

From Diversity to
Discrimination: A Comparative
Study of Blue-, Grey- and
White-Collars' Perceptions and
Experiences^(*)

İşgören Çeşitliliğinden
Ayrımcılığa: Mavi, Gri ve Beyaz
Yakalı Çalışanlar Arası Bir
Karşılaştırma

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Abstract

Bases of discrimination are also dimensions of diversity. However, not every dimension of diversity automatically becomes a ground of discrimination. Thus, this paper aims to identify the dimensions of diversity which are also bases for discrimination in a workplace. As different-collar workers may have different perceptions and experiences, this study aims to compare blue-, grey-, and white-collar workers. The study adopted an exploratory approach, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven workers. The questions were based on a diversity wheel which includes a wide range of diversity dimensions. The findings show that any dimension of diversity can also be a basis for discrimination, with peer-to-peer discrimination being the most prevalent among blue- and grey-collar workers. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination, as many existing papers on diversity only cover a few dimensions or bases. Additionally, this study sheds light on an under-researched area of discrimination among blue- and grey-collar workers.

Keywords: diversity, discrimination, white-collar, blue-collar, grey-collar

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Özet

İşgören çeşitliliđi, farklı etnik kökene, yaşı, cinsiyete, eğitim seviyesine, kültürel geçmişe ve diğer faktörlere sahip kişilerin çalışma ortamında bulunmasıdır. Tüm çeşitlilik unsurlarının kendiliğinden ayrımcılığa yol açmadığı göz önüne alındığında, bu çalışma mavi, gri ve beyaz yakalı çalışanlar arasında hangi çeşitlilik boyutlarının ayrımcılığa neden olduğunu belirlemeye odaklanmaktadır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerde bu çalışma için özel olarak oluşturulan çeşitlilik çarkı gösterilmiş ve 11 çalışandan veri toplanmıştır. Bulgular, bir çalışan için önemli olan herhangi bir çeşitlilik boyutunun aynı zamanda bir ayrımcılık unsuru olabileceğini ve mavi ve gri yakalılarda ise en yaygın ayrımcılığın aynı düzeyde bulunan çalışanlar arasında olduğunu göstermektedir. Çeşitlilik konusunda yapılan birçok çalışmanın sadece birkaç boyuta odaklanmasına karşın bu araştırma, işyerindeki ayrımcılığı daha kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma daha önce araştırılmamış mavi ve gri yakalı çalışanlar arasındaki ayrımcılık konusunu irdelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: çeşitlilik, ayrımcılık, beyaz yaka, gri yaka, mavi yaka

Introduction

Diversity is defined as the distribution of differences among workers according to some qualifications in organizations (Harrison & Klein, 2007), and left to their own devices, some employers and managers do not prefer a diverse workforce. This preference is quite understandable, because the more diverse a workforce, the more challenging it becomes to manage that workforce (Avery & McKay, 2010). However, if appropriately promoted, diversity is even claimed to provide a competitive advantage, increased job performance, employee engagement, and job satisfaction (Hauret & Williams, 2020; McCuiston, Wooldridge, & Pierce, 2004; Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2014).

Researchers have categorized the personal attributes that constitute diversity into various dimensions. According to Loden & Rosener's (1991) classification, the primary dimensions of diversity have innate and unchangeable features. The secondary dimension consists of the features that are acquired later and can be changed by the individual's own will. Gardenswartz & Rowe (1994) expanded Loden & Rosener's (1991) diversity classification by adding personality as a core dimension, and organizational dimensions as the outermost layer. According to their "The Four Layers of Diversity" model, diversity consists of personality, internal, external, and organizational dimensions. The organizational layer comprises items that are mostly related to membership in the organization, such as seniority, organizational unit, union affiliation. The diversity research generally

focuses on primary or visible dimensions (Triana, Gu, Chapa, Richard & Colella, 2021).

The dimensions of diversity and bases of discrimination may vary for different groups of workers. Traditionally, workers have been classified based on their collar colors, namely white- and blue-collars. Then, in the early 2000s, research on grey-collar workers has begun (e.g. Hanley & McKeown, 2005; Allen, 2005). Depending on collar colors, individuals' work experiences and how they perceive these experiences may differ, but very few studies examined these differences between the workgroups. Therefore, this study is one of the first attempts to explore any differential experiences of discrimination among white-, blue- and grey-collars.

Literature Review

Diversity Carried Over to Discrimination

The dominant dimensions of diversity that have received significant attention in scholarly literature include age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliations, and physical/mental health. As discrimination is a consequence of perceived diversity, recent studies tend to emphasize diversity and inclusion holistically (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Triana et al., 2021). In the following section, research on some of the most prominent dimensions of diversity and discrimination, which are gender, age, race/ethnicity and religion, and physical/mental health are reviewed.

According to Cottingham et al (2001), gender discrimination refers to any kind of exclusion, distinction, or restriction that stems from socially constructed gender roles and norms (as cited in Kouta & Kaite, 2011). Women have been found to receive less vocational training, have reduced employment opportunities, and earn lower wages compared to their male counterparts at work (Johansson, Katz & Nyman, 2001).

