

# Influence of Regional Perceptions and Children's Age on Their Social Inclusion Judgments

Buse GÖNÜL<sup>1</sup>, Başak ŞAHİN-ACAR<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The present study examined the effects of children's perceptions about the members of different geographical regions of Turkey on their social inclusion judgments. Children evaluated vignettes including protagonists coming from eastern and western regions of Turkey, which are namely easterners vs. westerners. Children demonstrated established perceptions regarding the disadvantaged social status of easterners and advantaged one for westerners, as shown by the preliminary study. In the main study, 150 children (75 10-year-olds,  $M = 10$  years,  $SD = 4.17$ ; 75 13-year-olds, 13.06 years,  $SD = 0.31$ ) were asked to decide whom to include, either an easterner or a westerner, into a reading group and justify their decisions. According to the results, while participants chose the socially advantaged child in the equal qualifications condition more frequently, they chose the disadvantaged child for the unequal qualifications. For justifications, 13-year-olds made more stereotyping and moral justifications, whereas 10-year-olds made more psychological justifications in the equal qualifications condition. This study was the first attempt to infer the socially disadvantaged status of easterners in Turkey and its effect as a criterion for inclusion.

**Keywords:** social inclusion, exclusion, judgments, social status, age

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<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Middle East Technical University, Department of Psychology, busegonul(at)gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assist. Prof. Dr., Middle East Technical University, Department of Psychology, basaks(at)metu.edu.tr

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# Çocukların Dahil Etme Yargıları Üzerinde Coğrafi Bölgelere İlişkin Algılarının ve Yaşın Rolü

## ÖZ

Mevcut çalışmada, çocukların Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinde yaşayan kişiler ile ilgili sahip oldukları algılarının, sosyal dahil etme yargıları üzerindeki etkisi incelenmiştir. Katılımcılar Türkiye'nin doğu ve batı bölgelerinden gelen çocuklarla ilgili hikayeleri değerlendirmişlerdir. Öncül çalışmada çocukların doğu bölgesinde yaşayan kişilere dezavantajlı sosyal statü ve ilgili algıları atfederken, batı bölgesinde yaşayan kişilere ise avantajlı bir sosyal statü atfettikleri gözlemlenmiştir. Ana çalışmaya ise toplamda 150 çocuk katılmıştır (75 10 yaş, *Ort.* = 10 yıl, *SS* = 4.17 ay; 75 13 yaş, *Ort.* = 13.06 yıl, *SS* = 0.31 ay). Bu çalışmada katılımcılara bir okuma grubu ve bu gruba dahil olmak isteyen ve okula yeni gelen bir doğulu bir de batılı çocuğu içeren hikayeler sunulmuştur. Ardından, çocuklara iki karakter arasından gruba kimin dahil edilmesi gerektiği ve kararlarının ardındaki gerekçelendirmeleri sorulmuştur. Sonuçlar eşit nitelikler koşulunda sosyal olarak avantajlı çocuğun, eşit olmayan nitelikler koşulunda ise dezavantajlı çocuğun daha fazla tercih edildiğini göstermiştir. Gerekçelendirmeler için ise, 13 yaş grubu katılımcılar küçüklere oranla daha fazla ahlaki ve kalıp yargı gerekçelendirmeleri kullanırken; 10 yaş grubu katılımcıların daha fazla psikolojik gerekçelendirmeleri kullandığı görülmüştür. Mevcut çalışma, çocukların kişilerin Türkiye içinde geldiği bölgelere göre yaptıkları sosyal statü atıflarının, bir sosyal dahil etme kriteri olarak kullandığını ele alan ilk çalışma özelliğindedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** sosyal dahil etme, dışlama, yargılar, sosyal statü, yaş

