

## *Summary*

# Investigation of Sexual Orientation Discrimination at Work Setting: An Experimental Study

Asmin Güneş Karakaş<sup>1</sup>

Hacettepe University

Selin Metin-Camgöz

Hacettepe University

İrem Metin-Orta

Atılım University

Individuals with different sexual orientations often face prejudice and discriminatory behaviors all around the world. One of the areas they frequently experience discrimination is work setting. In particular, there is an increase in prejudiced attitudes and discrimination toward homosexuals in recruitment, selection, hiring, career and promotion processes in the last few years. For instance, a recent survey including over 3000 LGBT employees across 15 countries and multiple industries report that 58% of LGBT employees keep their sexual orientation or gender identity hidden at work due to concerns about discrimination from managers and colleagues, 42% feel that their career prospects will be worse and 33% feel that they will less likely to get promoted (Vodafone LGBT+ Research, 2018).

Given these adverse consequences, exploring the discrimination toward homosexuals and identifying necessary steps to prevent its negative effects deserves great attention. In this vein, several studies are conducted in Western samples to identify social psychological variables in predicting anti-homosexual attitudes and behaviors (Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006) and a considerable number of studies are conducted to explore wage/earning discrimination based on sexual orientation in labor economic research (Drydakis, 2009). Moreover, those published studies related with sexual orientation discrimination overwhelmingly take the perspective of the discriminated individual (i.e. homosexual employee) but not from the perspective of the potential discriminator (i.e. employer).

Despite those research, there is a very limited number of studies examining sexual orientation discrimination in Turkish samples (Metin-Orta, 2021; Metin-Orta & Metin-Camgöz, 2018; Metin-Orta & Metin-Camgöz, 2020; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006). Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the plausible effect of the sexual orientation of the job candidates in hiring process by using an experimental method. A fictitious job applica-

tion scenario and 4 different fictitious resumes varying on sexual orientation and biological sex were generated in designing the scenario experiment. Becker's (1957) model of taste-based discrimination and Arrow's (1973) model of statistical discrimination constitute the main outcome variables of sexual orientation discrimination.

### **Sexual Orientation Discrimination**

Sexual orientation refers to emotional, romantic and sexual attractions toward an individual (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008). Of various orientations, an individual's emotional, romantic or sexual attractions toward members of the other sex is called *heterosexuality*, those attractions toward members of one's own sex is called *homosexuality*, and those attractions toward both one's own sex and the other sex is *bisexuality*. Unlike heterosexuality, homosexuality is regarded as a deviancy or a disease for a long time (Bayer, 1987; Şenel, 2014). Homosexual individuals face with physical and sexual violence, harassment and discrimination in various areas of social life (APA, 2008). These negative attitudes toward individuals based on their sexual orientation refers to sexual orientation discrimination (Opperman, 2009; Öner, 2015). Individuals with a sexual orientation different than heterosexuality often have to conceal their sexual orientations and gender identities in order to avoid people's negative reactions (Doğan, 2015; Öner, 2015).

### **Economic Models on Discrimination at Work Setting**

The leading economic theories in sexual orientation discrimination are discussed under the theoretical framework of Becker (1957)'s model of taste-based discrimination and Arrow's (1973) model of statistical discrimination. Taste-based discrimination is defined as blinding employers to the (true) monetary costs associated with hiring a minority worker (Baert, 2017). According to Becker's (1957) model, employers act as if the

costs of hiring a minority person pass its actual costs. Similarly, prejudiced co-workers may act as if the wage they get is lower, and customers may act as if the price of good they buy is higher when they have to interact with a minority worker. Even when they are not prejudiced themselves, profit-maximizing employers will take the prejudice of their employees and customers into account when deciding on whether or not to hire a minority worker (Baert, 2017).