Age discrimination arises from stereotypes that portray older workers as having reduced physical and mental performance, being resistant to training, less adaptable and costly to the organization (DeArmond, Tye, Chen, Krauss, Rogers & Sintek, 2006; McCann & Giles, 2002). Conversely, younger individuals are often stereotyped as lacking experience (Demir, 2011). These stereotypes lead to discriminatory behaviors, such as older workers being passed over for promotions (AARP, 2014), and facing pressure to retire prematurely (van Sollinge & Henkens, 2007).

Being a member of a racial, national, ethnic group and/or a religion different from the dominant ones at a workplace can expose individuals to potential discrimination. In a study conducted in Australia, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Arabic-speaking workers reported that they experienced discrimination and had low job security (Daly et al., 2018). Similarly, ethnic, and religious minorities are often offered lower salaries (Park, Malachi, Sternin & Tevet, 2009), are rated as less suitable for positions (Derous, Ryan & Serlie, 2015), and are less likely to be invited for interviews (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016).

Both visible and invisible health problems may also lead to discrimination (Graham, McMahon, Kim, Simpson & McMahon, 2019). Individuals from diverse health spectrums often face discriminatory behaviors in hiring (Araten-Bergman, 2016), pay (Gunderson & Lee, 2016), and involuntary job loss (Mitra & Kruse, 2016). Many employers seem to be reluctant to hire individuals with mental health problems because of a prevailing belief that psychological problems decrease productivity and job performance, especially in tasks that require cognitive capabilities (Corrigan et al., 2008; Scheid, 2005; Uçok et al., 2012). Additionally, individuals with mental health problems are often labelled as unreliable and seen as a potential risk to the safety of others (Scheid, 2005).

Discrimination based on gender, age, and disability can also manifest in the form of benevolent discrimination (Romani, Holck & Risberg, 2019; Glick & Fiske, 1997; Cary, Chasteen & Remedios, 2017; Cuddy, Glick & Beninger, 2008), which involves altruistic or paternalistic behaviors, overprotection, and patronization. Even if these behaviors are well-intended, they still are discrimination, albeit a subtle one, as they undermine the competence of the targeted individuals (Wang, Walker, Pietri & Ashburn-Nardo, 2019).

Being a caregiver (Mullins, Charbonneau & Riccucci, 2021), weight (Flint, 2015), unfashionable or inappropriate dressing and physical disability (Christman & Branson, 1990), attractiveness (Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Coats, 2003), and political views (Thompson, 2021) are other dimensions of diversity and/or discrimination in the workplace that have also been studied.

Culture and Discrimination

How diversity is perceived and what kind of discrimination occurs cannot be understood without taking into account the influence of national culture. For

understanding especially gender-based discrimination, it is worthwhile to start with the cultural dimensions of gender egalitarianism (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, 2004), masculinity (Hofstede, 2001), and paternalism (Burke, Koyuncu & Fiksenbaum, 2008). According to findings on Türkiye with respect to these dimensions (low level of gender egalitarianism, high level of masculinity, and paternalism), due to distinctions made between male and female gender roles, workplaces become segregated based on gender as women are not hired for certain positions or organizational units, are not preferred in promotions, and are paid lower than their male counterparts (Hofstede, 2001; Palaz, 2002).

Another cultural dimension which can be related to discrimination is individualism/collectivism. Türkiye is categorized as a collectivist country, where individuals primarily identify themselves as members of certain groups, and group cohesion, commitment, solidarity, agreement, and cooperation among individuals are considered very important (George & Jones, 2008; as cited in Yüksel & Bolat, 2016). As collectivist cultures set particularistic and ascriptive criteria for status (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995), employers tend to hire individuals based on who they are and how they are related to key actors in society and the organization. Additionally, being conscious of the value of in-group relationships, it is not uncommon for the managers in collectivist cultures to put workers of the same ethnic background in the same work group (Hofstede, 1991). Respect for age is also highly regarded in such cultures, and this translates into loyalty and seniority often being viewed as much more important than competence (Wu & Yi, 2008).

The importance of in-group dynamics in Türkiye is reflected in its very high score on in-group collectivism in GLOBE study (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002). However, in the same study, Türkiye has a low score on humane orientation (Pagda, Bayraktar & Jimenez, 2021). This indicates that Turkish society has fewer expectations from its members of the community to promote others' well-being, as explained by Çarkoğlu & Aytaç (2016), with the increase in economic hardships. Therefore, together with a high level of in-group collectivism, this cultural stance of Türkiye opens room for discrimination based on affiliations with certain workgroups or organizational units.

