



*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article*

## The Cultural Roots of Gender Bias and Horizontal Hostility in the Workplace

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### Abstract

A healthy workplace is an environment where everyone can work peacefully with both sexes, regardless of their roles as leaders, subordinates, or colleagues. Unfortunately, achieving this ideal remains elusive, and the situation is more challenging for women, due to their underrepresentation in many industries. Studies have revealed that especially women in management positions are subject to biased evaluations by their subordinates, colleagues, and managers. A deep understanding of the cultural underpinnings is essential to fully grasp the existence, prevalence and influence of gender bias in the workplace. Thus, this study aims to impartially investigate the cultural factors that may shape employees' preferences for the gender of their managers, alongside exploring potential biases towards managerial gender from a cultural standpoint. To achieve the research goals, an open-ended survey was administered to 302 professionals in Istanbul. The results indicate a prevalent bias against female managers by individuals of both genders. Moreover, the study uncovers that women are prone to harboring more prejudiced views towards their female peers and superiors. These insights are analyzed through a cultural lens, and recommendations for management are proposed.

**Keywords:** *Gender in Management, Gender Bias, Horizontal Hostility, Stereotypical Sex Roles.*

## İşyerindeki Cinsiyet Önyargısının ve Yatay Düşmanlığın Kültürel Kökleri

### Öz

Sağlıklı bir iş yeri, üst, ast veya aynı seviyedeki iş arkadaşları fark etmeksizin herkesin her iki cinsiyetle de barış içinde çalışabildiği bir ortam olduğu sürece mümkündür. Ne yazık ki, bu idealin gerçekleşmesi zordur ve durum, pek çok sektörde temsil edilmemeleri nedeniyle kadınlar için daha da zorlayıcıdır. Birçok araştırma, özellikle yönetim pozisyonundaki kadınların astları tarafından önyargılı değerlendirmelere maruz kaldığını ortaya koymuştur. Kültürel bağlamı anlamak, iş yerindeki cinsiyet önyargısının varlığını, yaygınlığını ve etkisini tam olarak kavrayabilmek için hayati önem taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, çalışanların yönetici cinsiyet tercihlerini şekillendirebilecek kültürel faktörleri tarafsız bir şekilde incelemeyi ve yönetici cinsiyetine yönelik olası önyargıları kültürel bir bakış açısıyla araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma hedeflerine ulaşmak için, İstanbul'da 302 profesyonele açık uçlu bir anket uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, her iki cinsiyetten bireyler arasında kadın yöneticilere karşı yaygın bir önyargının olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, çalışma kadınların kendi cinsiyetlerinden meslektaşlarına ve üstlerine daha önyargılı yaklaşımlar sergileme eğiliminde olduğunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu içgörüler, kültürel bir lensle analiz edilmiş ve yönetim için öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yönetimde Cinsiyet, Cinsiyet Önyargısı, Yatay Düşmanlık, Kalıplaşmış Cinsiyet Roller.*

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**Atıf/Cite as:** Yanıkoglu, Ö. (2024). The cultural roots of gender bias and horizontal hostility in the workplace. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2024, 42 (2), 341-362.

## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of social sciences, literature indicated that women are often less preferred colleagues, subordinates, and, most critically, managers compared to their male counterparts (Huang, 2016; Riffkin, 2014). In addition, studies have shown that both men and women tend to evaluate female managers more negatively than male managers (Jones & Palmer, 2011; Mizrahi, 2004). This gender bias against women has been attributed to stereotypical sex roles—unconscious mental associations based on gender that emerge from cultural, traditional, normative, and experiential contexts (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017). Society's pervasive gender stereotypes dictate expected behaviors, speech, and attire according to one's assigned sex and these expectations extend into the workplace (Levesque, 2011). This often leads to job segregation, with men predominately in high-ranking positions, while women are more likely to be found in roles that are lower in status and pay (Abadi et al., 2020; Mizrahi, 2004). Consequently, individuals are expected to conform to the stereotypical gender roles associated with their positions (Levesque, 2011). For instance, managerial positions that require significant authority and responsibility have often been associated with men rather than women (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Therefore, when a woman attains a position traditionally held by men or associated with masculine traits, she is often perceived as less successful, given the misalignment between her gender's characteristics and the role's perceived requirements.

Despite progress in various fields, women continue to be underrepresented in executive roles across numerous industries. According to UNESCO (2021), women executives remain a minority, with a 2018 report indicating that only 10% of 5,700 chief executive and financial officers were women (Desilver, 2018). Common expectations suggest that individuals within a minority group might naturally offer mutual support. However, the dynamics among women in the professional realm often reflect a different reality. Historical research has consistently demonstrated a tendency among women to exhibit bias against their female peers (Tanenbaum, 2002), with instances of active undermining and sabotage not uncommon (Heim & Murphy, 2003). Additionally, studies have identified a pattern where women are more inclined to engage in workplace bullying against other women than their male counterparts are (Crothers et al., 2009; Namie, 2021).

