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EXPLORING GERMAN TEACHERS' IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE AND MALE MUSLIM STUDENTS AND RESPONSES TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Abstract:

Studies have indicated that educators have unfavorable opinions about pupils from ethnic minorities, many of whom are Muslims, who are stereotypically linked to traditional gender norms in Germany. Thus far, there has been no investigation of the role of student gender or implicit attitudes in this particular scenario. We used an unconscious Association Test to gauge unconscious biases toward Muslim students relative to Christian pupils among 136 teachers in our sample. There were fewer favorable implicit and explicit opinions about male Muslim students than toward female pupils. Teachers were asked to consider their reactions after reading a scenario involving social exclusion. The student's gender and religion influenced the teachers' responses. Our research suggests that one factor contributing to ethnic minority kids' educational disadvantages may be Islam.

Keywords: student gender, teacher evaluation, teacher attitudes, and Muslim students

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic minority students suffer from disadvantages in many educational systems. Disadvantages often befall students who come from countries in which Islam is the majority religion. In Germany, students with Turkish roots represent a significant ethnic minority and are vulnerable to teachers' lower academic achievement judgments (Tobisch & Dresel, 2017) and biased social judgments. Teachers punish ethnic minority students' misbehavior harsher (Glock, 2016) and show lower intervention rates in social exclusion situations (Beißert & Bonefeld, 2020). How teachers handle social exclusion can have an impact on classroom climate and bullying (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). Teacher biases might stem from their perceptions of Islam, which are often associated with students with Turkish roots (Klapproth et al., 2018). Many people in Western societies perceive Islam as representing traditional gender roles with strict behavioral norms for women (Al Atom, 2015) and to be different from secular Western norms (Bashir-Ali & Elnour, 2003). This is often a barrier for the integration of Muslims into Western societies (Van Praag et al., 2016). Finally, Islam is often perceived negatively in Western countries because many people associate it with violence and terrorism (Hutchison & Rosenthal, 2011). Hence, it might be plausible that some of the disadvantages students with Turkish roots experience can be attributed to their religion. Thus, the aim of this study was to investigate teachers' attitudes toward male and female Muslim students and teachers' judgments about fictitious Muslim students in a social exclusion situation.

Attitude Theory and Research

Attitudes are evaluations of an attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) and are divided into explicit and implicit ones (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Implicit attitudes are automatic associations between the attitude object and its evaluation and are suggested to be the result of automatic, associative processes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Explicit attitudes are the result of deliberative processes and are the conscious evaluation of the attitude object (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). This implicit–explicit distinction is conceptualized as affective and cognitive components in the multicomponent model of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The affective component describes the feelings

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and valence associated with the attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Implicit attitudes tap into the valence associated with the attitude object because they represent the evaluation of this object (Fazio, 2007). The cognitive component is often assessed with explicit attitude questionnaires reflecting generalized beliefs and knowledge (Glock et al., 2020). The third attitude component is the behavioral one which considers the cognitive and affective attitude component as important for behavior and judgments (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Although implicit measures are still rarely used in the educational domain, a growing body of evidence shows that (preservice) teachers' implicit attitudes toward ethnic minority students are mainly negative (Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2019).

Looking specifically at attitudes toward Muslims, a Dutch study showed negative attitudes and emotions, such as anger and disgust (Wirtz et al., 2016). Dutch teachers' implicit attitudes toward Muslim students were neither positive nor negative (Thijs et al., 2018). However, this sample of teachers was assessed at Islamic schools, and the group of non-Muslim teachers was too small (n = 15) to draw valid conclusions. Implicit attitudes toward Arab American students, who were suggested to be most likely Muslims, were more negative than toward White American students (Kumar et al., 2015). Explicit attitudes toward Muslim students were relatively negative (Rissanen et al., 2015). Moreover, teachers tended to report more disfavor toward Muslim students (Agirdag & Loobuyck, 2011), but this varies depending on teachers' demographics (Agirdag et al., 2012). Female, younger and teachers with a college degree show more positive attitudes (Agirdag et al., 2012). These previous studies did not differentiate between male and female Muslim students. However, this seems to be important because conservative interpretations of Islam entail traditional gender roles, and male Muslim students are assumed to emphasize their religious masculinity (Macan Ghaill & Haywood, 2017). Hence, male Muslim students might be perceived to behave in traditionally masculine ways in school. Female Muslims might suffer from invisibility because they are neither perceived as typical women nor as typical Muslims (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Hence, female Muslim students, too, might face gender-related difficulties in school (Anderson, 2020), often with respect to sports and physical education (Mirsafian et al., 2014). Nonetheless, both female and male Muslim students are vulnerable to being stereotyped (Anderson, 2020), which might explain why secondary school teachers hold implicitly negative attitudes toward female ethnic minority students (Glock & Klapproth, 2017). In secondary school, behavioral differences might become more pronounced because particularly during adolescence when Muslim girls are confronted with behavioral norms that are considered to be at odds with conservative Muslim education (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012). Accordingly, teachers report positive explicit attitudes toward female Muslim students (Kleen & Glock, 2018).

