

THE GENDER EFFECT ON MANAGING SALESPeOPLE: BUSINESS STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the gender effect of a male versus a female manager in terms of business students' preferences in working for, being trained by, being motivated by, and being rewarded by one or the other. Based on 328 questionnaires, the results for the entire sample, as well as male and female subsamples, demonstrate the existence of a gender effect for all but one aspect of managing salespeople. Also, comparisons of male students to female students reveal significant differences between perceptions of the two genders in terms of the training and motivating functions. The study found that the subjects as a whole, as well as the male and female subsamples, have a preference for male managers over female managers. The findings of this study could have implications for developing and managing an effective sales force and it could also have implications for academics in preparing students for successful sales careers.

Keywords: gender effect, managing salespeople, business students, Turkey.

SATIŞ PERSONELİ YÖNETİMİNDE CİNSİYETİN ETKİSİ: TÜRKİYE'DE İŞLETME BÖLÜMÜ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ALGILARI

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, işletme bölümü öğrencilerinin gelecekte satış personeli olmaları halinde, birlikte çalışmaları, motive edilmeleri, eğitilmeleri ve ödüllendirilmeleri bağlamında erkek ya da kadın yönetici tercihlerinde cinsiyet etkisi araştırılmaktadır. Yapılan 328 anketin sonuçları örneklemin tümü için olduğu gibi kız ve erkek alt örneklemleri için de satış personelinin yönetilmeleri dışında hepsi için cinsiyet etkisinin olduğunu göstermiştir. Aynı zamanda, kız ve erkek öğrencilerin karşılaştırılmalarından elde edilen sonuçlar, eğitim ve motivasyon fonksiyonlarında iki cinsiyetin algıları arasında önemli farklılık olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Çalışmada, örneklemin tümünün olduğu gibi kız ve erkek alt örnekleminin de kadın yöneticilere karşı erkek yöneticileri tercih ettikleri görülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, yöneticiler için etkili bir satış gücünün geliştirilmesi ve yönetilmesinde, akademisyenler için de öğrencilerini başarılı bir satış kariyerine hazırlanmasında yol gösterici olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: cinsiyet etkisi, satış personeli yönetimi, işletme öğrencileri, Türkiye.

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Recent research has shown that females are successful in the traditionally male-dominated field of selling, but that women still face some barriers in gaining entry to some selling jobs (Fugate et al., 1988; Anonymous, 1988). Some prior studies (Comer and Jolson, 1991; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Russ and McNeily, 1988; Swan and Futrell, 1978; Swan et al, 1984) of women in sales situations suggest that stereotypes of women in selling still exist on the part of both potential customers and managers. Past research that examined gender effects in selling have covered such issues as female managers' leadership style (Comer et al., 1995; Yammarino et al., 1997), sex-role identity (Jolson and Comer, 1992), stereotypic behavior and perceptions of gender stereotyping (Comer and Jolson, 1991; Russ and McNilly, 1988), and professional status (Gable and Reed, 1987).

Prior gender research in the sales field has focused on gender effects from the recruiting point of view by surveying recruiters or from the selling point of view by interviewing salespeople. It appears that an investigation of students' perceptions (as applicants and future salespersons) regarding gender effects on managing and supervising salespeople could provide different perspectives into our understanding of the gender effect in the sales field. We focused on business students because business students are likely to pursue careers in sales. In addition, many gender studies have been conducted in the United States but there appears to be no study examining students' perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising salespeople in other countries, especially in developing countries. The findings of this study could provide insights concerning the potential gender effects on various managing and supervising functions in a developing country like Turkey.

While the traditional role of most Turkish women has been as a housewife, there have recently been some dramatic changes in their roles, especially in urban areas where more and more women are joining the work force (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1999). These role changes have been caused by the recent influx of females into the labor market, resulting from an increased level of their education. The purpose of this study is to investigate applicant (student) perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising salespeople in Turkey.

The specific objectives of the study are to determine Turkish students' perceptions in terms of whether (1) they prefer to work for male versus female managers (supervisors), (2) they believe that male versus female managers would provide the best training for the first sales position, (3) they believe that male versus female managers would be more capable of motivating the applicants to excel in their sales jobs, and (4) they believe that male versus female managers would be more likely to satisfactorily reward the applicants' selling efforts.