Enhancing our comprehension of gender bias is crucial, given its potential adverse effects on women's psychological well-being, performance, and the broader impact on the organizations (Jones et al., 2016). While existing research on gender bias predominantly centers around Western contexts, there's a call for studies on gender bias across diverse cultures (Diehl et al., 2020). Notably, a recent study explored the obstacles encountered by women managers and leaders in Middle Eastern countries, albeit without a specific emphasis on gender bias (Abadi et al., 2020). The study however did not include Turkey, which is partly located in Europe and the Middle East. Turkey is a unique culture combining modern western and traditional Islamic cultures (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2007). In Turkey, although the legal rights of women are sufficient compared to other Islamic countries, labor force participation rates of women are lower than those in Western countries. The societal perceptions of gender roles and gender bias are both influenced and perpetuated by a culture's traditions, norms, and values. Therefore, understanding the cultural context is vital to truly explore and interpret the relevance of workplace gender bias in Turkey, where traditional and cultural beliefs and norms are prevalent.

World Bank statistics reveal that in 2023, the labor force participation rate stood at 35.3 percent for females, compared to 71.6 percent for males. Furthermore, in 2022, women

accounted for only 19.6 percent of senior and middle management positions in Turkey (World Bank, 2023).

Previous research in Turkey has predominantly explored the barriers preventing women from entering the workforce (Tokageder, 2014). While there are studies addressing the "glass ceiling" – invisible barriers hindering women from ascending to top organizational roles – they often overlook an in-depth analysis of gender bias (Aydın & Çam, 2016). Moreover, there's a notable absence of studies examining workplace gender bias from a cultural perspective. Additionally, theoretical examinations of gender bias within the Turkish context are missing, particularly discussions on how women might unknowingly perpetuate biases against their own gender.

In order to contribute to the existing literature, the study first aims to analyse the theoretical perspectives on gender bias, with a particular focus on managerial positions. It then aims to uncover the factors that influence employees' preferences for the gender of their managers, along with their beliefs, opinions, and biases concerning managerial gender, all through the lens of Turkish culture. Furthermore, this research intends to delve into how women may unknowingly perpetuate gender biases that ultimately work against them. Through this multifaceted approach, the study seeks to offer both theoretical insights and practical implications for the realm of workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Various concepts are deeply intertwined with gender bias in the workplace. Among the most common metaphors used are the "glass ceiling," "glass cliff," and "glass walls." These metaphors collectively describe the structural and systemic barriers that women face due to gender bias, which prevents them from achieving equal access to career opportunities and advancements compared to their male counterparts. The term "glass ceiling" refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from ascending to the top roles in organizations (Loden, 1985). Alongside this, the concept of the "glass cliff" describes situations where women are promoted to leadership roles during periods of turmoil or economic downturn, placing them in positions where the risk of failure is heightened and success is particularly challenging (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Similarly, the literature has identified "glass walls" as lateral barriers that further restrict women's career advancement, limiting their movement across different sectors or roles within an organization (Wellington et al., 2003).

Various theoretical frameworks have been employed to discuss the subtle and embedded mechanisms that foster gender bias in the workplace (Seo et al., 2017). Among these, social identity theory suggests that individuals naturally attribute positive characteristics to those sharing their social identity (e.g., same gender) while ascribing negative characteristics to those who do not (e.g., opposite gender) (Tolbert et al., 1999). Similarly, similarity attraction theory posits that people are naturally drawn to and more positively evaluate others who resemble them in certain ways (Byrne, 1971). Furthermore, threat-rigidity theory argues that individuals or groups tend to behave rigidly - not open to learning, not attempting to adapt but relying upon prior assumptions - when they face a threatening situation. For instance, an increase in the number of female managers might be perceived as a threat by those who adhere to stereotypical gender roles. This perceived threat could then lead them to rely on gender stereotypes when evaluating women in managerial positions (Netchaeva et al., 2015).