In both GLOBE and Hofstede's studies (Cem Ersoy, Born, Derous & van der Molen, 2012; Pagda et al., 2021; Hofstede, 1993), Türkiye scores high on the power distance dimension. Most Turkish managers expect obedience from

their subordinates, and Turkish organizations are generally highly hierarchical (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). According to Özcan, Özkara & Kızıldağ (2011), the high power distance in Türkiye affects social interactions that individuals are treated according to their job status. Furthermore, organizational culture in Türkiye depends on seniority in employment, and respect shown to the elderly protect these individuals from age discrimination (Özcan et al., 2011). Moreover, because of hierarchy and uncertainty avoidance, not being an ethnic group member is critical for success in society and upward mobilization (Çarkođlu & Kalaycıođlu, 2009; as cited in Bađcı, Çelebi & Karaköse, 2017).

Classification of Workers by Their Collars

A traditional view classifies jobs as blue-collar and white-collar, based on their nature. However, this classification has evolved to include a category known as grey-collar workers, who occupy a position somewhere in between. While white-collar workers typically perform managerial or administrative tasks (Marandi & Moghaddas, 2013), blue-collar work is associated with physically demanding conditions, routine jobs, and unqualified individuals (Alpaslan & Özen Kutanis, 2007). Grey-collars' job descriptions combine some white and some blue-collar tasks (Wright, 2007; as cited in Hutchings, Zhu, Cooper, Zhang & Shao, 2009).

Research indicates that individuals' experiences may vary based on the different nature of their work. For example, white people have the highest upward mobility rate compared to African Americans and Latinos, but this difference is even greater for blue-collar workers as it is more challenging for African American and Latino blue-collar workers to get promoted compared to white-collar workers (Wilson & Maume, 2014). According to Adamy & Overberg (2016), gender inequality in income is greater in many white-collar jobs than in blue-collar jobs in U.S. Additionally, pay returns from training activities are significantly positive for white-collar workers, but not for blue-collar workers (Almeida-Santos, Chzhen & Mumford, 2010). However, it's worth noting that there are relatively few current studies specifically examining differences in discrimination experiences between different occupational categories. Moreover, the experiences of grey-collar workers have not been thoroughly examined in these studies.

Purpose of the Study

Even though differences should be expected among workgroups due to the varying levels (and status) of their positions, the individuals they interact with, and the work environment, the current body of research primarily focuses on white-collar workers, leaving a significant gap when it comes to the representation of blue-collar workers (Bayraktaroğlu, Özdemir, Aras & Özdemir, 2015). Moreover, according to Eriş, Timurcanday Özmen & Yanar Bayam (2020), there are just a few articles about grey-collar workers, and none of them specifically address the topics of diversity or discrimination within this occupational category/collar category.

In addition, many studies have addressed only a few dimensions of diversity. However, there can be some other dimensions of diversity which need to be studied, such as favoring a particular political party, being a graduate of a particular school/university. Also, there may be other dimensions and differences specific to Türkiye, such as being born and raised in a particular city or geographical region. Considering that each dimension of diversity may cause discrimination and other related negative consequences of discrimination, this study aims at examining those too.

With the aim of shedding some light on potential differential experiences of discrimination among different categories of workers, this exploratory study seeks to address the following questions.

- What are the dimensions of diversity that matter for the blue-, grey, and white-collar workers?
- Do blue-, grey-, and white-collar workers perceive varying types of discrimination?
- Are there any distinctions in the way that discrimination is experienced by the blue-, grey- and white-collars?

Research Design

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals from the same organization to control the organizational culture. The company under examination in this study is engaged in the production of concrete structures and

components in Ankara, the capital city of Türkiye. In the company, approximately 15% of the individuals work in white-collar positions, 83%, in blue-collar positions and 2% in grey-collar positions. However, there is a gender imbalance, as there are only 5 women in the firm, and all of them work in white-collar jobs.

Participants were invited to the research via announcements made by human resources department across the company. Before the interview, a brief oral presentation about the research was given and a written consent was obtained from each participant. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted. A psychologist carried out these interviews and they lasted approximately 8-45 minutes.

Since the perceived discrimination differences have not been previously examined, and the research questions cannot be adequately answered without analyzing the subjective experiences, this study takes an exploratory approach and therefore, naturally demands a qualitative design (Maxwell, 2012). Through the qualitative method of data collection, the constraints of closed-ended surveys can be removed, allowing for in-depth descriptions of perceptions and experiences to be elicited.

The interviews began with warm-up questions, such as “Can you tell us a little about yourself? What are your responsibilities at this company?”, and then proceeded with the diversity wheel. The participants were shown the diversity wheel (Appendix) which was constructed for the study by thoroughly reviewing the existing literature, particularly drawing from the works of Gardenswartz & Rowe (1994), and Loden & Rosener (1991). As it can be seen in the wheel, diversity dimensions are grouped into three categories as internal, external and organizational layers. Notably, this study expands on the diversity dimensions found in the literature by incorporating additional dimensions such as hometown, psychological state, specific educational institutions attended, religious sect/cult. As some culturally emergent dimensions are added, it can be stated that the study pursues mainly an etic approach with an emic touch (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012), and allows the examination of discrimination from a broader and more inclusive perspective.