The selection of Turkey for this study provides an opportunity to examine the impact of applicant gender on recruiting for sales positions in a developing country. Since most gender studies have been conducted in developed countries (mainly the United States) the results from this study could expand our understanding of the subject in a developing country. It appears that business majors (especially marketing and management) are more likely to seek sales-related jobs, so the responses from these business students should provide insight into managing and supervising new sales recruits in Turkey. The findings of this study could be helpful for Turkish companies in developing and designing sales training programs for new salespeople as well as for managers and supervisors in dealing with their new sales force. Also, this appears to be the first study to address these issues from the applicant's point of view in a developing country. Understanding applicants' perceptions of these issues could provide new and interesting perspectives on gender issues in managing and supervising the sales force, especially in a developing country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerning the gender effect on sales effectiveness and sales performance, previous research (Crosby et al., 1990; Smith, 1998) suggests that gender similarity between sales persons and customers is positively related to the quality of the sales person/customer relationship and sales performance. The research findings of Crosby et al. (1990) support conventional wisdom that exchange relationships are easier to develop with similar others (Churchill et al., 1997). On the other hand, some recent studies have shown that female salespeople are just as effective as male salespeople, and that gender similarity is not a significant factor in sales performance (Dwyer et al., 1998). In addition, some consumers may be more accepting of salespeople who are dissimilar by gender (Jones et al., 1998).

Several prior studies have investigated gender bias during the employment interview and attempted to separate the effects of applicant gender and recruiter gender on recruiters' evaluations (Arvey and Faley, 1988; Powell, 1987). These studies produced mixed results concerning the effect of similarity of applicant gender and recruiter gender on interview outcomes. For example, while personnel managers regarded same-gender applicants as more similar to themselves than opposite-gender applicants, gender similarity was not a factor in ratings of likeability or suitability for the job (Gallois et al., 1992). In a more recent study, Hardin et al. (2002) found that the gender of a hypothetical recruit did not affect the rating assigned by recruiters, regardless of recruiter gender.

Pinar et al. (2006) examined applicant (student) perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising salespeople using United States (hereafter U.S.) college students. Separate analyses were conducted for all students, for male and female students, and for male versus female students. The authors found that students as a whole preferred to work for male managers and felt that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position. The authors also found that both male and female managers are perceived as equally capable of motivating salespeople to excel in their jobs and of adequately rewarding selling efforts. The results by applicant gender indicate that male students prefer to work for male managers and feel that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position, and that male managers are more capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs. A similar analysis for female students showed that, while female students also preferred to work for male managers, they felt that female managers are more capable of motivating them to excel in sales jobs.

WOMEN IN THE TURKISH ECONOMY

As a result of the Civil Law voted for in 1926, several reforms have been passed to improve the position of women in Turkish society. In order to strengthen the role of women in society, several actions have been undertaken, including amendments to the Constitution, the Criminal Code, and the Civil Code. The National Action Plan Gender Equality: 2008-2013 (NAPGE, 2008) provides guidance and detailed information about the current status of gender equality in Turkey and constitutes a basis for several recent actions. As indicated in NAPGE, Turkey guarantees equality between women and men in its Constitution and other laws. Also, Turkey has undertaken to further develop policies to make legal amendments and to put these laws and policies into practice in accordance with international agreements. Some of these agreements and conventions include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the European Social Charter, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the 4th World Conference on Women Action Plan and the Beijing Declaration, and the European Union directives on equality between women and men (NAPGE, 2008).

While reforms under the Civil Law of 1926 have served as the legal basis for equality between women and men and been considered a part of the women's liberation movement in Turkey, these reforms have proven inadequate in significantly modifying the status of women and dissolving gender roles in the division of labor within the family (Arat, 1998; Kadioğlu, 1998; Kandiyoti, 1991; 1998; Kardam and Toksöz, 2004; Sirman, 1989; Tekeli, 1991).

Moreover, a review of the present status of women in Turkish society clearly reveals the existence of gender inequalities where problems are still being encountered in the realization and implementation of the reforms. For example, there are still significant problems like schooling for girls, women's access to health care services, equal participation in employment and power and decision-making processes (NAPGE, 2008).

There have been variations in the effectiveness of the Civil Law and status of women by geographic location, educational level, and socio-economic factors. These differences are especially notable between rural and urban areas, and between the relatively less developed eastern and more advanced western regions of the country. The traditional patriarchal family pattern is still the rule in rural areas, although urbanization and exposure to mass media are having their effects on changing these traditions (Anonymous, 2004).