Furthermore, expectation states theory suggests that societal assumptions and beliefs about a group's capability influence perceptions of individual competence. This theory posits that individuals often assume those with higher status, in this case, men in the workplace, to possess greater competence than their counterparts (Wagner & Berger, 1997). Consequently, men are typically perceived as more competent than women due to their historically higher social status in professional settings (Ridgeway, 2001). Contrarily, women are subject to more rigorous evaluations of their capabilities compared to their male colleagues, reflecting a bias in how competence is assessed across genders (Foschi, 2009; Weyer, 2007). Gender bias in the workplace can further be understood through the lens of role incongruity theory. This theory posits that individuals are more favorably evaluated when their characteristics match the expected roles of their group. According to this perspective, prejudice and bias against female leaders stem from a mismatch between the traits commonly stereotyped as feminine and those traditionally linked to leadership roles. This discrepancy leads to a perception that women are less suited for leadership, fueling gender bias (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Furthermore, according to implicit leadership theory, employees hold implicit expectations and assumptions about the attributes, traits, and behaviors that define an effective leader (Avolio et al., 2003; Eden & Leviathan, 1975). These expectations are considered implicit because they are not explicitly expressed. Such assumptions or leader prototypes often stem from gender stereotypes, shaping how individuals perceive and react to leaders.

Studies have pointed out that expected effective managerial characteristics are culturally embedded (Bierema, 2016; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). These perceptions often correlate with a country's level of gender egalitarianism, defined as the degree to which a society minimizes differences in gender roles and discrimination (House et al., 2004). Gender egalitarianism embodies the principle that all human beings, regardless of sex, should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. In countries with high levels of gender egalitarianism, there tends to be reduced bias against female leaders, alongside a greater inclusion of women in the workforce and in leadership or decision-making positions (Paris et al., 2009). Conversely, societies with low egalitarian values exhibit a pronounced gender role gap and discrimination, where traditional male attributes are more closely associated with successful leadership. In such cultures, given that roles like caregiving, emotional expression, empathy, compassion, and nurturance are traditionally attributed to women, leaders exhibiting these traits are often undervalued. Similarly, women in patriarchal or more conservative cultures experience more significant struggles and explicit gender bias (Basford et al., 2014).

The phenomenon of tokenism theory can also account for the negative evaluation of women leaders. Tokenism refers to a symbolic effort exerted to give the appearance of workplace inclusivity by hiring people from underrepresented or minority groups (Kanter, 1993). Accordingly, women are hired for powerful positions solely based on their gender rather than their actual qualifications, competencies, and abilities (Frankforter, 1996; Mooney, 2005). As "tokens," women's uniqueness in these roles makes them stand out more, heightening their visibility (Taylor et al., 1978). This visibility subjects them to increased scrutiny and performance pressure. Consequently, they often find themselves trapped in the role expected of them due to their token status. As a result, token women are likely to be evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts in similar token positions.

Ironically, it appears that women often exhibit more bias against their same-gender colleagues and managers (Bearman & Marielle, 2014). Research indicates that women have a

tendency to prefer male managers to female ones (Tanenbaum, 2002). This phenomenon is partially explained by system justification theory, which suggests that members of low-status groups (such as those identified by race, gender, or sexual orientation) may internalize feelings of inferiority. They unconsciously reinforce the dominant social system by showing favouritism for other outgroups at the expense of their own group interests (Jost et al., 2002). This especially happens when the system is inescapable and when people feel a deep dependence on the system (Kay & Friesen, 2011).

In addition, research indicates that women managers often display more discriminatory, severe, and negative behavior towards their female colleagues within organizations (Ellemers et al., 2004; Heim & Murphy, 2003). It's also been found that 71% of women reported experiencing bullying by their female peers (Crothers et al., 2009). A more recent study highlighted that women are twice as likely to bully other women compared to men (Namie, 2021). This type of disrespectful or bullying behaviour among women in the organizations is defined as horizontal hostility (Kennedy, 1970; Loya et al., 2006). Oppression theory posits that members of an oppressed, powerless, or marginalized group (e.g., women) may direct their frustrations towards one another instead of uniting against the systemic forces of oppression, such as patriarchal structures (Mooney, 2005). This acceptance of oppressive forces as normal leads to the unconscious displacement of aggression towards peers at the same hierarchical level (Roberts, 1983). Characteristics of the workplace, such as job segregation by gender and limited promotion opportunities for women, may further exacerbate the hostile interactions among women in the workplace (Mizrahi, 2004).

Dominant women in higher positions often engage in oppressive behaviors towards their female counterparts in more vulnerable roles (Rooddehghan et al., 2015). This dynamic is encapsulated in the queen bee phenomenon, where female executives distance themselves from other women upon attaining senior roles and actively hinder their progress within the organization (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Kanter, 1993). In settings where senior positions are limited and competition is intense, female executives and senior managers might worry about being outperformed by their female colleagues. Consequently, they may engage in behaviors that undermine and sabotage other women to secure their own advancement (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Litwin & Hallstein, 2007; Tanenbaum, 2002; Thomas, 2001).