According to Arrow's (1973) model, statistical discrimination occurs when employers examine statistics about a group's average performance to predict a particular candidate's productivity as a time-efficient and profit-maximizing response to imperfect information about the actual productivity of the individual job candidate (Baert & De Pauw, 2014). In other words, discrimination occurs when employers use their deficient information about minority job candidates in hiring process as it is an easier and shorter way to evaluate them according to group they belong to, rather than taking risk to hire them without knowing their productivity and stability levels (Baert, 2017).

### Research on Sexual Orientation Discrimination at Work Setting

Early studies on sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace and in the labor market have focused on labor supply (Antecol & Steinberger, 2013), occupational sorting (Antecol, Jong, & Steinberger, 2008), individual and household income, and earning differences (Allegretto & Arthur, 2001; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007; Plug & Berkhout, 2004). However, discrimination also occurs in hiring processes, and in promotion and career opportunities. Accordingly, the first scenario experiment investigating sexual orientation discrimination in hiring process was conducted by Adam (1981). The results showed that when resumes were sent to employers, heterosexual male candidate received a positive response (17% of the cases) more than homosexual male candidate (10%). Similarly, in Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio's (2002) study, heterosexual candidate wearing a hat with 'Texas and Proud' printed received a positive response (56% of the cases) more than homosexual candidate wearing a hat with "Gay and Proud" printed (43%). There findings were further supported by other scholars (i.e. Ahmed, Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2013; Drydak, 2009; 011; Mishel, 2016). In line with aforementioned research, recent studies using scenario experiment showed that heterosexual candidates receive more positive responses than homosexuals (Baert, 2017) and transgenders (van Borm & Baert, 2018). Overall, considerable research reveal that employers favor heterosexuals more than homosexuals in hiring process.

### Hypotheses

The present study investigates the influence of sexual orientation of job candidates in hiring process with a scenario experiment by using fictitious scenarios and resumes. It also examines the effects of participant's (who act as an employer) and candidate's biological sex in hiring process as previous research have demonstrated differential attitudes of men and women toward gay men and lesbians. For instance, in the traditional and patriarchal Turkish society (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1981; Kandiyoti, 1995), men as compared to women have more negative attitudes toward gay men than lesbians since they view gay men as a threat to society due to violation of masculine gender roles (Çırakoğlu, 2006; Okutan & Büyüksahin-Sunal, 2011; Sakallı, 2003; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006). Based on aforementioned studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: The candidate's sexual orientation will influence taste-based discrimination. Homosexual candidates are more likely to be affected by taste-based discrimination.

H1b: The candidate's sexual orientation will influence statistical discrimination. Homosexual candidates are more likely to be affected by statistical discrimination.

H2a: The candidate's sexual orientation and biological sex will influence taste-based discrimination. In comparison to lesbians, gay men are more likely to be affected by taste-based discrimination.

H2b: The candidate's sexual orientation and biological sex will influence statistical discrimination. In comparison to lesbians, gay men are more likely to be affected by statistical discrimination.

H3a: The candidate's sexual orientation, biological sex and the participant's biological sex will influence taste-based discrimination. In comparison to female participants, male participants are more likely to make taste-based discrimination to gay men.

H3b: The candidate's sexual orientation, biological sex and the participant's biological sex will influence statistical discrimination. In comparison to female participants, male participants are more likely to make statistical discrimination to gay men.

### Method

#### Participants

The sample consisted of 224 (113 female and 111 male) graduate students with a potential to be an employer or a HR specialist in the nearest future. The majority of the participants were graduate students in Business Administration ( $n = 168$ ), followed by Psychology ( $n = 12$ ) and other departments ( $n = 44$ ). The mean age was

28 years ( $Range = 21-56$ ,  $SD = 5.08$ ). All participants identified themselves as heterosexuals.

### Materials

**Taste-based Discrimination Scale.** Three items developed by Baert and De Pauw (2014) (i.e., “As an employer I will enjoy collaborating with this candidate.”) was used to assess taste-based discrimination. Participants rated all items on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *totally disagree*, 7= *totally agree*). The overall taste-based discrimination score was generated by averaging three scores, and higher score indicates less discrimination toward the candidate. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale (Cronbach alpha) was .76.