Within the framework of 'westernization' efforts and the ideology of the Republic, women have taken advantage of laws and reforms related to civil rights and educational opportunities. In the long term, this has opened the path for accepting the existence of women in the work place and eliminating some prejudices towards women who work in traditionally male professions. Some of the concrete results of these efforts have been the specialization of women in scientific, technical and professional occupations. According to Kardam and Toksöz (2004), the distribution of women based on occupational groups shows concentrations of females in middle ranked positions such as scientific, technical and professional workers (38.1%) as well as clerical and related jobs (38.3%). In 1995, the proportions of the labor force in some specialized professions revealed that 28% of lawyers, 39% of architects, 23.5% of engineers, 39% of dentists, and 33% of academicians were women (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1999: 261).

The changing nature of women is also reflected by the increasing proportion of female university students who are enrolling in traditionally male-dominated majors such as architecture, chemical engineering, chemistry, mathematics, and management. For example, in 1999-2000, 47% of students majoring in mathematics and natural sciences, 43% of students majoring in social sciences, 32% of students majoring in agriculture and forestry, and 23% of students majoring in technical sciences were female (Tan, 2000).

The 1999 national data (Kardam and Toksöz, 2004) show that in Turkey women make up 30.9 % the total labor force. This varies from urban areas (40.4%) to rural areas (20%) (SIS, 1999). In a U.N. report, Turkey ranked 70th out of 177 countries on the gender-based development index (about 4.4% of national representatives are women and 7% of senior managers are women) (Akoz, 2004). Also,

the OECD employment report (Tamer, 2005) shows that women's share of the total labor force has declined from 33% in 1990 to 26% in 2000, and to 24% in 2004. These statistics are lower than the average of 30 countries (56% in 2004). This means that in Turkey only one out of four workers is a woman. Despite the legal reforms and recent legislation to promote gender equality, and some recent progress and changes regarding women's status, these statistics support the existence of difficulties and obstacles that Turkish women face in finding employment opportunities. It appears that Turkey is still a male-dominated society where social, historical, and cultural issues continue to be important factors in determining the level of occupational segregation and employment distribution by gender (Kardam and Toksöz, 2004). These percentages suggest that gender equality and gender segregation may be more influenced by social and cultural forces than legal and legislative reforms.

A recent study by Pinar, Eser and Hardin (2007) provided some insights into the gender effect on the recruitment of salespeople in Turkey. These insights are: (1) there is no apparent or noticeable recruiter–recruit gender effect (or bias) on recruiting decisions for sales positions in the industries that were studied. In fact, the recruiters did not show any hiring preference for same-gender applicants. Both male and female recruiters seem to prefer female applicants because of their expected selling effectiveness. In addition, Pinar et al. (2007) found that target-market gender had a mixed effect on the selection of applicants. In some cases, female applicants were selected regardless of the gender of the target market. In other cases, both male and female recruiters attempted to match applicant gender with target market gender. These findings are consistent with the findings of Dwyer et al. (1998) and Jones et al. (1998), where gender similarity was not a factor in sales performance in the United States.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Much of the research addressing gender effects in the sales field has been based on three major theories, the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm (Byrne 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982; 1985), and the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). All three theories are interwoven: The similarity-attraction paradigm suggests that individuals tend to be attracted to those similar to themselves. The social identity theory indicates that an individual's self-identity formation is partly a result of group membership. An important and integral part of the above theories involves self-categorization. The self-categorization theory indicates that individuals take socially defined categories into account when making evaluations about others, and that those characteristics seen as similar to one's self would likely be regarded as positive while those that were contrary would be rejected. All three theories indicate that a positive self-identity of individuals is maintained by seeking to maximize inter-group distinctiveness with out-group members perceived as being less attractive (Jackson, et al. 1992; Kramer, 1991).

These theories may provide a foundation to explain applicants' perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising salespeople. Figure 1 (developed by the authors) presents a framework to examine the potential effects of applicant (salesperson) and manager/supervisor gender on managing salespeople resulting from their gender similarity (or difference). Also presented in Figure 1 are the managing/supervising functions provided to salespeople. As discussed above, the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Byrne and Neuman, 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and the self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982; 1985), would generally predict that applicants (future salespeople) will be more comfortable working with managers or supervisors who are similar to themselves. These theories indicate that gender-matched

salesperson-manager dyads are expected to have better working relationships than gender-mismatched dyads (Figure 1). For this research project, salesperson-manager relationships (functions) are grouped into four areas of working preference, training, motivating, and rewarding. Based on gender similarity, the theories presented above suggest that: (1) applicants (salespeople) would prefer to work for, (2) would be given better sales training by, (3) would be most motivated by, and (4) would be rewarded better by the same gender managers or supervisors. Based on the above theories and the framework presented in Figure 1, the expectation is that male students will prefer male managers or supervisors while female students will prefer female managers or supervisors.