However, some studies have found different results, suggesting that changes in organizational dynamics and leadership demographics might influence traditional perceptions of gender roles in management. Stoker et al. (2012) examined whether an employee's gender, their manager's gender, and the gender ratio of management within an organization influence preferences for feminine characteristics and female leaders. The findings confirmed that while the general stereotype of a manager remains masculine, female employees, those with female managers, and those in organizations with a higher proportion of female managers show a stronger preference for feminine traits and female leaders.

Considering the literature discussed above, it becomes clear that gender bias can significantly impede women's career progression, adversely affecting their success and overall well-being. In response to this issue, there is an intention to carry out an investigation into the factors that influence employees' preferences regarding the gender of their managers. This includes examining their thoughts, opinions, and biases towards managers' gender from the cultural perspective of Turkey, thereby contributing to the existing academic discourse.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Our study utilized a stratified random sampling method to select participants from diverse industries in Istanbul, Turkey, including the service sector. Participants were chosen across various roles, ensuring representation from junior staff to senior management, to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives on gender dynamics in management. Strict inclusion criteria were applied, requiring all participants to be currently employed with a minimum of three years of experience in their field, enhancing the relevance and depth of the collected data. From September 10, 2021, to October 10, 2021, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed via LinkedIn to a final sample of 302 employees. Ethical approval for this study was secured from the Ethics Committee of Özyeđin University, as evidenced by the decision numbered 2022/10 dated June 30, 2022. Sample questions included in the questionnaire are:

- Would you prefer working under a male or female manager, and can you elaborate on your reasons?
- Do you experience different challenges with female managers compared to male managers, or are the issues you face generally similar?

Participants were encouraged to provide detailed responses. A thematic content analysis was performed on the responses collected, identifying specific words and phrases that carried similar meanings to uncover overarching themes (Boyatzis, 1998). This analysis went beyond merely quantifying phrases and words; it also delved into the explicit and implicit meanings present in the data (Guest et al., 2012). The analysis was facilitated by the use of MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program.

As the first step of thematic analysis, an in-depth overview of all the collected data was conducted, and initial notes were taken. Main points and common meanings that recurred throughout the data in relation to the research question were then identified and labelled to describe their content. Subsequently, several codes were brought into common themes. As the final step, each theme was named and defined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The sample involves 158 female and 144 male employees with different titles and from various industries such as finance, banking, aviation, academia, and information technology. In terms of age, most of the participants are between 26-35 years old. The age distribution of the sample can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Age Distribution of the Participants**

Age Interval	%
18-25	17%
26-35	59%
36-45	21%
46-55	3%
56-65	1%

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

A significant portion of the respondents (60.6%) reported that the gender of the manager is irrelevant to them. Among the others, 30.1% expressed a preference for working under male managers, while only 9.3% showed a preference for female managers. When analyzing responses by gender, 39.2% of female respondents indicated a preference for male managers, compared to 5.7% who preferred female managers. Furthermore, 20.8% of male respondents expressed a desire to work with male managers, whereas 12.5% favored female managers (Table 2).

**Table 2: Gender-Based Manager Preference Distribution of the Participants**

Respondents Gender	Manager Gender Preference		
	Female	Male	Doesn't matter
Female	5.7% (9)	39.2% (62)	55.1% (87)
Male	12.5% (18)	20.8% (30)	66.7% (96)

When participants were inquired about their reasons for preferring a manager of a certain gender, some emphasized the positive attributes of their preferred gender, while others pointed out the negative aspects of the opposite gender.

When the participants are asked about the reasons for the manager's gender preferences, some have highlighted the positive sides of their preferred gender, whereas some have highlighted the negative sides of the other (not preferred) gender.

#### 3.1. Female Employees Preferring Male Managers

The responses indicate that women's preference for male managers stems from perceived hostility from female managers, perceived lack of emotional control in female managers, communication challenges experienced with female managers, and perceptions of women's deficiencies in work-related capabilities. Generally, the emphasis is more on the negative traits attributed to female managers than on the positive aspects of male managers.

##### 3.1.1. Perceived Hostility from Women Managers

Among female employees who prefer male managers, various reasons were cited for their choice. Eight respondents noted that female managers are more likely to harass and insult their female subordinates. Eleven respondents reported preferring male managers because they perceived female managers as imposing their egos on other women. Nine mentioned jealousy from female managers towards other women, while four stated that female managers often try to prove their superiority over other female employees. Additionally, another four respondents observed that female managers exhibit greater ambition and competitive behavior towards other women. Three labeled female managers as more arrogant than their male counterparts. Furthermore, seven participants highlighted that conflicts are more common among women, and six noted that male managers tend to be more understanding towards their subordinates. Five respondents mentioned that working with male managers is less stressful, and nine pointed out that male managers are generally more helpful, supportive, respectful, and understanding towards women employees.

