for the model

According to the results of path analysis, the direct effect of the place of living on the homophobia is  $-.14$  ( $p < .05$ ) and the standardized the direct effect of the place of living on the traditionality is  $-.14$  ( $p < .05$ ). While the place of living has no direct effect on respect for differences ( $p > .05$ ), the standardized the direct effect of the place of living on the respect for differences is  $.10$ . The standardized direct effect of the perceived traditionality level on the homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance is  $.42$  ( $p < .001$ ) and  $-.14$  ( $p < .05$ ) respectively. While the perceived traditionality has no direct effect on respect for differences ( $p > .05$ ), the standardized the direct effect of perceived traditionality on the respect for differences is  $-.25$ . The standardized direct effect of the homophobia on respect for differences is  $-.51$  ( $p < .001$ ) and the standardized direct effect of the unconditional self-acceptance on respect for differences is  $.23$  ( $p < .001$ ).

Moreover, place of living and perceived traditionality together explain 21% of total variance of homophobia. This means that place of living and perceived traditionality variables are two of the variables affecting homophobia and explain 21% of homophobia. These four variables (place of living, perceived traditionality, homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance) together explain 32% of total variance of respect for differences. In other words these variables are four of the variables affecting respect for differences and explain 32% of respect for differences. When the factors affecting respect for the differences at a meaningful level are ranked according to importance, "homophobia" is the first and "unconditional self-acceptance" is the second; while the indirectly affecting variables is the "level of perceived tradition" and "place of residence", respectively. Results also indicated that homophobia is the most significant direct predictor of respect for differences, followed by unconditional self-acceptance and the perceived traditionality level is the most indirect predictor of respect for differences, followed by place of living.

In order to assess the validity of this model in path analysis, fit indices were evaluated. The most commonly used goodness of fit indices in path analysis are; the similarity ratio chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, NFI and CFI (Sumer, 2000). The acceptable values of fit indices (Byrne, 2009; Kline, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) and the measurement results obtained in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Values of fit indices and the values of the model

Fit indices	Goodness of fit indices	The acceptable values of fit indices	Values of the Model
$\chi^2/df$	$\chi^2/df \leq 3$	$3 < \chi^2/df \leq 5$	1.436
p	$.05 \leq p \leq 1$	$.00 \leq p < .05$	.219
RMSEA	$RMSEA < .05$	$.05 \leq RMSEA \leq .10$	.043
GFI	$.95 \leq GFI \leq 1$	$.90 \leq GFI < .95$	.991
AGFI	$.90 \leq AGFI \leq 1$	$.85 \leq AGFI < .90$	.964
NFI	$.95 \leq NNFI \leq 1$	$.90 \leq NNFI < .95$	.966
CFI	$.97 \leq CFI \leq 1$	$.95 \leq CFI < .97$	.989

As shown in Table 2, the similarity ratio chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2/df$ ) is smaller than 3 ( $\chi^2/df=1.4336$ ), and the p-value is greater than  $.05$  ( $p=.219$ ). It is estimated that model being tested indicates good fit with the actual data in the event that the rate calculated with path analysis ( $\chi^2/sd$ ) is lower than 3 and p-value is greater than  $.05$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). According to this view this model good fit the actual data. The results of other goodness-of-fit indices are  $RMSEA=.043$ ,  $GFI=.991$ ,  $AGFI=.964$ ,  $NFI=.966$ ,  $CFI=.989$ . All of these values suggest that the model had good fit.

*Results of variance analysis and t-test*

The results of independent sample t-test which shows the difference between male and female psychological counselor candidates with respect to respect for differences are shown in Table 3.

*Table 3. The results of independent sample t-test for respect for differences in terms of gender*

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	df	t	p
Female	172	125.14	11.684	237	3.942	.000*
Male	67	118.39	12.422			

\*p<.000

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the levels of respect for differences differ significantly between male and female psychological counselor candidates [ $t(237)=3.942$ ;  $p<.001$ ]. Female participants have significantly higher mean scores (125.14,  $Sd=11.684$ ) than male participants (118.39,  $Sd=12.422$ ).