Diversity encompasses not only about how individuals see themselves, but also about how others perceive that person (Sampana & De la Cruz, 2020). Therefore, the participants were asked whether they believed all workers were treated differently based on any of features presented in the wheel. They were then

asked to mark the dimensions that they believed were relevant. Subsequently, for each marked box on the diversity wheel, the participants were asked further questions about that specific dimension of diversity.

Participants

The participants of the study consist of 11 participants (3 females, 8 males) aged between 23-52. Four of these participants work in grey-collar roles (foreman), 4 in white-collar positions (office support staff, civil engineer, sales engineer, technical office engineer) and 3 in blue-collar roles (welder, laborer). Although the job titles were stated as above, to classify individuals by their collar colors, the participants were asked “How do you spend your day at the company? What kind of responsibilities/tasks do you have?” in the interviews. The demographic information of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Participant No.	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Duration of Employment	Job Position	Collar Type
P1	M	36	Married	15 years	Foreman	Grey
P2	F	50	Married	7 years	Office support staff	White
P3	M	41	Married	11 years	Foreman	Grey
P4	M	27	Single	6 months	Civil engineer	White
P5	M	52	Married	15 years	Foreman	Grey
P6	M	23	Single	6 years	Welder	Blue
P7	M	38	Married	10 days	Laborer	Blue
P8	M	51	Married	6 years	Laborer	Blue
P9	F	24	Single	2 months	Technical office engineer	White
P10	M	38	Married	12 years	Foreman	Grey
P11	F	38	Single	1 year	Sales engineer	White

Content Analysis

In this study, audio recordings obtained through semi-structured interviews were transcribed, and interviews were analyzed through content analysis, which is a research technique used to draw systematic conclusions from certain categories defined in the text, and it is used because of its ability to reveal the deeper meaning and latent content within the text. Analysis process involved six stages in total: getting familiar with the data, creating the first codes by bringing together the remarkable features of the data, collecting the codes under subcategories, reviewing the compatibility of subcategories with the data and codes, defining, and naming the main categories, and preparing the report by selecting quotation samples.

Findings

In the content analysis, four main themes emerged, covering dimensions, areas, direction of discrimination and discriminatory behaviors. The diversity dimensions that resulted in discrimination were gathered in three themes in line with our diversity wheel. These themes include internal, external, and organizational dimensions of diversity. Additionally, themes of discrimination areas based on diversity dimensions are defined as hiring, promotion, relationships, work experiences/workload and pay. In addition to these themes, the analysis uncovered direction of discrimination and discriminatory behaviors emerged (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Content Analysis

Main Themes	Themes	Subthemes
Dimensions of Diversity	Internal Dimensions	Personality Gender Citizenship/Ethnicity and/or Townspersonship Age Disability Mental/Physical Ability
	External Dimensions	Physical Appearance Education Level Income Family Status Political View Religious Beliefs
	Organizational Dimensions	Seniority Hierarchical Status Union Affiliation
Areas of Discrimination	Hiring Relationships Promotion Pay Work Experiences/ Workload	-
Direction of Discrimination	Vertical Lateral	-
Discriminatory Behaviors	Hostile Benevolent	-

Dimensions of Diversity and Discrimination

In the content analysis, dimensions of diversity that contributed to discrimination emerged as three subthemes: internal, external, and organizational dimensions of diversity linked to discrimination.

1. Internal Dimensions of Diversity and Discrimination

Internal (or primary) dimensions include aspects of diversity which individuals have no control over (Loden & Rosener, 1991), and these are typically the first things a person observes in others. The internal dimensions on which any participant provided input were personality, gender, citizenship/ethnicity/townspersonship, age, disability, and mental/physical ability.

1.1. Personality

To begin with, two out of four grey-collar workers talked about difficult personalities, such as being dissatisfied, angry, and dissident, they mentioned that these worker “disrupt the order”, leading to their ostracization from social circles at work. For instance, Participant 1, who has been working at the same company for 15 years and holds a position as a foreman mentioned how he leverages his position to discriminate against certain workers. During the interviews, it became evident that being a grey-collar worker for many years has made it easier for him to discriminate against others.

“We have an order. If someone disrupts it, he is useless...I exclude him, no need to lie ... I don't call him for overtime work...I keep him at arm's length.” (P1, grey-collar)

1.2. Gender

Unlike personality, gender appears to have two sides. First, three white-collar workers mentioned experiencing or observing benevolent gender discrimination, such as giving priority in the lunch queue, front seats in the workplace transport (“ladies first!”) and even carrying out some of their duties. Secondly, despite the benevolent discrimination among white-collar peers, there seems to be an ongoing hostile sexism for blue- and grey-collar positions as it has been openly stated by two grey- and one blue-collar interviewees, as well as by human resources department staff who mentioned that women are not hired for their positions. Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that there is gender segregation at this workplace (Becker, 1971, as cited in Carrington & Toske, 1995).