Figure 1
Effects of Salesperson and Manager Gender on Managing and Supervising Salespeople

		Applicant/Salesperson	
		Male	Female
Sales Manager	Male	Gender Match: Perceived Similarity <i>(Expected Gender Effect)</i>	Gender Mismatch: Perceived Dissimilarity
	Female	Gender Mismatch: Perceived Dissimilarity	Gender Match: Perceived Similarity <i>(Expected Gender Effect)</i>
Managing/Supervising Functions			
Working preference			
Sales training			
Motivating			
Rewarding			

METHODOLOGY

In order to accomplish the study objectives, a research instrument (questionnaire) was developed. The research instrument includes a number of questions to examine students' (as potential applicants) perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising salespeople. Students were asked to assume that they were hired as a salesperson by one of their preferred companies and were asked several questions concerning their perceptions of managing and supervising to be provided by their future managers. Specifically, students were asked to indicate the following: (1) whether they would prefer to work for male versus female managers (supervisors), (2) whether male versus female managers would provide the best training for the first sales position, (3) whether male versus female managers would be more capable of motivating applicants to excel in their first sales job, and (4) whether male versus female managers would be more likely to satisfactorily reward the applicants' selling efforts. These four statements are used to measure the gender effect on managing and supervising efforts of salespeople. The standardized reliability coefficient of 0.682 for the four statements is higher than the recommended level of 0.50 (Hair et al., 1995), and the scale items show a high level of consistency. The survey questions were measured on a semantic differential type of scale ranging from -5 to 5, where a score of -5 signifies a strong preference for males, a score of 0 signifies an equal preference

for both genders, and a score of 5 signifies a strong preference for females. On the actual survey, the negative signs were omitted in order to eliminate any potential confusion and/or association with negative numbers (See Appendix A for a complete copy of the research instrument).

In the process of developing the research instrument, the instrument was submitted to several academicians who are recognized as experts in the sales field and scale development. After the survey instrument was improved with their suggestions, it was pre-tested with students as respondents. These pretests provided input for improving the survey questions and established the face validity of the constructs (Churchill, 1979; Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Narver and Slater, 1990). The questionnaire, which was originally developed in English, was translated into Turkish and it was later back-translated into English to avoid translation errors (Ball et al., 2002) and to make sure that the intended meaning of the questions was maintained. The above pre-testing procedures were also conducted with the Turkish version of the survey instrument. Demographic data was gathered including gender, age, year in school (class) and major.

Sample and Data Collection

The above described research instrument was administered to business students in the colleges of business at six universities in Turkey where three were state (or government) supported universities and the other three were private universities. The universities are all located in Ankara and the research instrument was administered during the middle of the fall 2004 semester. Several prior studies utilized student samples to investigate gender effects in the sales field (Jones et al., 1998; Russ and McNeilly, 1988), and attitudes toward women managers in Turkey (Sakallı-Uğurlu and Beydoğan, 2002), and in Greece (Mihail, 2006). Since students' perceptions (or attitudes) could influence their behaviors (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977), the results of this study could help us understand their future behaviors toward sales careers and their preferences for managers. As previously stated, we focused on business students because it is likely that they may pursue sales careers. While students might have limited or no prior sales experience, their perceptions of the gender effect on sales management functions could impact their career choice in sales as well as their success in sales, should they choose sales as a career; therefore, we believe that business students are appropriate for this study.

Before conducting the study, the total number of business classes and the approximate number of students in each class at the universities was obtained. Taking into consideration the number of sections at each university, one or two sections were randomly selected. Survey instruments were distributed in the classroom and students were asked to complete the survey as honestly as possible. These classes were considered as clusters and every student in each selected class was surveyed, which is called one-stage cluster sampling (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). This process produced 332 surveys with four unusable surveys that were improperly completed. This gave us a total of 328 useable responses for analysis purposes.

There are two main reasons that business students are used for this study. 1) As future employees in the sales field, students' perceptions and expectations could have a strong influence on their career choices. Like most new graduates, since graduating business students may have limited or no experience in selling, their expectations could have a significant impact on their career decisions. Therefore, the results of this study could provide some insights into student expectations about supervisory functions in the sales field that could help managers in their recruiting efforts. 2) The results of the study could

also help sales managers and human resources departments in assigning, training, motivating, and rewarding new recruits. In this regard, knowing student perceptions of potential gender effects on managing and supervising could help companies develop a more effective sales force and, more importantly, improve the retention of newly hired sales people. Even though students may not have any experience in the sales field, their perceptions could provide valuable insights for companies when recruiting, managing and retaining newly hired salespeople.