### **3.1.2. Perceived Emotional Control Challenges in Women Managers**

Eight female participants highlighted the emotional nature of female managers as a negative trait. Additionally, five participants described women managers as capricious, two perceived them as less objective, and five noted that they struggle to manage their emotions and reactions during stressful situations. Two participants pointed out that personal problems can adversely affect the performance of women managers, and another two mentioned that they are easily offended or upset by comments. Furthermore, four respondents expressed that female managers are more prone to take things personally.

### **3.1.3. Perceived Communication Challenges with Women Managers**

Ten female participants noted that communication is more straightforward with male managers, expressing that they can freely share their thoughts and opinions with them. In contrast, they reported that misunderstandings are more likely to occur with female managers. Thirteen participants mentioned that working with male managers is easier and more comfortable. Additionally, six participants highlighted that male managers are easy to understand, clear, and straightforward, whereas they perceive female managers as more complicated.

### **3.1.4. Perceived Lack of Competence in Women Managers**

Seven participants reported finding male managers more work-oriented. Six participants noted that male managers tend to be more practical compared to female managers, and five participants observed that male managers are more result-oriented. Additionally, five female participants expressed that they perceive male managers as more professional and rational than female managers.

## **3.2. Male Participants Preferring Male Managers**

Based on the responses from male employees who prefer to work with male managers, it appears that their preference stems from perceived shortcomings in women's work-related capabilities, communication challenges experienced with female managers, the egoistic attitudes of female managers, and a perceived lack of emotional control among female managers. Overall, the negative traits attributed to female managers are emphasized more than the positive attributes of male managers.

### **3.2.1. Perceived Communication Challenges with Women Managers**

Thirteen participants reported that communicating with male managers is easier. Additionally, two noted that female managers tend to create a more stressful working environment. Three participants mentioned that male managers are more peaceful and present fewer problems.

### **3.2.2. Perceived Emotional Control Challenges in Women Managers**

Similarly to female participants, four male respondents stated that women managers are more emotional and less rational. Additionally, three mentioned that male managers are more predictable, while they find the reactions and behaviors of female managers to be unpredictable. Four participants noted that female managers tend to transmit more stress to employees, and two described them as capricious. Two respondents highlighted that the performance of male managers is less likely to be influenced by their personal problems.



### **3.2.3. Perceived Lack of Competence in Women Managers**

Among male participants who prefer to work with male managers, eleven mentioned that male managers are more practical and solution-oriented compared to female managers. Additionally, two participants noted that male managers tend to be more analytical.

### **3.2.4. Perceived High Ego in Women Managers**

Additionally, four participants emphasized that women managers exhibit higher egos compared to male managers. Two respondents stated that women managers tend to dominate and oppress other women.

## **3.3. Female Participants Preferring Female Managers**

Based on the responses from female employees who prefer to work with female managers, it is evident that they favor female managers due to their perceived superior soft skills and stronger work-related capabilities compared to male managers.

### **3.3.1. Perceived Enhanced Soft Skills**

Among the female participants who prefer to work with female managers, five emphasized that women managers are more empathetic than male managers, and they find communication with female managers to be more effective.

### **3.3.2. Perceived Superior Work-Related Capabilities**

Nine female participants highlighted the work-related capabilities of women managers, noting that they tend to be more detailed-oriented, possess a multidimensional perspective, and are well-organized.

## **3.4. Male Participants Preferring Female Managers**

Based on the responses from male employees who prefer to work with female managers, it is evident that they favor female managers due to their superior soft skills and stronger work-related capabilities compared to male managers.

### **3.4.1. Perceived Enhanced Soft Skills**

Ten male participants mentioned the soft skills of female managers, highlighting that they are more empathetic and fairer compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, two participants noted that communication is more effective with female managers.

### **3.4.2. Perceived Superior Work-Related Capabilities**

Nine male participants have highlighted the work-related capabilities of women managers, such as being more orderly, more detailed, more disciplined, and having a multidimensional perspective. The summary of findings is available in Appendix 1.

## **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Overall, more than half of the participants expressed no preference regarding the gender of their managers, which could be interpreted as a positive indication of gender neutrality in the workplace. However, it's possible that some participants were reluctant to disclose their true preferences for fear of being labeled as sexist. This is particularly relevant given recent initiatives to increase the number of women in managerial positions and the growing emphasis on gender

equality within organizations. Consequently, people may be hesitant to openly share their views on gender-related issues.