**Statistical Discrimination Scale.** Four items developed by Baert and De Pauw (2014). For example, “This person will deliver the required productivity for this job” was used to assess statistical discrimination. Participants rated all items on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *totally disagree*, 7= *totally agree*). The overall statistical discrimination score was generated by recoding and averaging items, and higher score indicates less discrimination toward the candidate. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale (Cronbach alpha) was .74.

### Procedure

Before data collection, ethical committee approval and permissions from the authors who developed the scales were gathered. Participants were first asked to imagine themselves as an employer in a textile company. Having given qualifications needed for the vacant position of a sales representative/consultant, they were asked to screen the randomly assigned resume of a fictitious job candidate applying for this position. Based on Baert and De Pauw (2014)’s procedure, four fictitious resumes varying on the candidate’s sexual orientation and biological sex were generated: 1) a heterosexual male candidate, 2) a homosexual male candidate, 3) a heterosexual female candidate, and 4) a homosexual female candidate. The homosexual candidates’ sexual orientations were labeled by a line in the ‘Affiliations’ part of the resumes as a member of LGBT Community, head of LGBT Community and member of KAOS GL. Afterwards, they were asked to rate items on taste-based discrimination, statistical discrimination as well as demographic variables and the item for manipulation check.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

First, data were screened for missing values, outliers and normality. The distribution was normal, there were no outliers, and missing values were replaced with

mean scores. Second, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for two discrimination scales, and they were confirmed with three items. Third, correlational analysis was conducted among study variables, and it was revealed that two discrimination scores were positively correlated ( $r = .13$ ,  $p = .04$ ). In addition, gender was negatively correlated with taste-based discrimination ( $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and statistical discrimination scores ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p = .03$ ).

### Hypotheses Testing

**The Effects of Candidate’s Sexual Orientation and Biological Sex.** In order to test main hypotheses of the study (H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b), 2X2 Between-Groups Factorial ANOVA were conducted separately with the candidate’s sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. homosexual) and biological sex (female vs. male) as independent variables; discrimination items and mean scores as dependent variables. As shown in Table 2, the main effect of the candidate’s sexual orientation on taste-based discrimination scores was significant ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 4.21$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). That is, participants evaluating the resume of heterosexual candidate ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) score higher in taste-based discrimination scale than those evaluating the resume of homosexual candidate ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). However, the main effect of biological sex ( $F_{(1, 220)} = .67$ ,  $p = .41$ ) and two-way interaction effect ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 1.73$ ,  $p = .19$ ) were not significant.

When taste-based discrimination items were individually examined, Bonferroni correction was done. It was found that the candidate’s sexual orientation had a significant effect on the 2<sup>nd</sup> item of the taste-based discrimination scale ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 9.21$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ). That is, participants thought that their co-workers would enjoy collaborating with heterosexual candidate ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) more than homosexual candidate ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ). Similarly, the candidate’s sexual orientation had a significant effect on the 3<sup>rd</sup> item of the taste-based discrimination scale ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 8.26$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ) indicating that participants thought that their costumers would enjoy collaborating with heterosexual candidate ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) more than homosexual candidate ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ).

As shown in Table 3, the main effect of the candidate’s sexual orientation on statistical discrimination scores was significant ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 10.33$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ). That is, participants evaluating the resume of homosexual candidate ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) scored higher in statistical discrimination scale than those evaluating the resume of heterosexual candidate ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = .68$ ). However, the main effect of biological sex ( $F_{(1, 220)} = .64$ ,  $p = .43$ ) and two-way interaction effect ( $F_{(1, 220)} = .10$ ,  $p = .75$ ) were not significant.

