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**SEXISM AND PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE  
INSTRUCTORS**

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*Abstract*

Professional performance of teachers and academicians is easily affected by a variety factors including social, cultural and methodological variables. Methodological issues are given priority by researchers with negligence on social and cultural issues. This study aims to find out whether female instructors' teaching and working performance are affected on the grounds of sexism at the School of Foreign Languages in Anadolu University, Turkey. To this end, a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions inquiring whether their working performance is affected or not was given to 30 female instructors. The questionnaire mainly includes items based on theories of Marxist feminism. Findings suggest female instructors face many problems and their working performance is affected negatively. These findings can be categorized under three different themes which are perceptions of female academicians concerning household chores and their professional life, the society's perceptions concerning female academicians, and female academician's ideas about their own household and professional practices.

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**Keywords:** Sexism, Gender Discrimination, Professional Performance.

## 1. Introduction

When we have a look at the political history, women have been treated inferior since Paleolithic times when hunting was the main source of subsistence. Archeological findings indicate that women were considered precious and held in high esteem only for their biological and reproductive qualities, which shows female members of the society didn't have a high status in daily life. In more civilized societies, as the communities settled down, surplus values produced were governed by the soldiers and religious leaders all consisted of men. Even during the reign of Babylonian Kingdom, which is known as an era of justice and equality, all the matters were handled in town courts whose members were all men. In the same era, the lands of the deceased were also inherited by the sons only. These were all signs of men's gaining more power thanks to their physiological strength and women's becoming more and more inferior. Shortly, it is a well known fact that there has always been a kind of inequality between men and women making the women disadvantaged all the time. Feminism, in a very broad sense, is a movement trying to stop this case of inequality (Dikici, 2016). Feminism first flourished as a movement trying to gain equity on behalf of women instead of opposing patriarchy, and this philosophy was shaped independent of social environment it existed in. This first movement, called Liberal or Classical Feminism, has set the groundwork for further fractions of feminism like Marxist and Radical Feminism. Liberal feminism, unlike other fractions, considers family as a crucial institution and alleges that family is of vital importance for self realization of women.

## 2. Problem Statement

Marxist Feminism, which has been shaped as an alternative to Liberal Feminism, sees the reason behind women's secondary position in the society as class distinction rather than a difference of gender. Marxist Feminists claim that existence of class distinction in a society results in inferior treatment of women, and only socialist system can make it possible for women economically independent and therefore freer because in classless societies there used to be a specific labor division in which men and women participated equally (Demir, 1997). However, with the advent of new production methods women started to become passivated.

As a result of production manner offered by capitalism, it can be seen that women's status has deteriorated. This model has given men the chance to contribute to production, get surplus values and have free time while women were given a role to do the housework and bring up the children. The status and roles of the members of the society offered by capitalist system is as follows: Men are more powerful and more prestigious because they work and put food on the table, unless men work, the family can't make a living and survive. Women are dependent on men because doing the housework and upbringing of the children do not provide a surplus value. In any case of argument or dispute, women cannot be assertive even if they are right as they are dependent.

Şentürk (2012) also suggests that women who work at universities are equally affected by traditional gender restraints like pressure, prohibition, etc.. with women who work in other sectors or even housewives. Female academicians think their behaviour, appearance and interaction patterns are negatively affected by gender inequity.

In conclusion, gender discrimination has always been to the disadvantage of females, which has reflections on a variety of areas that mainly include professional performance. Teachers and academicians also do not stand as an exception to this, and their professional performance is affected negatively by gender inequity.

### **3. Research Questions**

Looking after the children, cleaning the home and cooking are considered as separate branches of work in our time and are handled by professionals. Therefore, all the duties the women were expected to handle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with no monetary expectation are actually considered as three different jobs. At this point Marxist feminists strongly oppose the existence of family institution, and claim that social unity should be realized through economical function cooperation rather than kinship. According to Marxist Feminism, all the housework women are responsible for doing should be professionalized and priced, and women should have the right to work at any job, earn their own money and have the same status and rights with men. All the chores should be done professionally in exchange for its price.