The results of the one-way ANOVA which was applied to determine whether the levels respect for differences of psychological counselor candidates differ according to the grade are given in Table 4.

*Table 4. One-way ANOVA results for respect for differences in terms of grade*

Variable	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
Grade	Between Groups	826.762	3	275.587	1.856	.138
	Within Groups	34899.673	235	148.509		
	Total	35726.435	238			

According to the one-way analysis of variance (Table 4) performed to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the groups it was found that the mean respect for differences scores of participants did not differ significantly in terms of grade level [ $F(2,235)=1.856$ ;  $p>.05$ ]. However, the mean scores of participants were also compared by independent sample t-test in the two groups and it was found that the first year college students have significantly [ $t(235)=2.313$ ;  $p<.05$ ] higher mean respect for differences scores (125.67) than fourth year college students (120.66).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The differences can be stated as a combination of several characteristics such as gender, age, language, religion, ethnicity, marital status, experience, beliefs, values, educational status, mental/physical competences, family status, personality, sexual orientation, and lifestyle of any group of individuals (Foxman & Easterling, 1999). These differences shape an individual's basic self-esteem and worldview (Oksuz & Guven, 2012), and respect for differences is important for social-emotional and personality development. According to the findings of this study, the place of living (village, province, etc.) has an impact on traditionality and homophobia; traditionality has an impact on homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance and homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance have an impact on respect to differences. In this respect, it was found that while homophobia and unconditional self-acceptance are the variables that have a direct effect on respect for the differences, traditionality, and place of living have an indirect effect on respect for the differences.

It is an expected finding that place of living where individuals spent most of their lives has an impact on traditionality. As a matter of fact, it was stated that democratic values are more adopted by the people living in the cities (Aydin, 2003) and that the people living in rural areas are more traditional. It was also found that the individuals who grew up in big cities tend to exhibit less discriminatory behavior (Akar-Vural & Gomleksiz, 2010) and are more tolerant of sexual diversity than those who grew up in sub-provinces (Coban, Karaman & Dogan, 2010). Accordingly, it is not surprising that, psychological counselor candidates who spend most of their lives in villages and sub-provinces have more traditional structures and therefore have more homophobic attitudes. Similar to this finding, it was stated that traditional and conservative individuals exhibit more negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Sakalli, 2002a). Hence, homophobia, which includes these negative approaches to homosexuality, takes place in the traditional value system (Santona & Tognasso, 2018) and cultural values shape homophobia (Sakalli, 2002b). In addition, it is noted that individuals with a traditional gender role are less tolerant of homosexuals (Harbaugh & Lindsey, 2015; Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2015; Poteat & Anderson, 2012). In this direction, it can be said that the effect of place of living and traditionality on the homophobia is supported by the previous literature.

The results indicated that unconditional self-acceptance is the other variable that traditionality effected. Self-acceptance can be defined as accepting oneself as a whole person with positive and negative qualities, and involves self-realization of self-esteem (Topses, 2013). Decreasing the level of unconditional of self-acceptance as the level of the traditionality increases can be explained by the humanistic approach. Maslow's definition of "self-actualized person" contains "realistic self-acceptance". The self-actualized person has an ability to grasp the reality as a whole and correct

isn't ashamed because of his/her characteristics and accepts himself/herself as a whole person with positive and negative qualities. In this context, it is thought that the need for self-actualization which contains self-acceptance is a high-level need and does not correspond with the traditional structure.

Results of the analysis indicated that unconditional self-acceptance has a positive effect on respect for differences. Although no research has been found this directly supports this finding, the result can be interpreted in terms of self-acceptance and acceptance of others. Indeed, the definition of self-actualization contains both self-acceptance and acceptance of others (Topses, 2013). Self-acceptance behavior also includes and behaviors to accept others nonjudgmentally and without criticism. Self-acceptance and acceptance of others are the processes which include and cultivate each other (Sherer, 1949; Topses, 2013). It is thought that accepting others realistically, nonjudgmentally and without criticism requires respect for differences, thus unconditional self-acceptance may have a positive effect on respect for differences.