1.3. Citizenship/Ethnicity/Townspersonship

One blue- and one white-collar worker expressed negative feelings towards Syrians and Kurds. They mentioned the presence of informal social groupings (cliques) among these workers, which also serve as strong support systems for

them. These minority groups of workers are also known to be actively involved in bringing new workers from their communities to blue- and grey-collar positions in the firm. For instance, Participant 8, who identifies himself as Turk, exhibits a strong sense of camaraderie among blue-collar workers but excludes Kurdish workers from this group. Despite the existence of robust social bonds among the blue-collar employees, Participant 8 perceives the Kurdish workers as outsiders to this social circle.

“It’s (speaking Kurdish) the thing you do to display yourself different... In my opinion, that shows a lack of personality, there’s no need (to speak Kurdish)... Kurds also have a strong support system: they always back each other, they gather, make tea together during breaks.” (P8, blue-collar)

1.4. Age

Three grey- and two white-collar participants mentioned benevolent age discrimination, such as showing respect or assigning lighter duties to aged coworkers and allowing them to leave work earlier. These positive attitudes seem to be stronger for the aged workers who are seniors or hold higher hierarchical positions. Therefore, due to age, seniority and hierarchical status, there seems to be a change in interaction patterns. However, unlike other areas of discrimination, it was also noted that there is a cultural influence in Türkiye where showing respect to older colleagues is a norm. Participants mentioned that, irrespective of collar distinctions, there is a tendency to demonstrate reverence towards those who are older. For example, Participant 8, aged 52, and Participant 11, aged 38, both expressed their inclination to show respect to individuals older than themselves, regardless of their collar status.

“If there is something to be carried, even if it is something of light weight, (we tell the senior person to) bring that material slowly... For example, (when) tea comes, (we say) be seated, I will serve you.” (P5, grey-collar)

“Age is also important. I mean, in terms of priority... both age and seniority. We respect those who are older than us. Those younger than us also respect us in a way that is related to age.” (P11, white-collar)

1.5. Disability

Like gender dimension of diversity, individuals from diverse health spectrums are also exposed to both benevolent and hostile discrimination. Regarding hostile

discrimination, similar to the case for women, there are no individuals with physical or mental conditions in blue- or grey-collar positions. Therefore, it can be said that construction of glass walls extends to keeping individuals with health challenges outside (Bend & Fielden, 2021). Regarding benevolent discrimination, two grey- and two white-collar participants stated that they help and try to ease these workers' work.

“Here we have a disabled friend...He can hardly walk (so) we help him. We offer to carry his bag; we give priority to him in the cafeteria.” (P11, white-collar)

1.6. Mental/Physical Ability

As pointed out by one blue- and one grey-collar worker some individuals with their relatively low levels of skills and competence seem to receive some attention. Despite placing of these individuals in positions according to their ability and skill levels, some workers view them as incompetent (lacking in skills to work), and do not want them around. For example, Participant 6, a 23-year-old welder, reveals that other blue-collar workers often speak openly to him about their colleagues, expressing their desire for some of them to be fired, possibly due to his young age and position.

“Some don't like these individuals. They want to take the bread out of their mouths. You know, (they say) “This man doesn't know (anything), why do we still have him?” (P6, blue-collar)

2. External Dimensions of Diversity and Discrimination

External dimensions of diversity can be changed or discarded in lifetime, and they are less salient than internal dimensions (Loden & Rosener, 1991). In this study, physical appearance, education level, income, family status, political views and religious beliefs emerged as subthemes of external diversity categories.

2.1. Physical Appearance

First and foremost, both a grey-collar and a white-collar worker shared different instances and forms of discrimination related to physical appearance. While teasing and bullying based on appearance were observed across all three collar groups, the way individuals dress seemed to have a negative influence only on hiring decisions for white-collar workers. Moreover, in addition to the ongoing discrimination among peers at the same level, there exists a downward

vertical dimension of discrimination based on physical appearance for white-collar workers, which begins as early as the interview stage. As evident from the following quotes, discrimination within the white-collar community operates more subtly and covertly, often going unnoticed by others. In contrast, the tighter social bonds and lower education levels among blue-collar and grey-collar workers may lead to teasing that is directly expressed to the person's face.

“When someone is dirty, everyone starts to gossip about (him). They say “You smell”...People will talk behind your back...(such as) “Why is there a bad smell here? Doesn't he take a bath at all?” (P1, grey-collar)

“I felt judgment about appearance when job interviews were held with a couple of candidates... We hear that it is spoken within the company (such as) “Is this how you come to work?!” (P4, white-collar)

2.2. Education Level

Since blue- and grey-collar workers generally have lower education levels, they display benevolent discrimination towards someone with a higher education level, as observed in the study. The highly educated, but unfortunately misplaced workers, appear to receive more respect from their peers.

“They view those who are educated, differently...(They think) he is educated; he came (to work) because he had to...For example, there was a physics teacher here...I mean, people show respect to this teacher, they show respect just because he is educated.” (P1, grey-collar)

2.3. Income

As the altruistic understanding and nature of Turkish culture demand, individuals with low-income levels are sometimes financially supported by their coworkers. However, this was observed only among blue- and grey-collar workers, which is expected as these workers generally have lower incomes than others and act as a member of cohesive and clan-like groups.