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Social and cultural dynamics lead to new forms of stereotypes and prejudice (Killen, Hitti & Mulvey, 2015), and these stereotypes might be used as inclusion and exclusion criteria. Previous studies examined whether children find it legitimate to exclude or include others based on various group memberships, such as ethnic or national identities. However, there might be specific cultural contexts, in which social inclusion would not be based on ethnic membership of others, but rather, this might be based on the geographical and regional differences in one cultural context. For instance, individuals who were born in a particular region of a country might not be fond of others who were born in another and a usually distinct region of the same country. In the context of Turkey, a few resources mentioned the salience of geographical regions, especially eastern-western regional distinctions, as a basis for having differential perceptions towards the people living in those regions (Düzen, 2015; Tuzkaya et al., 2015). Based on this premise, the present study explored Turkish children's regional perceptions and stereotypes towards individuals living in eastern and western regions of Turkey, namely easterners and westerners. We specifically examined whether children used their perceptions as social inclusion criteria in the context of group activities. When children evaluated individuals coming from eastern and western regions of Turkey, they built their social inclusion judgments upon their perceptions regarding the differentiated social status of the people living in those regions. This study contributed to the existing literature by providing a novel context for examining children's inclusion judgments based on regional perceptions and stereotypes.

### **Theoretical Background**

**Domain-based reasoning of social issues.** Children base their social evaluations on multifaceted factors, such as their gain or loss in the face of benefiting or excluding a member into or out of a social group. In addition, they evaluate the requirements of a diverse range of social relationships when they make sense of the social world (Smetana, 1999). According to Social Cognitive Domain Theory (SCDT), individuals use three knowledge domains when they evaluate social issues as moral, social-conventional and psychological (Turiel, 1983). While the moral domain refers to the concerns of fairness, equality and others' rights, the social-conventional domain includes social norms and group concerns. Moreover, when individuals use the psychological domain, they make attributions about personal choice and preferences. Over the three decades, domain research revealed that the development of moral, social-conventional and psychological domains of knowledge progress hand-in-hand. However, each domain also has their inner developmental course based on child's cognitive and social maturity (Smetana, 1999; Turiel, 2006).

**Social inclusion judgments based on Social Domain Theory.** The domain-based reasoning of social issues pioneered new models by offering an insight into how individuals evaluate moral, social-conventional and psychological concerns simultaneously. Social Domain Theory, a branch of SCDT, concerns individuals' judgment patterns of social exclusion and inclusion in diverse social contexts. According to Rutland, Killen, and Abrams (2010), exclusion evaluations are based on a balance between individual choices and preferences, and societal norms, group cohesion, and traditions. While in some contexts children emphasize moral values such as equality and fairness; in other occasions, they use stereotypes and prejudice as legitimate justifications of social exclusion for the sake of ingroup and functioning (Rutland et. al, 2010). In order to maintain this balance, children sometimes violate moral concerns for the benefit of the individual or the group. In other words, this decision process is usually not a simple one; rather it is composed of complex and multi-faceted evaluations. Social inclusion and exclusion judgments are based on the interplay of two important factors as the context of the evaluation and the children's socio-cognitive developmental processes.

**Group membership as a criterion of social inclusion.** One of the most extensively studied criteria while examining children's social inclusion and exclusion judgments is group membership. Referred to as intergroup exclusion (Aboud, 1992), individuals may experience stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination based on the groups they belong to such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Although there is an extensive body of literature focusing on intergroup exclusions by adults, research on children's related judgments are comparatively fewer and to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies on this issue in the context of Turkey. However, the structure and the content of social judgments and occasionally stereotypes are carried into the adulthood years (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Thus, it is informative to examine how children evaluate intergroup exclusion to shed light on its developmental mechanisms.

There are a number of criteria that children use to make social inclusion and exclusion related judgments, such as gender, ethnic or cultural identity (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardilla-Rey, 2001; Malti, Killen, & Gasser, 2012; Møller & Tenenbaum, 2011; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001; Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010) Even though children, regardless of their age, do not usually view social exclusion solely based on group membership as acceptable, their evaluations also change as a factor of group membership under evaluation. For example, children evaluated excluding someone based on gender more acceptable, compared to

excluding them based on ethnic background (Møller & Tenenbaum, 2011). Considering the complexity of social inclusion and exclusion judgments, the context of the judgments provides important information.