The results of path analysis showed that homophobia is the most significant variable affecting respect for differences. Given that respect for differences also includes respect for sexual differences, it is not surprising that negative attitudes towards homosexuals influence the level of respect for differences. It is also found that psychological counselor candidates have an average level of homophobic attitudes. There are several studies that examined the attitudes towards homosexual individuals (Akdas-Mitrani, 2008; Cirakoglu, 2006; Sakalli, 2002a, 2002b; Sarac, 2012; Sargin & Circir, 2015; Ummak, 2012; Yildiz, Atamer & Yavuz, 2003). Homosexual individuals are exposed to violence, alienated, murdered, ignored, discriminated and are not to let them identify themselves (Selek, 2004). Homophobia can be an important underlying cause of violence and aggression against homosexual individuals. Similarly, in school settings, homosexual students are exposed to homophobic bullying and teachers do not often interfere with such bullying (Guasp, 2012; Rivers, 1996). The homophobic attitudes and behaviors of teachers and psychological counselors affect the social quality of life and school life of homosexual students (Ummak, 2012). For this reason, levels of homophobia and respect for differences are important in order for psychological counselors to serve counseling services to homosexual students effectively.

It was also found that female participants have significantly higher levels of respect for differences than male participants. Contrary to this finding, Coban et al. (2010) found that males and females have similar perceptions and views regarding cultural differences, sexual orientation, religious opinion and gender role differences. In many previous studies on discriminatory, democratic and tolerant attitudes which are thought to be related to respect for differences, it was demonstrated that discriminatory attitudes (Akar-Vural & Gomleksiz, 2010) and negative attitudes towards different sexually oriented individuals of female students are less than males (Sakalli, 2002a; Sakalli, 2002b). Nevertheless, the results of the previous studies which indicated that the democratic attitudes of female teacher candidates are higher than males (Akin & Ozdemir, 2009; Aycan & Calik, 2003; Aydemir & Aksoy, 2010; Erdem & Saritas, 2006; Gomleksiz & Cetintas 2011; Karatekin, Merey & Kus, 2012; Nalcaci & Ercoskun, 2006; Saglam, 2000) are consistent with the findings obtained from this research.

Respect for differences requires to have a respect an individual without attribute the differences to the individual and accepting him/her just as a "human" (Guyen, 2012) and necessitates communication with the respected person in an appropriate way (Raz, 2001). In this regard, it is especially important for psychological counselors to respect for differences in order to provide counseling services at a satisfactory level. In this study, it was determined that the level of respect for differences of psychological counselor candidates is high. This can be accepted as a pleasing result.

While there were no researchers that tried to determine respect for differences level of the psychological counselors in the related literature, some studies focused on the programs that aim to gain students respect for differences (Dilmac, Kulaksizoglu & Eksi, 2007; Ekmisoglu, 2007; Uner, 2011), some others aimed to determine the opinions of the teachers about the cultural differences (Coban et al., 2010; Rengi & Polat, 2014). The studies are conducted mostly based on some concepts such as democratic attitude, tolerance and multiculturalism that are thought to be closely related to the concept of respect for differences (Buyukkaragoz & Kesici, 1996; Ektem & Sunbul, 2011; Ercoskun & Nalcaci, 2008; Genc & Kalafat, 2008; Karahan, Sardogan, Ozkamali & Dicle, 2006; Unlu & Orten, 2013) and it was found that teacher candidates have generally had moderate and high democratic attitudes. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that undergraduate education is important in terms of gaining democratic attitude and tolerance.