RESULTS

Respondent Profiles

Profiles of the respondents show that 50.3% of the respondents are female and 49.7% are male with a combined average age of 21.9 years. A distribution of student classification indicates that 3.4% are sophomores, 51.1% are juniors, 38.2% are seniors, 4.6% are graduate students, and 2.8% are other (nondegree). In terms of majors, 89.9% are majoring in management, 1.8% in marketing, 4.0% in economics, 0.9% in computer science, 3.0% in finance, and 3.0% in other college majors. It seems that multiple majors are not common at Turkish universities, where management (or business administration) is the most dominant major or degree offered to students.

Gender Effect on Managing and Supervising

The main objective of this study was to investigate applicant perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising salespeople. In order to test whether there is any perceived gender effect for managing and supervising by male versus female managers, a one-sample t-test was conducted where the test value norm is 0. Since the scale used in the study ranged from “-5 signifies definitely males” to “5 signifies definitely females” with “0 signifying equally likely,” the sign of the mean shows the direction of any gender effect, and the t-significance suggests the existence of a perceived gender effect (bias). The analyses were conducted for all respondents (male plus female) and the results are presented in Table 1. Based on the results of the one-sample test for all responses, respondents indicate that they would prefer working for male managers (mean of -1.18, $p < 0.01$), that they would be offered the best training by male managers (mean of -.82, $p < 0.01$), and that their selling efforts would be more satisfactorily rewarded by male managers (-.27, $p < 0.05$). Regarding motivation, respondents feel that they would be equally motivated by both male and female supervisors. Finally, the overall mean obtained from the average of the four questions indicates that the respondents as a whole have a significantly higher preference for male managers than female managers (mean of -0.60, $p < 0.01$).

In addition to a gender effect for all respondents (potential applicants), separate analyses were conducted to determine whether there are gender effects for male respondents and for female respondents. These results are also presented in Table 1. The results show that male respondents prefer to work for male managers (mean of -0.69, $p < 0.01$) and feel that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position (mean of -1.07, $p < 0.01$). However, they believe that female managers would be more likely to satisfactorily reward their selling efforts (mean of 0.38, $p < 0.05$). Male respondents also feel that female managers are slightly more capable of motivating them to excel in their sales job (mean of 0.06), but it is not significant ($p = 0.791$). On an overall basis, male respondents prefer males rather than females as sales managers (mean of -0.33, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1
Turkish Students' Perception of Gender Effect on Managing and Supervising of Salespeople

Managing and Supervising Process	One-sample t-test for all respondents (n=328)			One-sample t-test for male respondents (n=163)			One-sample t-test for female respondents (n=165)			Two sample t-test comparison of male vs. female
	Mean	St. Dev.	p-sign.	Mean	St. Dev.	p-sign.	Mean	St. Dev.	p-sign.	p-sign.
Q1: Supervisor most preferred to work for	-1.18	2.92	0.000	-0.69	3.11	0.005	-1.66	2.65	0.000	0.003
Q2: Offer the best training for the first sales position	-0.82	2.77	0.000	-1.07	2.85	0.000	-0.57	2.68	0.007	0.104
Q3: Most capable of motivating to excel in sales job	-0.13	2.71	0.405	0.06	2.95	0.791	-0.31	2.46	0.108	0.217
Q4: Most satisfactorily reward selling efforts	-0.27	2.42	0.043	0.38	2.48	0.050	-0.92	2.18	0.000	0.000
Overall: Average of four questions	-0.60	1.94	0.000	-0.33	2.03	0.040	-0.86	1.81	0.000	0.013

Scale: Definitely Males -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely Females

The findings of a similar analysis for female respondents are also presented in Table 1. The results show that female students prefer to work for male managers (mean of -1.66, $p < 0.01$). Female respondents also feel that male managers will offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position (mean of -0.57, $p < 0.01$), and they feel they would be more satisfactorily rewarded for their selling efforts by males (-0.92, $p < 0.01$). Female respondents also seem to feel that male managers would be more capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs (mean of -0.31, $p = 0.10$). The overall mean for managing also indicates that female respondents have a significantly higher preference for male managers than female managers (mean of -0.86, $p < 0.01$). The negative means for all of these managerial functions indicate that female respondents in Turkey prefer male managers over female managers. This suggests a gender bias in preference for the opposite gender by female respondents, rather than the same gender.