2.4. Family Status

Family status also leads to benevolent discrimination among all work groups. For instance, participants stated that parents can take time off from work easier than others, and workers with newborns receive financial support from their colleagues.

2.5. *Political View*

As mentioned earlier, it has been observed that blue-collar workers, with their closely-knit social bonds, exhibit discrimination more directly than white-collar workers, who tend to be more subtle in their discriminatory behaviors. The harsh language and discriminatory remarks made by politicians, particularly when dividing voters of opposing political parties from those supporting the ruling party, have had an impact on the interactions among blue-collar workers. Some participants make insulting comments or jokes about members of opposing political parties and their fervent supporters. For example, Participant 8 shares that arguments arise based on political views. While age and seniority do not prevent discrimination based on political beliefs, no negative attitudes towards grey and white-collar workers have been observed among blue-collar workers. Therefore, the discrimination seems to occur more horizontally, among peers on the same level.

“Sheep (Participant calls a coworker who supports a particular political party as a sheep)...Sometimes we even quarrel.” (P8, blue-collar)

2.6. *Religious Beliefs*

It has been observed that there are discriminatory acts based on the daily practices of Islam. According to one blue- and one grey-collar worker, performing Friday prayers is not allowed, because management believes that it negatively affects performance. On the other hand, blue- and grey-collars help each other when one of them performs religious rituals, such as fasting during Ramadan. In the case of white-collar workers such assistance is not present.

“We slow down the tempo a little bit (during Ramadan)...After Ramadan, we prioritize our friends who fast in Ramadan and have them work overtime, because they do not have that opportunity (during Ramadan).” (P3, grey-collar)

3. *Organizational Dimensions of Diversity and Discrimination*

The diversity features placed in organizational dimensions are items that are under the control of the organization, and because of this, individuals can influence these dimensions to some extent. The types of discrimination were grouped under three subthemes as seniority, hierarchical status, and union affiliation.

3.1. Seniority

Seniority is the most frequently mentioned dimension by the participants, and feelings of discrimination become more intense when seniority is combined with age or hierarchical status. According to all work groups (two blue-collar, one grey-collar, two white-collar workers), discrimination based on seniority becomes benevolent for seniors while it becomes hostile for younger and less experienced individuals. Participants mentioned that new workers get help from others, while they receive less attention from management. For instance, Participant 6, a 27-year-old civil engineer, who has been working at this company for only 6 months, complains that the mistakes he pointed out to the management and the suggested improvements were not taken into consideration. Furthermore, workers who have worked for the company longer are respected more, paid higher and are considered to be flawless.

“But when you tell management (the mistake), management doesn't listen to you...They (management) tell the newcomers to do something, (but) they criticize everything (they do). They also think that seniors always do it right.” (P4, white-collar)

“Age is also important. I mean, in terms of priority...both age and seniority... Also, when seniority is also the case, there should be an extra respect and an extra priority.” (P11, white-collar)

Senior employees, when they are in white-collar positions, as mentioned by Participant 4 in the previous quotes, have more authority. However, when senior employees are in blue-collar positions, they tend to attract more reactions due to their mistakes. From all the interviews, it can be understood that in general, blue-collar workers are more oppressed.

“They just say (something like) this. “You've been here for ten years, you're still doing this wrong, you still can't do the project.” (P6, blue-collar)

3.2. Hierarchical Status

As mentioned earlier, participants talked about different patterns of interaction between workers based on age, seniority, and hierarchical status. However, it can be inferred that hierarchical status carries more significance in relation to discriminatory behaviors compared to age. For example, as evident in the following quotes, both Participant 2, aged 50, and Participant 3, aged 41,

mentioned being cautious while addressing the younger general manager during the interviews.

“I can make a joke to my friend (a colleague), but I can't to my general manager, I don't want to.” (P2, white-collar)

“The way he (the head of the department) talks to a normal blue-collar person will be different.” (P3, grey-collar)

3.3. Union Affiliation

Among the various subthemes of diversity and discrimination, only blue- and grey-collar workers mentioned about union affiliation. Membership in a union seems to be of utmost importance to management, and is known to carry a serious consequence, which is immediate dismissal.

“I have never been a member of a union...If you become a member of a union, you will be fired.” (P8, blue-collar)

Areas of Discrimination

Content analysis revealed another main theme, namely areas of discrimination, and that certain dimensions of diversity are carried over to discrimination in areas such as hiring, relationships, promotion, pay, work experiences and workload.

1. Hiring

As mentioned throughout this study, participants agreed that gender, physical appearance, and disability may influence being hired or not. In addition, three participants stated that they were able to get a job through the referral of their relatives who were already working in the firm.

2. Relationships

Almost all dimensions of diversity have reflections on the different ways of constructing and maintaining relationships among workers with different collars. However, these differing types of relationships have two sides. In addition to being treated differently because of features an individual has, some individuals approach their superiors with the hope of receiving special treatment, in other words, seeking favoritism.