Moreover, a lack of expressed preference does not necessarily mean the absence of subtle gender biases. Research has shown that "unspoken or subtle bias" is widespread, with both women and men harboring covert biases and engaging in discrimination against women in subtle and indirect ways (Torino, 2017). According to the implicit leadership theory, individuals harbor implicit expectations and assumptions about the traits and characteristics that define an effective manager (Avolio et al., 2003; Eden & Leviathan, 1975), which may still subtly influence their perceptions and interactions in the workplace.

Of the participants, 29.5% expressed a preference for male managers, while only 9.2% preferred female managers. Notably, the issue of a manager's gender appears to be more significant for female employees, with 39.2% indicating a preference for male managers. The similarity attraction theory helps to understand why men might favor male managers, as it suggests that individuals are generally more attracted to and positively evaluate others who are similar to them (Byrne, 1971). Additionally, the system justification theory may explain why women might prefer male managers over female ones, proposing that members of minority or less powerful groups might internalize feelings of inferiority and perpetuate dominant social structures by favoring outgroups at the expense of their own group interests (Jost et al., 2002).

It's important to note that both the similarity attraction theory and system justification theory highlight the role of culturally embedded gender stereotypes and expectations in shaping behaviors and perceptions. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted in light of the specific cultural context of the country (Bierema, 2016; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; House et al., 2004). Turkey is characterized by a patriarchal and low egalitarian culture (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2007), and with the majority of its population being Muslim, societal expectations heavily influence gender roles. According to prevalent interpretations of Islam, women are expected to prioritize their roles as obedient wives and mothers (Kagnicioglu, 2017; Küçük, 2013), and their participation in the workforce is considered acceptable only if it does not interfere with their household responsibilities (Abadi et al., 2020; Nasir, 2009). As a result, in Turkey, women's progression to leadership roles is hindered by cultural attitudes and patriarchal prejudices. Even when women attain managerial positions, they are often evaluated less favorably due to these pervasive stereotypes (Yenilmez, 2015).

The responses from female participants who prefer male managers underscore the presence of horizontal hostility among women, aligning with findings from previous research (e.g., Crothers et al., 2009; Heim & Murphy, 2003; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Namie, 2021). According to oppression theory, members of the same oppressed, powerless, and marginalized group often compete against one another rather than uniting against the external forces that oppress them. This suggests that women might unconsciously redirect oppressive behaviors towards other women (Roberts, 1983). Such behavior is indicative of the low egalitarian status prevalent in the country, which is further reinforced by the traditionally masculine traits of the workplace.

In addition, both female and male participants pointed out the negative impacts of what they perceive as the emotional nature of women managers. These perceptions could be influenced by stereotypical gender roles that depict women leaders as more emotional, reactive, and sensitive compared to male leaders. The assumed emotionality of women managers may

lead to perceptions of them being unstable, unreliable, and challenging to communicate with (Gard & Kring, 2007; Heim & Murphy, 2003; Thomas, 2001). Such findings might reflect the characteristics of a low egalitarian country, where feminine traits like caregiving and emotional expression are traditionally ascribed to women, and leaders who exhibit these traits are often undervalued (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2007).

Furthermore, it is important to consider that research indicates a double standard in how emotional expressions are interpreted based on gender: women expressing emotions are often labeled as weak and lacking control, whereas emotional expressions by men are seen as a sign of passion (Smith et al., 2016). This discrepancy suggests a biased evaluation of emotional expression in women and men managers (Bordini & Sperb, 2013), further highlighting the gendered stereotypes that influence perceptions in the workplace.

Some male and female participants perceive that female managers often act based on their egos. This behavior in female managers could stem from not receiving the same level of respect or cooperative behavior from their subordinates as their male counterparts do. Such a disparity may lead female managers to feel undervalued, potentially prompting them to display more egoistic behavior as a compensatory mechanism.

While some participants expressed a preference for working with female managers and noted positive aspects of such interactions, these positives are notably fewer compared to those highlighted for male managers. The most frequently mentioned positive trait of female managers is their empathy.

Implicit gender bias is a process that starts with social perception, evolves through causal judgments and social inference, and ultimately influences behavior. In this context, a country's stereotypical sex roles, social norms, and cultural values play a crucial role in shaping gender bias (Heim & Murphy, 2003).

Gender stereotypes begin to embed in children's minds as early as age two, and their career aspirations are often based on these stereotypes (Albert & Porter, 1983). Particularly, the sexual identity and stereotypical roles that women adopt from childhood can significantly hinder their ability to envision themselves in managerial roles. Due to the internalization of gender stereotyping they encounter, women may also exhibit biased attitudes toward their own gender. In Turkey, the participation of women in the workforce is heavily influenced by the traditional societal views on women, the upbringing within families, the cultural values transmitted, and the roles and expectations imposed by society.