Comparison of Male versus Female Respondents

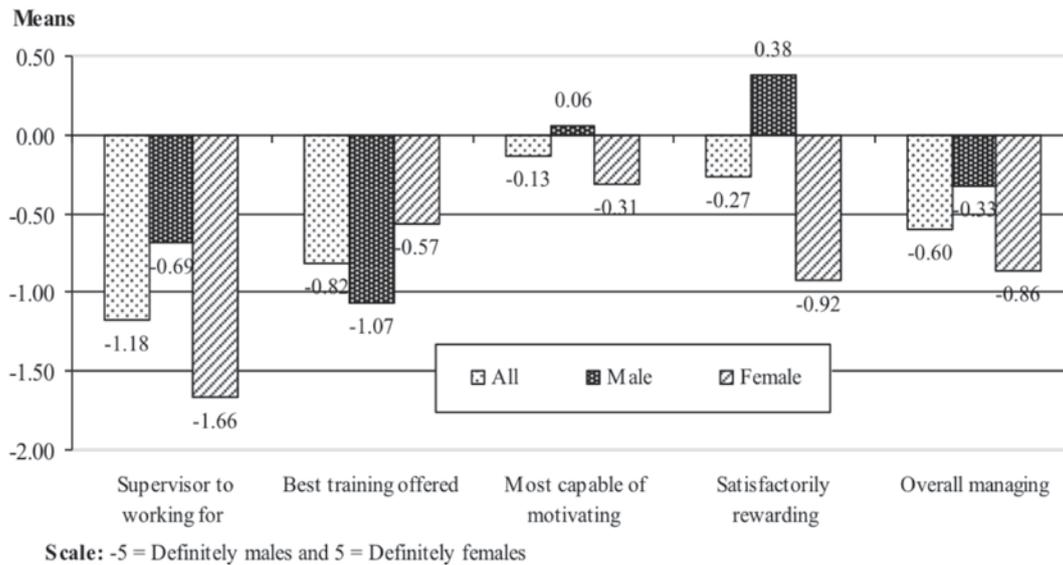
Finally, the study compared male vs. female respondent perceptions of the gender effect on managing and supervising, and these results are presented in Table 1. Comparisons of the mean scores suggest that there is a significant difference between male and female respondents in their preferences for type of manager to work for ($p < 0.01$) and in whom they feel will more satisfactorily reward them ($p < 0.01$). The negative sign of the mean for type of supervisor indicates that both male and female respondents prefer to work for male supervisors, and that female respondents have a stronger preference (mean of -1.66) than male respondents (mean of -0.69). Regarding rewards, the results show that male respondents feel that female manager/supervisors would more satisfactorily reward them (0.38) while female respondents feel that male managers would more satisfactorily reward them (mean of -0.92). Similar comparisons indicate that male respondents feel that female managers would be more capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs (mean of 0.06), whereas female respondents feel that male managers would provide them the best motivation to excel in their jobs (-0.31), but the difference is not significant ($p = 0.217$). On an overall basis, even though both male and female respondents prefer male managers, the study found that female respondents have a stronger preference (mean of -0.86) than male respondents (mean of -0.33), and that the difference is significant at $p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined Turkish student (applicant) perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising salespeople. Separate analyses were conducted for all students, male and female students, and comparisons were made for male versus female students. The results presented in Figure 2 show that, with the exception of two cases, all the mean values are consistently negative, which indicate that students as whole, and male and female students separately have an overwhelming preference for male managers/supervisors. The implication is that students (or potential applicants) perceive that men are better in managing salespeople. This is especially true for “supervisor to work for” and “best training offered by” where students have a significantly higher preference to work for and to be trained by male supervisors/managers. The findings of this study may, in part, be due to the fact that Turkey is still a developing country. Despite recent legislation, reforms, and being part of international conventions to improve women’s status, to improve gender equality, and to eliminate gender discrimination, it appears that Turkey is still a male-dominated society where social, historical, and cultural issues continue to be important factors in determining the level of occupational segregation and employment distribution by gender (Kardan and Toksöz, 2004). The effect of social, historical, and cultural issues demonstrates that those factors have power in helping to shape societies’ values and life in the business world as well.