At this point, in most of the layers of the modern society, these problems do still exist to the detriment of women's rights. In our time, the concept of sexism exists in all layers of the society and nearly through all stages of life. The term can be defined as "prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex". This definition also reveals the asymmetry of power and status between the two genders, to the disadvantage of women all the time (Sayılan, 2012).

Women face more problems in rural areas and in societies with a lower education level, yet it can't be denied that it exists among all classes and geographical settlements where capitalist system is in process. In urban life, women participate more in the production processes than they do in rural areas and are more educated. So, does it mean that with their increased status, income and education level, women in cities face fewer problems regarding sexist discrimination? And what about female academicians who are at the top layer of the society in terms of their status and education level? Can we say all the inequality and discrimination we have talked about are not true for female academicians?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent female academicians are affected by sexist practices and biases. Some possible areas of problems may arise from the following themes:

- Women are considered responsible for doing the housework and bringing up the children.
- Their roles as mothers and wives are given more importance than female academicians' roles at the university.
- Women do not consider their case as a problem.

### **5. Research Methods**

This research was conducted with 30 female academicians who are members of a faculty at a state university in Turkey, therefore findings are limited to these 30 academicians as each institution is unique in terms of its organizational culture and has its own dynamics. There are about 100 female academicians

in the sample faculty. The participants were chosen via stratified sampling method to ensure reasonable distribution of single, married and mother academicians. A questionnaire consisting of 20 questions were given to respondents. The questions are specially designed to find out perceptions of female academicians on following themes: Household chores and professional responsibilities, perceptions of the society about female academicians, equity of males and females, and their self evaluation concerning Marxist feminist theory. Descriptive statistics were then evaluated to get a broad understanding of the respondents' ideas and perceptions on these themes.

## 6. Findings

First 10 items in the questionnaire aim to find out perceptions of female academicians concerning household chores and their professional life. In this scope, the items try to figure out how their professional practices are affected by doing the housework and bringing up the children. The statistical average of these items is 3.14 out of 5 levelled Likert scale (1 Totally Disagree – 5 Totally Agree). The first and sixth ones are reverse items and the data they provide has been adapted. These findings show us that female academicians' perceptions about doing the housework, upbringing the children and being an academician is 3.14/5 negative. This means it isn't easy for female academicians to be able to keep up with both the housework and academic studies at the same time. When we interpret these findings in the light of the criticism Marxist feminism postulates about the family institution and suggested social unity based on economic functions, it can be concluded that the family institution and labor expenditure stemming from family life affect female academicians' professional career and performance negatively. As seen in Table 1, the first item "Being a mother and an academician is easy" has an average of 3.83/5; sixth item "It's easy to do the household chores and be an academician at the same time" has an average of 4.20/5 statistically, which means female academicians who participated in the study clearly say that doing the housework and being a mother affect their professional life negatively. At this point, the Marxist feminist idea of professionalizing all the chores gives us some good idea to overcome the problems female academicians experience. According to this argument of Marxist feminists, a mother academician performs three different jobs, but is only paid for being an academician. Although female academicians carry out all these jobs, they hardly agree with item 10 which is "Primary responsibility to do the household chores belongs to the women" with a 2.33/5 statistics making it the least favored item in the questionnaire; they actually strongly oppose the idea of carrying out those jobs.

**Table 01.** Perceptions of female academicians about household chores and professional life

Descriptive Statistics					
ITEMS	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean
1. Being a mother and an academician is easy	30	3,00	2,00	5,00	3,83
2. If a woman has a child, her academic career is negatively affected	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	3,06
3. Female academicians who have children are stressed in their professional life	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	3,43
4. Work quality of female academicians who have children is negatively affected	30	3,00	2,00	5,00	2,73

5.Primary responsibility to bring up the child belongs to mother	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	2,66
6.It's easy to do the household chores and be an academician at the same time	30	4,00	3,00	5,00	4,20
7.Doing the household chores affects my academic career negatively	30	2,00	1,00	5,00	2,93
8.Being obliged to do the household chores make me stressed at work	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	3,13
9.Being obliged to do the household chores affect my work performance negatively	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	3,10
10.Primary responsibility to do the household chores belongs to the women	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	2,33

Items from 11 to 14 try to explore the society's perceptions concerning female academicians. Female academicians think that the society they live in expects them to bring up the children and do the household chores. An average of 3.8 statistics tell us that female academicians think the society has attained these jobs to women. According to Marxist Feminism, this is a case which totally ignores the rights of women and is completely against the proposed labor division and professionalism models of Marxist feminists.

