

STEREOTYPES AGAINST SINGLES: A STUDY OF THE NEED FOR SOCIAL APPROVAL AND SELF-CONSTRUALS

Kübra Meltem Karaoğlu¹, & Burçak Sönmez²

¹Psychology, Ankara University (Turkey)

²Psychology, Erzurum Technical University (Turkey)

Abstract

Stereotypes Against Singles: A Study of the Need for Social Approval and Self-Construals. According to studies on single people, the number of singles is increasing in various countries including Turkey. However, negative stereotypes against singles are increasing due to reasons such as the culture's giving importance of marriage and family. Because people think that singles become a threat to the social order. For example, it's believed that these people are unhappy, lonely and insecure. In studies, singles report negative experiences such as stigma, exposure to violence or exclusion because they are single. Therefore, in this study it's been examined why people are exposed to negative stereotypes just because they are single. It's thought that negative stereotypes might be related to people's cultural backgrounds. It is known that in collectivist cultures, negative stereotypes are more dominant against groups that are attributed to features that are not accepted by the society. According to studies, "autonomous self" structure is prominent in individualistic cultures, while "related self-sonctual" in collectivist cultures. Kağıtçıbaşı states that the "autonomous-related self" construal, in which relational characteristics are maintained but independence is supported, is formed depending on socioeconomic developments in relational cultures. So, we thought that individuals' self-construals might be related to stereotypes about single people. In addition, the need for social approval which means giving importance to the expectations and judgments of others is also influenced by culture and may be related to negative stereotypes. It's thought that people with a high need for social approval in Turkey may perceive singles more negatively. So, the aim of the study is to examine the mediator role of the need for social approval in the relationship between self-construal and stereotypes towards willing singles. In the study, it's been used "negative stereotypes scale for willing singles", "self scale in family context" and "Need For Social Approval Scale". 301 people aged between 18-65 participated in the study. Of these, 183 (60.8%) were female and 118 (39.2%) were male. In addition, it was determined that 263 people had autonomous-related, 36 people had related, and 2 people had autonomous self-construal. In model test results of the analysis, need for social approval mediates the relationship between autonomous self-construal and stereotypes towards singles. Accordingly, as the level of autonomy of individuals increases, their need for social approval decreases, and accordingly, their stereotypes towards single people decrease. Findings show that with the increasing socioeconomic level, autonomous-relational self-construal has become widespread in Turkey. In addition, it shows that the increased level of autonomy affects people's stereotype content more positively.

Keywords: *Stereotypes, singles, social approval.*

1. Introduction

According to studies on single people, the number of singles is increasing in various countries, including Turkey (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; TÜİK, 2019). However, negative stereotypes against singles are increasing due to the culture's importance of marriage and family. In other words, people think that singles threaten the social order (Sönmez, 2020). Also, people believe that singles are unhappy, lonely, and insecure (Etaugh & Birdoes, 1991; Etaugh & Malstrom, 1981; Hertel, Schütz, DePaulo, Morris & Stucke, 2007; Morris et al., 2008; Nanik, Tairas & Hendriani, 2018). In studies, singles report negative experiences such as stigma, exposure to violence, or exclusion because they are single (Byrne, 2000; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Therefore, it is wondered why people are exposed to negative stereotypes just because they are single.

Negative stereotypes might be related to people's cultural backgrounds. It is known that in collectivist cultures, negative stereotypes are more dominant against groups attributed to features not accepted by society (Sen et al., 2003). According to studies, the "autonomous self" structure is prominent in individualistic cultures, while "related self-construal" is in collectivist cultures. Kağıtçıbaşı states that the "autonomous-related self" construal, in which relational characteristics are maintained, but independence is supported, is formed depending on socioeconomic developments in relational cultures. So, it has been thought that individuals' self-construals might be related to stereotypes about single people (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010).

In addition, the need for social approval, which means giving importance to the expectations and judgments of others, is also influenced by culture and may be related to negative stereotypes. People with a high need for social approval in Turkey may perceive singles more negatively. So, the aim of the study is to examine the mediator role of the need for social approval in the relationship between self-construal and stereotypes towards willing singles.

2. Method

In the study, "stereotypes toward voluntary singlehood scale," "self in the context of the family," and "need for social approval scale" were used. Stereotypes toward voluntary singlehood scale measure how people perceive singles in Turkey. Self in the context of the family aims to measure what kind of self-construals (autonomous, relational, and autonomous relational self) individuals have according to the scores they get from the dimensions of interpersonal distance and competence. The need for social approval scale measures how much social approval individuals need. 301 people aged between 18-65 participated in the study. Of these, 183 (60.8%) were female, and 118 (39.2%) were male. In addition, 263 participants had autonomous-related, 36 had related, and 2 had autonomous self-construal.

3. Findings

According to the correlation analysis, stereotypes towards singles are significantly and positively related to the need for social approval ($r = .16$ $p < .05$) and significantly and negatively related to autonomous self-construal ($r = -.15$ $p < .05$). The need for social approval is also significantly and negatively correlated ($r = -.13$ $p < .05$) with autonomous self ($p = -.40$ $p < .05$) and autonomous relational self-construal. In the model test results of the analysis, the need for social approval mediates the relationship between autonomous self-construal and stereotypes towards voluntary single. Accordingly, as individuals' autonomy level increases, their need for social approval decreases, and their stereotypes towards single people decrease.

Findings show that autonomous-relational self-construal has become widespread in Turkey with the increasing socioeconomic level. In addition, it shows that the increased level of autonomy affects people's stereotype content more positively.

4. Discussion

In Turkey, where rapid socioeconomic changes have been experienced in the last 30 years, the evolution of self-construals of people with high levels of education into "autonomous-relational self" construal in the expected direction is an important finding supports the theoretical framework (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010). It supports that the past information that the self-construals of people with relational self-living in collectivist cultures will turn into an independent self-construal in the individual culture with socioeconomic developments does not maintain its validity. As the education level of the individuals increases, it is seen that although their autonomy characteristics increase, they continue to protect their relational sides, and a new self-construal consisting of the combination of these two characteristics has emerged. Autonomous-relational self-construal allows individuals to make decisions according to their values and protect their boundaries. At the same time, it provides a more functional basis for psychological health by ensuring that they do not lose positive values such as the social support provided by the relational culture and the decrease in the feeling of loneliness.

According to correlation analysis, the individuals' autonomous self and autonomous relational self-levels increase, and their negative stereotypes towards single people decrease. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that collectivist cultures and people with relational self-construal have more negative stereotypes toward others (Sen et al., 2003). However, as individuals' autonomy level increases, the need for social approval also decreases. With the increase in autonomy, people begin to give less importance to the opinions of other people with whom they are in a relationship while defining

themselves, decreasing their need for approval from others. The mediation model analysis results showed that the social approval needs of individuals mediate the relationship between autonomous self-construal and stereotypes towards single people. In other words, as people's level of autonomy increases, their need for others to approve of themselves decreases. At the same time, their stereotypes towards single people, who are attributed negative features by society, also decrease.

5. Conclusion

This study has some limitations. First of all, although the study had a sufficient sample, the fact that most of the participants were at a high socioeconomic level caused the majority to have an autonomous-relational self-construal in line with the theoretical framework. The inability to reach enough people with other self-construals did not make it possible to make statistical comparisons. Future studies may give importance to a balanced distribution according to socioeconomic level. However, using a measurement tool with better power seems necessary to distinguish self-construals. It seems essential to use a new scale whose validity and reliability have been proven in different sample groups or to develop the existing scale.

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