Given the deeply entrenched cultural influences that reinforce gender bias, it is clear that organizations alone cannot overcome it. In order to effectively combat gender bias, there must be sustained, solid, and collective efforts at all societal levels to dismantle patriarchal attitudes, increase awareness of the importance of gender equity, and implement national legal reforms that encourage women's leadership (Abadi et al., 2020; Seo et al., 2017). With an understanding of the country's cultural context, the following section will offer practical implications for organizations.

## **5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1. Promote Integration**

Women's workplace issues with other women are often exacerbated by the interpersonal dynamics fostered by gendered environments. As noted by Kanter (1993), gendered roles and discrimination are products of corporate pressures and prejudices. Consequently, to address these issues effectively, both the system and the processes within which these distinctions manifest need to undergo significant changes.

Segregation of roles by sex and limited advancement opportunities for women result in and support horizontal hostility and gender bias (Kanter, 1993; Loya et al., 2006; Tanenbaum, 2002). The first step toward mitigating the conditions that foster horizontal hostility among women is to ensure workplace integration at all organizational levels. It is crucial for organizations to ensure that women are represented in senior positions and positions of authority.

Research has shown that integration can enhance relationships among women by reducing group dissociation (Mizrahi, 2004). As the presence of female executives becomes more common, gender will become a less prominent aspect within organizations. Women managers will not stand out as unusual, making it easier for them to gain and maintain authority without needing to assert excessive control. This shift can help change the negative perceptions surrounding women managers. Moreover, as the existence of women managers becomes usual, they will no longer be subjected to greater scrutiny than and by their male peers, and they will be less likely to be evaluated negatively. Women will start to view each other less as competitors and more as colleagues, which should decrease the likelihood of hostility.

### **5.2. Coping with Tokenism**

While increasing the number of women executives and hiring more women represent positive steps for organizations, these measures alone are insufficient. It is crucial for organizations to hire women who are well-suited for their roles and are at least as qualified as other candidates. Employing women solely to meet gender quotas can lead to unfair practices that undermine the system. Such an approach can have detrimental effects on women who genuinely deserve their positions, as they may be subjected to increased scrutiny from supervisors, subordinates, and peers. Furthermore, being perceived as a token can cause women to experience self-doubt, stress, and burnout (Watkins et al., 2019).

Simply hiring a sufficient number of women addresses the diversity aspect within a company, but diversity without inclusion leads to tokenism. To effectively combat tokenism, it is essential that women are not only present but also empowered and actively involved in decision-making processes.

### **5.3. Mentorship and Female-Centric Education**

The findings indicate that women, rather than men, can often be the principal enforcers of gender bias. Women's implicit biases, which favor men as leaders and view women primarily as subordinates, pose a significant threat by unconsciously perpetuating inequality (Malloy, 2020). Consequently, it is essential for women to recognize the factors that lead them to undermine one another. To foster this awareness, organizations can develop specialized courses

and workshops tailored for women, where they can share experiences and discuss strategies to combat gender bias.

These educational initiatives can help women become more aware of gender biases and explore effective countermeasures. Moreover, mentorship should be emphasized as a crucial strategy to dismantle barriers to women's career advancement and address horizontal hostility (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Establishing a structured coaching and mentoring program could significantly aid in elevating more women to executive and senior management roles and improve their promotion rates.

Ultimately, women play a pivotal role in combating gender bias. It is imperative for them to vocalize their experiences, unite in solidarity, and actively oppose the underlying forces that sustain oppression and contribute to horizontal hostility.

#### **5.4. Creating an Awareness of Gender Bias**

To effectively detect and address horizontal hostility among women, the oppressive social structures within workplaces need to be transformed (Purpora et al., 2012). In pursuit of this goal, it is crucial to create a gender-neutral workplace culture and to educate all employees about gender bias. Such measures would increase empathy and understanding of the perceived challenges faced by both genders, thereby enhancing the ability of employees to support one another and contribute to a healthier work environment. Implementing regular training sessions on gender bias is essential. These sessions can educate employees on recognizing discriminatory or biased behaviors and provide them with practical strategies for addressing such situations. By promoting awareness and proactive responses to gender bias, organizations can foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

Additionally, companies should educate all employees on the use of gender-inclusive language to help prevent unconscious biases and gendered behaviors in the workplace. It is particularly crucial to provide targeted education for executives and managers, as they play key roles in driving gender equality initiatives. Organizations can also develop employee training seminars to ensure all staff members are well-informed about horizontal hostility and its impacts. Furthermore, it is essential for organizations to create a safe environment that encourages individuals to report any form of gendered behavior. Ensuring that women feel supported in voicing their concerns and experiences is vital for fostering a truly inclusive workplace where everyone can thrive. This includes implementing robust policies and procedures for addressing and resolving complaints effectively and respectfully.