**Table 02.** Society's perceptions concerning female academicians

Descriptive Statistics					
ITEMS	N	Range	Min.	Max	Mean
11.Being both a mother and an academician is highly appreciated in the society I live in	30	2,00	3,00	5,00	3,90
12.My role as a mother is considered more significant than my role as an academician in the society I live in	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	2,73
13.Members of the society I live in believe that bringing up the children is primarily mother's responsibility	30	1,00	4,00	5,00	4,40
14.Women are expected to do the housework in the society I live in	30	3,00	2,00	5,00	4,23

Items 15 to 18 are about female academician's ideas about their own household and professional practices. The item "I feel that the effort I make for my home is more valuable than my academic effort" is scored 2.9/5; the item "I feel that the responsibility I have for my home is more valuable than my academic responsibility" is scored 2.7/5; the item "I can postpone my academic studies if my child needs me more" is scored 4.3/5; and finally the item "My academic progress has slowed down after I became a mother" is scored 3.2/5 (As only 18 of the participants were mothers N=18 for these two items). These statistics tell us female academicians have –in a way- accepted to carry out the roles attributed to them by the society. Especially when it comes to upbringing of children and caring for them, they seem to be very devoted, and their professional life has a secondary place in their life following their family life. This case can be interpreted as women academicians have embraced their roles as mothers and wives responsible

for the household chores and babysitters, which is far from their involvement in productive practices put forward by Marxist theories. They also feel themselves more involved in reproduction rather than production. At this point, it can be concluded that the obstacles for a more independent life for women do still exist as women embrace their roles as mothers and wives with no involvement in work life: A case totally against Marxist feminist ideas!

**Table 03.** Female academician's ideas about their own household and professional practices

Descriptive Statistics					
ITEMS	N	Range	Min.	Max	Mean
15.I feel that the effort I make for my home is more valuable than my academic effort	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	2,90
16.I feel that the responsibility I have for my home is more valuable than my academic responsibility	30	4,00	1,00	5,00	2,73
17.I can postpone my academic studies if my child needs me more	18	2,00	2,00	5,00	4,33
18.My academic progress has slowed down after I became a mother	18	3,00	3,00	5,00	3,27

The last two items try to explore what male friends, colleagues, or husbands of respondents think about gender equity, and to what extent their ideas reflect to their acts and practices. With a 3.5/5 average men are sensitive about gender equity, and their acts and practices are also in accordance with their ideas of equality.

**Table 04.** Men's ideas about gender equity

Descriptive Statistics					
ITEMS	N	Range	Min.	Max	Mean
19.Males around me or my husband think that men and women are equal	30	3,00	2,00	5,00	3,53
20.Males around me or my husband behave in accordance with gender equality	30	3,00	2,00	5,00	3,40

## 7. Conclusion

[This study aimed to find out whether or not female academicians, who possibly belong to an upper stratum of the society economically, and the highest stratum in terms of education level, experience injustice as alleged by Marxist feminist theory. According to findings of the study, female academicians, who are expected to be minimally affected by aforementioned factors of gender discrimination and inequity, are actually adversely influenced to a great extent. Especially for duties like bringing up the children and doing the housework, female academicians believe that they are disadvantaged when compared to men. However, although the participants of the study consider themselves disadvantaged about the points involved in the study, they surprisingly embrace and carry out all the chores they feel they shouldn't be doing. Exploring the reasons of this case may be subject of a different study. Nevertheless, Bordieu (2016) attributes this case with symbolic violence and claims underdeveloped and developing liberal societies dignify women and mothers in their homes doing all the duties they are

supposed to carry out as wives and mothers. Therefore, as a result of some psychological processes, women do these jobs semiconsciously, and in order to deserve all the jobs the society expects them to do, they feel they have to do these jobs properly with a feeling of subconscious devotedness. |

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