The results for the entire sample of Turkish students showed the existence of a significant gender effect for all four sales management functions. Turkish students as a whole have a preference to work for male managers/supervisors, feel that male managers/supervisors would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position and would more satisfactorily reward their selling efforts. Regarding the motivation aspect of managing or supervising, students feel that both male and female managers are equally capable of motivating them to excel in their sales jobs. Overall, these results support the existence of a traditional male dominant nature in Turkish society and the work force. Moreover, it appears that Turkish students perceive that selling is a male-oriented field where managing salespeople is best done by males.

Figure 2
Student Perceptions of Gender Effect on Managing Salespeople



The results by gender indicate that male students prefer to work for male managers, and feel that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales position. These findings suggest a gender effect (bias) for male students who seem to prefer male managers for these two sales management functions. These findings are consistent with the predictions of the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Byrne and Neuman 1992; Graves and Powell 1995), the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and the self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982; 1985). These theories suggest that individuals tend to be attracted to, or seek membership in, groups that are (demographically) similar to themselves. The implication is that there would be a perceived attraction between a salesperson and a manager/supervisor based on perceived similarity (i.e. gender). However, male students feel that female managers are more likely to satisfactorily reward their selling efforts, which contradicts the predictions of the above theories.

A similar analysis for female students shows that female students also prefer to work for male managers, and feel that male managers would offer them the best training, be more capable of motivating them to excel in their jobs, and more satisfactorily reward their selling efforts. These results indicate the existence of a gender effect (bias) by female students, which is not consistent with the predictions of the above gender theories nor with the findings of prior research (Churchill et al., 1997; Crosby et al., 1990; Pinar et al., 2006; Smith, 1998). The current study was not designed to explain the reasons for these perceptions. However, the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of some recent studies (Dwyer et al, 1998; Jones et al., 1998), which contradicted the predictions of these gender theories. For example, Dwyer et al. (1998) and Jones et al. (1998) indicated that these gender theories may not be as valid as they were proposed. Also, Dwyer et al. (1998) and Jones et al. (1998) suggested that gender similarity may not be a factor in the sales field and that consumers may be more accepting of genders dissimilar to themselves. In addition, most of the prior gender studies have been conducted in the U.S. and other developed nations where the predictions of these theories may be supported in the sales field. However, due to cultural differences, these theories may not be applicable to a developing nation such as Turkey.

Despite recent progress in gender equality in Turkey, men may still be perceived as the experts in the sales field to such a degree that both male and female students prefer to work for male managers. Also, since having female salespeople is somewhat new in the sales field in Turkey, students might think that female managers may not have the expertise to help them in their first sales jobs. This suggests that female students perceive that male managers have better knowledge and skills to help them with their first sales jobs. Therefore, rather than matching female students with female managers, as suggested by the above theories, it would seem better to assign them to male managers, at least initially, for retention of the new female recruits and also for better performance. In fact, this could be one way to increase the number of women in sales which could lead to management opportunities for women in the future.

Comparisons of male students vs. female students found some significant differences between the two genders for training and motivating (new) recruits. The results show that, while both male and female students prefer to work for male managers, female students have a higher preference to work for male managers. Also, both male and female students feel that male managers would offer them the best training for their first sales jobs, with males demonstrating a stronger preference than females. These findings for male students are consistent with the predictions of the gender theories presented above. These results are also consistent with the findings of Crosby et al. (1990) who reported that same-gender relationships seem to be associated with greater relationship investment, more open communication, and greater trust and satisfaction within relationships. The findings of the current study are consistent with Liu, Comer, and Dubinsky (2001) who found that Chinese salespeople generally preferred male managers (with women more willing to accept a female sales manager). However, the findings for female students are not consistent with the predictions of the gender theories nor with the findings of Crosby et al. (1990).

The results also show that while male students feel that female managers would more satisfactorily reward them for their selling efforts, female students feel that male managers would more satisfactorily reward them in this regard. These findings are the opposite of the predictions of the above theories. It appears that in some cases, companies might be better off in matching male students (new recruits) with male sales managers for better training, but not for motivating and rewarding. On the other hand, companies might be better off assigning female students (new recruits) to male managers for all sales functions. As stated above, it seems that Turkish female students perceive male managers as more expert and/or knowledgeable than female managers.

Although Turkish females are getting higher levels of education, comprising a larger percentage of the workforce in urban areas, and are a significant percentage of the employees in several traditionally male dominated fields (i.e. architects, engineers, dentists), the female students who were subjects of the current study expressed a strong preference for male managers. Part of this effect is probably due to the fact that Turkey is still a male dominated society where gender equality and gender segregation may be more influenced by social and cultural forces than by education, employment opportunities, and legislative reforms.