Hence, we expected to find gender differences in implicit and explicit attitudes but could not specify a hypothesis on their direction. Research has shown differences between genders, but not consistently (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Kleen & Glock, 2018). Furthermore, ethnicity matters in a social exclusion scenario (Beißert & Bonefeld, 2020), and teachers are often aware of the vulnerability of ethnic minority students (Beißert et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers more likely intervene for female students (Beißert et al., 2022). Hence, we expected that teachers would more likely intervene for Muslim students (main effect) and particularly for female Muslim students (interaction effect).

II Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 136 German teachers (92 women; in years: Mage = 39.89, SDage = 11.18; Mexperience = 13.18, SDexperience = 10.70). Ninety-four teachers reported to be

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Christian, 5 Muslim, 1 Jewish, and 36 did not answer. Twenty-three teachers reported being immigrants or their direct descendants. Participants received no compensation.

Procedure

Teachers were visited in their schools. After giving informed consent, this study was randomly run in the female or male version. Within these two versions, the student's religion in the scenario was also presented randomly. Participants worked on the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) using the target categories Christian student and Muslim student and the attribute categories pleasant and unpleasant. Then, the scenario was presented. Next, the participants filled out the questionnaire on explicit attitudes toward Muslims. Finally, demographics were assessed, and participants were thanked and debriefed.

III Materials

Implicit Attitudes

We employed the IAT with six male names signaling a Christian background (e.g., Johannes) and six male names indicating a Muslim background (e.g., Ahmed; see Electronic Supplementary Material, ESM 1, for the names). In the female version, we employed six female Christian (e.g., Hannah) and six female Muslim names (e.g., Betül). As attributes, we used the same 20 positive (e.g., happy, warm) and 20 negative adjectives (e.g., brutal, cold) as in previous research. The correlation between IAT practice score and IAT test score, r = .55, reflected medium internal consistency.

Explicit Attitudes Toward Muslims

The explicit attitudes questionnaire contains eight items (e.g., "Muslim students reject jihad and violence"; Agirdag et al., 2012, p. 371). The items were filled in on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (= do not agree at all) to 5 (= totally agree). Higher scores signaled more positive attitudes toward Muslims, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$.

Social Exclusion Scenario

The scenario developed by Beißert and Bonefeld (2020) describes a situation in which students denied to let another student join their learning group. We compiled four different versions of the scenario with Paul and Eva signaling Christian and Fatima and Mohammed indicating Muslim names. We considered three different judgments consisting of the likelihood of intervening, asking the group to let the student join, and asking the student to look for another group. Participants made their judgments using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (= not likely at all) to 5 (= very likely).

Demographic Questionnaire

We assessed participants' gender, age, teaching experience, and religious and ethnic background.

IV RESULTS

Implicit Attitudes

Positive values indicated more negative attitudes toward Muslim students (more negative attitudes toward Muslim students should always be interpreted as more negative in relation to Christian students). Information on the data analysis is provided in ESM 1. First, we investigated the nature of implicit attitudes in conducting a one-sample t test with the reference constant 0. Implicit attitudes were significantly different from zero, in general, $t(135) = 10.36$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.92$, 95% CI [0.73, 1.13], for female, $t(77) = 4.99$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.80], and male Muslim students, $t(57) = 13.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.83$,95% CI [1.39, 2.23]. An independent t test with student gender as a factor showed that the teachers were implicitly more negative toward male than female Muslim students, $t(134) = 6.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.08$, 95% CI [0.713, 1.447] (see ESM 1 for all Ms, SDs, and correlations).