Regarding the relationships theme, a difference has been observed between white-collar workers and others. Similar to the political view subtheme, blue-collar and grey-collar workers find it easier to express discrimination arising from favoritism towards each other. As an example, Participant 8, a blue-collar worker, mentions that favored employees are addressed using inappropriate nicknames.

“I can’t make any jokes (to my boss). I don’t expect them (subordinates) to do the same for me either. They don’t already.” (P2, white-collar)

“There are those who flatter their superiors...They are called smarmy, smarmy, ass-kissers... We see that they become favored employees by exaggerating their work.” (P8, blue-collar)

3. Promotion

According to two grey-collar participants, getting a promotion is especially related to good relationships with the superiors. Participant 8, who has been working at the same company for 15 years and is currently a foreman, mentions in the following quote that getting promoted is related to treating to the supervisor favorably.

“(To get a promotion) they examine your current order of working...(and) how your relationship with your supervisor is.” (P1, grey-collar)

4. Pay

Another outstanding area of discrimination is compensation. One blue- and one white-collar participant mentioned pay discrimination. It has been observed that there are discriminatory practices in the pay given to employees based on some diversity dimensions by the management.

“If someone is a fellow townsperson, he earns a little bit more...There are those who kiss up to their superiors and rumors circulate about them getting higher wages.” (P8, blue-collar)

5. Work Experiences and Workload

The last theme about results of discrimination revealed by the content analysis is work experiences and workload. As can be seen from the quotations in this study, discriminatory behaviors and attitudes toward individuals affect their experiences at the workplace. For instance, workers are given lighter tasks because of their townspersonship.

Direction of Discrimination

Besides the dimensions of diversity and discrimination, the content analysis also revealed that discrimination flowed in two directions: lateral and vertical (downward). More specifically, discrimination seems to happen among co-workers as well as being exercised by superiors towards subordinates. Furthermore, compared to vertical discrimination, lateral discrimination seems to be more pervasive. With the exception of union affiliation, in all of the diversity dimensions, discrimination is experienced laterally, whereas vertical discrimination is found in about half of the diversity dimensions. There were six dimensions from two categories in which only lateral discrimination was mentioned. The internal dimensions of lateral discrimination included personality, age, and mental/physical ability. Out of the three organizational dimensions of diversity, two dimensions (seniority and hierarchical status) were related to both lateral and vertical discrimination. The only organizational dimension of diversity that was related only to vertical discrimination was union affiliation. Thus, the areas of discrimination showed a particular difference according to their direction. While downward vertical discrimination was found to occur in hiring, promotion, workload and salary decisions, lateral discrimination was predominantly related to working climate.

Discriminatory Behaviors

Lastly, several participants consistently used the term “positive discrimination” in their narrations, and they associated positivity with the concept of discrimination by mentioning certain positive behaviors, such as carrying out some duties for someone else, giving someone priority in the lunch queue. Those positive behaviors which still count for discrimination should be named as benevolent discrimination (Romani et al., 2019). Therefore, another theme constructed in this study is discriminatory behaviors dichotomized as benevolent, and hostile discrimination. Contrary to benevolent discrimination, hostile discrimination consists of only negative behaviors, such as name-calling, ostracism, segregation, dismissal and other salient acts. In this study, discrimination was found to have a hostile nature only for personality, mental/physical ability, physical appearance, political view, and union affiliation dimensions. However, benevolent discrimination was the only type of discrimination found for age, education level, income, family status, and hierarchical status.

Discussion

This research aimed to explore differences in experiences of discrimination among different categories of workers. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants, 3 of whom were blue-collar, 4 grey-collar and 4 white-collar workers, in a large organization in Türkiye. Content analysis was performed on the interview data, revealing several diversity dimensions that fell under the internal, external, and organizational categories. The internal dimensions included personality, gender, age, disability, citizenship/ethnicity/townspersonship, and mental/physical ability. The external dimensions consisted of physical appearance, education level, income, family status, political view, and religious affiliations. The organizational dimensions mentioned by the participants were seniority, hierarchical status, and union affiliation.

Starting with the direction of discrimination (Table 3), lateral discrimination was found to be the dominant type of discrimination, as it was found in 14 out of 15 dimensions, whereas vertical discrimination was found in only 9 dimensions. This shows that discrimination was mainly a peer-to-peer issue. For the types of behaviors involved, similar to hostile discrimination, benevolent discrimination was found in two-thirds of the dimensions. Both hostile and benevolent discriminations were found in five dimensions, namely, gender, citizenship/ethnicity/townspersonship, disability, religious beliefs, and seniority. These findings are in line with previous findings on Türkiye's low score on gender egalitarianism and high scores on collectivism and power distance.