The undergraduate program in psychological counseling and guidance in Turkey has several courses where principles, techniques, and skills of psychological counseling are addressed. It is expected that the level of respect for the differences among psychological counselor candidates will increase over the years, considering that the content of these courses includes the concepts of "unconditional respect, unconditional acceptance, and empathy". However, in this study, it was found that the level of respect for the differences of first year college students was significantly higher for the fourth year college students. Although several studies demonstrated that the democratic attitudes of teacher candidates increase depending on age (Karadag, Baloglu & Yalcinkayalar, 2006), and the discriminatory attitudes of teacher candidates decreases over the years (Akar-Vural & Gomleksiz, 2010), some other studies indicated that democratic attitudes of teacher candidates didn't differ in terms of class (Genc & Kalafat, 2008; Yazici, 2011). In a study on "multicultural education" (Unlu & Orten, 2013) that could be considered related to respect for differences, it was

pointed out that teachers who showed negative attitudes toward multicultural education interpreted multiculturalism as separating and disintegrating. From this point of view, the decrease in the level of respect of the fourth year college counseling students to the differences can be interpreted as a reaction to the fear of separation and disintegration.

It is thought that these different results in the literature may be due to the differences in undergraduate programs. Some undergraduate programs in teacher education include courses related to multicultural education which aimed at gaining democratic attitudes, reducing discriminatory attitudes and increasing respect for cultural differences. At this point, it is thought that it is important for psychological counselor candidates to take courses related to multicultural counseling during the undergraduate education in acquiring the skills of respect for differences. Thus, as a result of their education, psychological counselors can contribute to the formation of a democratic school climate by showing respect for differences and will be willing to make a behavioral change that is appropriate for their profession (Unlu & Orten, 2013). It is important for counselors to develop and apply programs that aim to increase respect for differences level in educational settings in order to provide teachers and students to have a respectful and empathetic approach to the individuals with different characteristics (Ekmisoglu, 2007).

The main task falls to educators and school counselors to create an educational environment that respects diversity and reflects cultural diversity (Derman-Sparks, 2010). For this reason, it is important to support and increase the level of respect for differences level of psychological counselors during their undergraduate education. Although the courses in undergraduate counseling education include therapeutic skills such as empathy, unconditional acceptance, and respect, the counselor may experience difficulty in applying these skills during sessions with different clients. For example, a psychological counselor who grew up in an environment where individuals have negative attitudes toward homosexuality may experience difficulty in empathizing with homosexual clients and may not show unconditional acceptance and respect them. It is necessary to help and support psychological counselor candidates to cope with such cases in their undergraduate education. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to give priority to help psychological counselor candidates to acquire multicultural counseling competencies. Thus, it is expected that psychological counselor candidates will be aware of their own values and prejudices and understand the worldviews of clients from different cultures (Kagnici, 2013). There are many studies (Bemak & Chung, 2004; Kagnici, 2011; Kagnici, 2014; McCreary & Walker, 2011) that emphasize the importance of multicultural counseling competencies in psychological counseling education in order to gain these competencies that psychological counselors should have.

In the light of these results, some suggestions for practitioners and researchers can be offered. Firstly, education programs can be designed and implemented to change the attitudes of psychological counselors towards individuals with cultural differences in a positive way. Additionally, some intervention programs can be developed to address the homophobic attitudes of psychological counselors in order to provide a safe educational environment for homosexual students. Thus, psychological counselors who are knowledgeable and sensitive about different sexual orientations can make interventions to change the homophobic attitudes of teachers and students in the school environment and to provide more effective counseling services to homosexual individuals. It should also be taken into consideration that psychological counselor candidates should make practices in different settings where there are individuals from different cultural backgrounds to gain multicultural counseling competencies.

This study was conducted only with psychological counseling students who enrolled in state university which is a limitation of this study. Future studies Future research can be conducted in different universities or different cities and include a larger number of students. The level of respect for the differences of the psychological counselor candidates and the psychological counselors and the influencing factors can be compared. The effect of courses which include multicultural counseling skills on the level of respect for differences of psychological counselor candidates can be examined. It is thought that studies on this topic will contribute to the field.

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