Beyond internal efforts, companies can show their commitment to gender equality by participating in global initiatives like #HeForShe, a solidarity campaign for gender equality initiated by the United Nations. However, organizations must ensure that their public commitments extend beyond mere symbolic gestures. It's crucial that these public declarations reflect the actual experiences of women within the workplace. To truly embody these commitments, organizations must implement substantive policies and foster changes in their internal cultures to align with these ideals (Fox-Kirk et al., 2020). This involves more than just crafting a positive image; it requires tangible actions that make gender equality a lived reality for all employees.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this study, the existing theoretical literature on gender bias, particularly in managerial roles, was analyzed. Subsequently, the factors that shape employees' preferences for their managers' gender, along with their thoughts, opinions, and prejudices regarding this subject, were explored and discussed from the cultural perspective of Turkey. The study also examined how women unconsciously perpetuate gender bias and the impact of this behavior. In our sample, over half of the participants expressed no preference for the gender of their managers. Among the remaining participants, 29.5% preferred male managers, while 9.2% preferred female managers. The issue of manager's gender proved to be more significant for females, with 39.2% indicating a preference for male managers. Additionally, the study identified the presence of horizontal hostility among women. The reasons behind participants' choices for manager gender and the causes of horizontal hostility among women were evaluated in light of existing literature, and managerial implications were provided to organizations.

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### AUTHOR STATEMENT

#### Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

This study has been prepared in accordance with scientific research and publication ethics.

#### Ethics Committee Approval

For this research, the Ethics Committee of the University of Özyđin Ethics committee approval was obtained with the date of 30/06/2022 and the decision numbered 2022/10/03.

#### Author Contributions

Contribution rate (100%)

#### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for the authors or third parties arising from the study.

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## Appendix I. Participant Perceptions on Manager Gender Preference and Characteristics

### Female Employees Preferring Male Managers

Perception	Participant
<b>Perceived Hostility from Women Managers</b>	
Harassment and insults toward female subordinates	8
Imposing egos on other women	11
Displaying jealousy toward other women	9
Attempting to prove superiority over other female employees	4
Demonstrating ambition and competitive behavior toward women	4
Being more arrogant than male counterparts	3
Experiencing more conflicts among women	7
Perceiving male managers as more understanding toward subordinates	6
Finding it less stressful to work with male managers	5
Perceiving male managers as more helpful, supportive, and understanding toward women	9
<b>Perceived emotional control challenges in women managers</b>	
Viewing emotional nature as negative	8
Describing them as capricious	5
Perceiving them as less objective	2
Struggling to manage emotions in stressful situations	5
Having personal problems affect performance	2
Being easily offended or upset by comments	2
Being more prone to take things personally	4
<b>Perceived communication challenges with women managers</b>	
Finding communication more straightforward with male managers	10
Experiencing more misunderstandings with female managers	13
Finding it easier and more comfortable to work with male managers	6
<b>Perceived Lack of Competence in Women Managers</b>	
Seeing male managers as more work-oriented	7
Perceiving male managers as more practical than female managers	6
Seeing male managers as more result-oriented	5
Viewing male managers as more professional and rational than female managers	5

<b>Male Participants Preferring Male Managers</b>	
<b>Perceived communication challenges with women managers</b>	
Finding communication easier with male managers	13
Perceiving female managers as creating a more stressful working environment	2
Seeing male managers as more peaceful and presenting fewer problems compared to females	3
<b>Perceived emotional control challenges in women managers</b>	
Perceiving female managers as more emotional and less rational	4
Perceiving female managers as unpredictable	3
Finding female managers more prone to transmit stress to employees	4
Describing them as capricious	2
Seeing male managers as less influenced by personal problems	2
<b>Perceived lack of competence in women managers</b>	
Perceiving male managers as more practical and solution-oriented than female managers	11
Perceiving male managers as more analytical than female managers	2
<b>Perceived high ego in women managers</b>	
Perceiving female managers to have higher egos compared to male managers	4
Perceiving female managers as dominating and oppressing other women	2
<b>Female Participants Preferring Female Managers</b>	
<b>Perceived enhanced soft skills</b>	
Perceiving female managers as more empathetic than male managers	5
Finding communication more effective with female managers	5
<b>Perceived superior work-related capabilities</b>	
Perceiving Female managers as more detailed-oriented and well-organized	9
<b>Male Participants Preferring Female Managers</b>	
<b>Perceived enhanced soft skills</b>	
Seeing female managers as more empathetic and fairer compared to their male counterparts	10
Finding communication more effective with female managers	2
<b>Perceived superior work-related capabilities</b>	
Seeing female managers as more orderly, detailed, disciplined, and possessing a multidimensional perspective	9