Table 3. Summary of Findings

Dimension of Diversity	Direction of Discrimination		Discriminatory Behaviors		Classification of Employees		
	Lateral	Vertical	Benevolent	Hostile	Blue	Grey	White
Personality	+			+		+	
Gender	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Ethnicity and/or Townspersonship	+	+	+	+	+		+
Age	+		+			+	+
Disability	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mental/Physical Ability	+			+	+		+
Physical appearance	+	+		+		+	+
Education Level	+		+			+	
Income	+		+		+	+	
Family Status	+	+	+			+	+
Political View	+			+	+		
Religious Beliefs	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Seniority	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Hierarchical Status	+	+	+			+	+
Union Affiliation		+		+	+	+	

Combining and evaluating the findings with respect to collar types, in terms of the noted dimensions of diversity and experienced discriminations, the three groups of workers showed more commonalities than differences. The common

dimensions of diversity and discrimination for all three collar participants are gender, disability, and seniority. Interestingly, for these dimensions, all the cells are marked showing that lateral, vertical, benevolent and hostile discriminations are experienced.

There are four dimensions common for grey- and white-collar participants, namely, age, physical appearance, family status, and hierarchical status. The dimensions common for blue- and grey-collar participants are income, religious beliefs, and union affiliation. Additionally, there are two dimensions – personality and education level – which are noted by only grey-collar participants, and the political view dimension noted by white-collar participants.

Even though the collar groups were mostly in agreement on the dimensions of diversity and discrimination, the experiences of discrimination with respect to certain dimensions differed. As stated before, there was an ongoing benevolent discrimination of women and disabled workers, mentioned by all collars. However, for blue- and grey-collar positions, not employing women or individuals from diverse health spectrums turned into a hostile discrimination in hiring. Moreover, physical appearance meant different things for two collar groups. While a grey-collar participant specified cleanliness-dirtiness and bodily odors, especially sweat, as factors related to physical appearance, a white-collar participant referred to formal business attire as the defining aspect of physical appearance.

Another difference found among these groups is that blue- and grey-collars seem to have formed highly cohesive informal groups in which they show solidarity. Besides the frequent use of the “we” term, the level of interaction among them also seems high compared to the white-collar workers, who have a relatively individualistic sub-culture. This in-group collectivism (House et al., 2002; Pagda, 2019) leads the two collar groups to distance themselves easily from the out-group (Branscombe, Wann, Noel & Coleman, 1993) workers, especially with respect to different political views and personalities.

Except for union affiliation, all dimensions of discrimination are experienced laterally, mostly peer-to-peer. The vertical dimensionality in discrimination arises because of the nature of those dimensions that can be observed in certain practices of discrimination, such as hiring, promotion, workload, and salary decisions.

In addition, the participants talked about benevolent discrimination with respect to most of the dimensions, and this type of discrimination was the sole

discrimination experienced for five dimensions (age, education level, income, family status, and hierarchical status).

In terms of the dynamics of discrimination, some dimensions of diversity were combined in some narratives of discrimination, such as age, seniority, and hierarchical status resulting in stronger benevolent discrimination. Besides, the attention given to hierarchical level, age and seniority also indicates a culture of hierarchy, and this finding about mixture of clan and hierarchy cultures is in line with the literature (Oney-Yazıcı, Giritli, Topcu-Oraz & Acar, 2007). As another important dynamic, a particular discriminatory act or decision within the firm was attributed to more than one dimension of diversity, such as the ineligibility of women and individuals from diverse health spectrums for employment in blue- and grey-collar jobs.

Finally, we can state that each dimension of diversity is somehow transferred to discrimination either in a light or severe form. For instance, the gossiping of some workers on a blue-collar worker's sweat odor can be considered a light discrimination as it involves talking behind someone's back. Unfortunately, there are other discriminations which can be deemed more severe, such as immediate termination due to union membership. From another perspective, the participants seemed to mention only the diversity dimensions with which they had issues. Therefore, it can hardly be claimed that any dimension of diversity automatically becomes an area of discrimination.

Although the current study has many strengths, such as including grey-collar workers, comparing collar types, examining many diversity dimensions beyond the literature, it had a limitation. Despite seeking voluntariness through an announcement by the HR department, about half of the participants were observed to be uneasy and could hardly talk. One of these participants even questioned whether the interviews were organized to determine those to be fired. When the interviewer asked for new participants to replace these hesitant workers, the contact person from the HR department showed reluctance by stating that he should not be interrupting the workflows of some other workers. To overcome such difficulties, an alternative approach could be considered, such as collecting and analyzing data from blogs where workers freely write down their experiences.

As this study showed the coexistence of multiple diversity dimension in a particular discrimination, it would be worthwhile to study the hybrid structure of diversity dimensions in discrimination specifically in the future. The type of

reactions to discrimination – such as resentment, indifference – and how they relate to the role of the worker – such as actor, observer or victim – should also be studied in the future. Since different levels of importance on some dimensions of diversity and different experiences of discrimination for three different groups were found, future studies should take a closer look at these with higher number of participants from these worker categories. Future studies on cross-sectional samples, and different types of organizational cultures would make worthwhile contributions to the literature.

For practical implications, to alleviate discrimination and have a more inclusive work environment, organizations should implement diversity management programs that include initiatives such as mentoring and promoting volunteering opportunities. These programs should aim to actively engage all groups of workers and managers in the organization.

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Appendix