When statistical discrimination items were individually examined, Bonferroni correction was done. It was found that the candidate's sexual orientation had significant effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> item ( $F_{(1, 220)} = 8.90, p = .003, \eta^2 = 0.04$ ). That is, participants thought that homosexual candidate ( $M = 5.76, SD = 1.10$ ) would show more productivity at work than heterosexual candidate ( $M = 5.32, SD = 1.06$ ). Furthermore, the main effects of sexual orientation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> item ( $F_{(1, 217)} = 8.85, p = .003, \eta^2 = 0.04$ ) and 4<sup>th</sup> item ( $F_{(1, 216)} = 6.61, p = .01, \eta^2 = 0.03$ ) of the scale were significant. Accordingly, participants thought that they would take more risk by hiring a homosexual candidate ( $M = 3.69, SD = 1.79$ ) as compared to hiring a heterosexual candidate ( $M = 3.04, SD = 1.42$ ). Furthermore, a heterosexual candidate ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.27$ ) is thought to be more on sick leave than a homosexual candidate ( $M = 2.49, SD = 1.31$ ).

**The Effect of Participant's Biological Sex.** In order to test other hypotheses of the study (H3a and H3b), 2X2X2 Between-Groups Factorial ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that two-way interaction effect between the candidate's sexual orientation and the participant's biological sex on the 1<sup>st</sup> item of taste-based discrimination scale was marginally significant ( $F_{(1, 217)} = 3.78, p = .05$ ). However, this effect became nonsignificant when Bonferroni correction was used. Moreover, three-way interaction effect between the candidate's sexual orientation, biological sex and participant's biological sex on the 3<sup>rd</sup> item of statistical discrimination scale was marginally significant ( $F_{(1, 213)} = 3.75, p = .05, \eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Similarly, this effect became nonsignificant when Bonferroni correction was used.

## Discussion

This study investigates discrimination toward homosexuals; particularly, the influence of sexual orientation in hiring process. Supporting the first group of hypotheses (H1a and H1b), the results revealed that homosexual candidates face taste-based and statistical discrimination more than heterosexual candidates. In particular, participants thought that their hypothetical co-workers and customers would not enjoy collaborating with this candidate. In addition, they thought that hiring a homosexual candidate would be riskier than hiring a heterosexual candidate. These findings are in line with previous research on taste-based and statistical discrimination (Baert, 2017; Baert & De Pauw, 2014) and other research on discrimination conducted using hypothetical scenarios (Ahmed et al., 2013; Mishel, 2016; Tilcsik, 2011; Weichselbaumer, 2003). On the other hand, homosexual candidates were perceived as more productive than heterosexual candidates.

The results overall did not support the second group of hypotheses (H2a and H2b) proposing two-way interactions between the candidate's sexual orientation and biological sex on discrimination variables. Thus, it is inconsistent with past research in Turkish samples showing that gay men are evaluated less favorably than lesbians (Çırakoğlu, 2006; Sakallı, 2003). Furthermore, the results did not support the last group of hypotheses (H3a and H3b) proposing three-way interactions between the candidate's sexual orientation, biological sex and the participant's biological sex on discrimination variables. It is therefore inconsistent with the notion that men have more negative attitudes toward gay men than lesbians as they pose more threat to masculine gender roles particularly in traditional societies (i.e. Sakallı, 2003; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006).

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected from graduate students, and fictitious scenario was used to assess potential discrimination. In future studies, scholars should conduct research with employers, managers and HR specialists in a real hiring stage of recruitment and selection. Second, the study used resumes of a job candidate as a part of a hiring scenario. Further research may address different methods of recruitment and selection as well as career and promotion opportunities and performance appraisal. Lastly, the study used a vacant position of a sales representative. In future studies, scholars should investigate this issue among different occupational groups.

Overall, this study reveals discriminatory behaviors that homosexual individuals may encounter by using hypothetical scenarios, resumes and an experimental method. The findings of the study contributes to managers and HR specialists in identifying the necessary steps to diminish prejudiced attitudes and behaviors.