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Explicit Attitudes Toward Muslims

An independent t test with student gender as a group factor revealed teachers' more positive attitudes toward female than toward male Muslim students, t(134) = 2.76, p = .007, d = 0.48, 95% CI [0.132, 0.828].

Teachers' Judgments in the Social Exclusion Scenarios

We submitted the judgments to a 2 (student religion: Muslim vs. Christian) × 2 (student gender: male vs. female) Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). This MANOVA revealed significant main effects of student religion, F(3, 124) = 6.00, Wilks' Λ = 0.87, p < .001, ηp 2 = 0.13, 95% CI [0.03, 0.22], and student gender, F(3, 124) = 4.80, Wilks' Λ = 0.90, p = .003, ηp 2 = 0.10, 95% CI [0.01, 0.20]. The interaction was not significant, F(3, 124) = 0.58, Wilks' Λ = 0.99, p = .63, ηp 2 = 0.01, 95% CI [0.00, 0.06]. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the likelihood of the intervention did not reveal significant main effects of student gender or student religion or a significant interaction effect (see Table 1 for all ANOVA results).

The ANOVA on the likelihood of asking the group to let the student join yielded a significant main effect of student gender. The teachers were more likely to ask the group to let the student join if the student was male than female. They were also more likely to ask the group to let the Muslim (M = 3.61, SD = 1.17) than the Christian student join (M = 3.14, SD = 1.30). The interaction was not significant. The significant main effect of student religion displayed by the ANOVA showed that teachers were more likely to ask the Christian (M = 3.26, SD = 1.10) than the Muslim student (M = 2.72, SD = 1.11) to look for another group.

Table 1. Results of the ANOVAs on the social exclusion scenario

Variable	$F(1,129)$	η_p^2	95% CI
Likelihood of intervention			
Gender	2.23	0.02	[0.00, 0.08]
Religion	2.32	0.02	[0.00, 0.09]
Gender × Religion	1.58	0.01	[0.00, 0.07]
Asking the group to let the student join			
Gender	6.99**	0.05	[0.003, 0.14]
	4.60*	0.03	[0.00, 0.11]
Gender × Religion	0.58	0.00	[0.00, 0.05]
Asking the student to look for another group			
Gender	3.46	0.03	[0.0, 0.10]
Religion	7.62**	0.06	[0.04, 0.15]
Gender × Religion	1.34	0.01	[0.00, 0.07]

Neither the main effect of student gender nor the interaction reached significance.

V DISCUSSION

The results showed that teachers had less negative implicit and more positive explicit attitudes toward female than male Muslim students. This might be attributed to perceptions about male students' behaviors that reflect religious masculinity (Macan Ghaill & Haywood, 2017). The emphasis on religion seems to activate other evaluations presumably stemming from stereotypical associations between Islam and gender inequality to the disadvantage of women (Bashir-Ali & Elnour, 2003). The preference for female over male Muslim students might result from compensating for an assumed disadvantaged position of Muslim women. Teachers might feel pity, thus resulting in a feeling that one should help female Muslim students develop (Cuddy et al., 2007), leading to positive affect (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976). If Muslim men are considered to act out traditional values that they link to Islam, this might lead to contempt by the teachers, thus provoking distancing (Cuddy et al., 2007).

Teachers' judgments in the social exclusion scenario point in a similar direction. Teachers expressed that they would rather convince the group to include male compared with female students – independent of religion – and to include Muslim compared with Christian students – independent of gender. This could be due to social desirability because it might appear unacceptable not to help a socially excluded Muslim student which is especially

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true in socially sensitive situations (De Houwer, 2006). Our results might also be due to shifting standards (Biernat & Manis, 1994), and in this case, negative stereotypes can lead to more positive judgments (Nishen & Kessels, 2022). Although teachers had less positive attitudes toward male Muslim students, the latter were protected in the social exclusion scenario, and the group was more likely to be asked to act rather than the Muslim student himself. Hence, although negative attitudes are not reflected in teachers' behaviors and judgments, disadvantages can nevertheless operate. In this vein, teachers sometimes provide overly positive feedback to appear unprejudiced (Nishen & Kessels, 2022).

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