Implications of the Findings

The overall goal of the study was to investigate applicant (student) perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising efforts among Turkish students. Understanding student perceptions

of gender effects on different aspects of managing and supervising could have several managerial implications for companies in developing and managing their sales force, as well as implications for academics in preparing students for successful sales careers.

The first managerial implication deals with assignment of new recruits to their managers/supervisors. Since both male and female students prefer to work for male managers/supervisors, Turkish companies might assign male managers to new recruits so that the new recruits may have an easier transition period at their new job. This may increase the retention rate of new recruits.

The second managerial implication is that since students in Turkey feel that male managers would offer them the best training in how to conduct sales for their first sales positions, companies might want to make sure that their initial sales training is provided by male sales managers. This may offer not only better sales training results, but it may also increase the retention of the new recruits after they start the sales jobs. Students (new recruits) may perceive that male sales managers have more experience and/or knowledge concerning sales jobs than female sales managers. These students' perceptions seem to be consistent with gender stereotyping in the sales field (Comer and Jolson, 1991; McNeilly and Russ, 2000; Russ and McNeilly, 1988; Swan and Futrell, 1978, Swan et al., 1984). While having male managers to train students as new recruits may seem to endorse and reinforce existing gender discrimination, this actually could be one way to reduce gender inequality. Since female students in this study have a preference to be trained by male managers, once they receive their training they may be more successful in their sales jobs and thus be able to move into managerial roles and possibly become trainers in the future. As more women stay in the sales field and eventually move into managerial roles, gender inequality may gradually decline, and eventually sales could be considered as a job equally suited to men and women.

The third managerial implication deals with rewarding new recruits. The results indicate that male students feel that female managers would more satisfactorily reward their selling efforts. Therefore, companies might attempt to get female managers involved in the rewarding process with male recruits. Another implication is that since female students prefer male managers for all sales management functions, female students should be assigned to male managers in order to obtain the best results, rather than matching them with same gender female managers, as suggested by the above theories. The final implication is that this study provides a better understanding of different aspects of managing and supervising new recruits in the sales force in a developing country (Turkey).

The findings of this study also have educational implications. The results for the entire sample, as well as for the male and female subsamples, show a significant gender effect on several areas of managing and supervising salespeople where there is a preference for male managers. While this study was not designed to address the reasons for these preferences, business students could be educated to overcome some of these perceptions through various techniques. For example, students could be given some journal articles regarding successful female sales managers, the potential benefits of working for female managers, and their ability to successfully train, motivate, and reward salespeople of both genders. Also, students could work on some case studies covering both male and female managers and their management abilities. Finally, students could work on class projects and/or simulations as teams with male and female managers. This may allow students to experience being managed by both male and female managers. Such educational experiences may help students overcome their misperceptions resulting from their upbringing and cultural experiences where Turkish men are still seen as the "first choice" for managerial positions (Sakallı-Uğurlu and Beydoğan, 2002: 649).

Limitations of the Study

While this study provided some insight into student (applicant) perceptions of gender effects on managing and supervising salespeople in Turkey (a developing country), the study has some limitations. Caution, therefore, should be exercised in interpreting the results. The first limitation is that the study was conducted with students, not with the salespeople. As indicated before, like most new graduates, students may not have experience in the sales area to evaluate the impact of gender on supervising functions; therefore we suggest that a similar study should be conducted with experienced salespeople. A second limitation is that the study included students from a limited number of universities in Turkey. More students from a larger number of universities could improve the external validity of the results. A third limitation is that the study only considered the gender effect on managing and supervising activities. It is possible that other demographic factors could have had an effect on managing functions or activities, so we recommend that future gender studies include other demographic characteristics. A fourth limitation is that this study was conducted only in Turkey. It is recommended that the same study be conducted in other developing countries in order to have a better understanding of the gender effect on managing salespeople in developing countries. It is also recommended that similar studies be conducted that compare gender attitudes in developed countries (such as the U.S.) to those in developing countries (such as Turkey). A fifth limitation is that this study only examined the existence (or absence) of gender bias suggested by gender theories in determining the preferences of male and female students for male (or female) managers for various management functions. The study did not investigate why male and female students prefer male (or female) managers for each management function. A future study should investigate why these preferences (biases) exist. Finally, the study covered only the sales field. However, since the issues addressed in this research could be applicable to general work in a business organization, future studies should be conducted in other business fields utilizing the instrument developed for this study.

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