When children make judgments regarding whom to include or exclude based upon the group membership, as in the case of ethnic identity, they are highly related to ingroup and outgroup biases, stereotypes and prejudice (Killen & Rutland, 2011). For instance, Killen and Stangor (2001) showed that even though children's evaluations of ethnicity-based exclusion were not under the complete influence of stereotypes, they, when the group functioning was at stake, evaluated excluding a peer based on ethnicity as more acceptable by referring stereotypes frequently. These ethnic or geographical region-based stereotypes might manifest themselves in different ways due to different social and cultural contexts. There is a significant amount of research on how ethnic background influences social inclusion and exclusion judgments. However, geographical region related stereotypes were not examined as a criterion of social inclusion judgments, and there are a few studies about adult's attitudes and stereotypes in other social sciences (e.g. Johnson & Coleman, 2012; Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermandi, & Mosso, 2005; Reed, 2010; Rogers & Wood, 2010; Young, 1988). In the current study, we aimed to expand the related literature by introducing a possible inclusion and exclusion criteria depending on social status due to geographical regions, namely being an easterner vs. a westerner in Turkey.

### **The Case of Turkey**

Throughout the historical course of Turkish cultural context, there are features frequently attributed to the people living in eastern and western regions of Turkey. For example, individuals living in the eastern regions are usually associated with poverty-related, less-developed and socially disadvantaged ways of living and cultural practices (Tuzkaya et al., 2015). Furthermore, individuals living in these regions, namely easterners (*doğulu* in Turkish), are also associated with some traits, such as having a specific dialect or a way of speaking the Turkish language, and the lack of modernized ways of living. On the other hand, individuals living in western regions are viewed as more intellectual and modern (Düzen, 2015; Tuzkaya et al., 2015). This social dynamic is quite common even in the daily socialization of Turkish people. Participants of a recent national survey conducted with a representative sample reported that easterner-westerner distinction and related perceptions are one of the main issues leading to the societal polarization problem in Turkey (Kadir Has Üniversitesi Türkiye Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2016). Yet, it is not an empirically

investigated issue as a criterion for social exclusion. Thus, this possible context and social status are worthwhile to explore in terms of whether it is used as a legitimate criterion of social inclusion and exclusion and whether it interferes with possible stigmatization of the individuals belonging to these groups.

Previous literature on perceived social differences due to different geographical regions prevalently focused on social status differences and gaps between those regions (Johnson & Coleman, 2012; Jost et al., 2005). In a similar vein, we argue that the underlying mechanism behind possible regional stereotypes in Turkey might also be based on the differentiated attributions about the social status of people living in the eastern and the western regions of Turkey. While the attributions towards people living in the eastern regions refer to as a *socially disadvantaged status*, the ones towards the individuals living in the western regions refer to as a *socially advantaged status*. Even if concepts about socially advantaged and disadvantaged status were introduced especially in intergroup exclusion literature, there are no studies empirically defining or examining stereotypes for easterners and westerners in the context of social exclusion.

Turkish culture has evolved with the effects of various values. On the one hand, relatedness, being loyal and tolerant to different groups in the society, and maintaining coherence have been important components of social and cultural life (Kaval, 2013). On the other hand, within the last two decades, Turkey has also been experiencing hegemonic impacts of oppression (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015). This oppressive social atmosphere leads to more conservative values and in turn, more emphasized stereotyping among different groups in Turkey. Once these kinds of social conflicts arise and stereotyping tendencies become more visible, social dynamics within Turkey became more polarized and in turn, more available for possible social exclusions. Thus, exploring this new social reality in terms of its effects on social inclusion and exclusion judgments would provide valuable information about Turkish youth's evaluations when they encounter with individuals who are coming from different regions and cultural backgrounds than themselves.

Who are the easterners and westerners in Turkish cultural context? There are multiple ways to explain social status related differences between these two perceived groups, including wealth, access to health services and education, attributions, social status, etc. Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI) repeatedly revealed significant differences between eastern and western regions of Turkey in terms of living conditions and access to basic human rights (2010, 2013). Especially in the eastern

regions, which are closer to the eastern border of Turkey, individuals struggle with high rates of poverty, unemployment, and limited access to sufficient education and health opportunities. However, for western regions, employment opportunities are richer and access to education and health opportunities is substantially better. While there is a tendency to look down on individuals from eastern regions regarding attributions and social status, individuals from western regions are dignified. Studies showed that exposure to stereotypical attributions, discrimination and decreased social support have usually been a common experience of individuals who migrated to the big western cities from the eastern and southern eastern regions of Turkey, regardless of their ethnic background (Aker, Ayata, Özeren, Buran & Bay, 2002; Aksel, Gün, Irak & Çengelci, 2007; Erdem, Özevin & Özselçuk, 2003). There are stereotypes about ethnic backgrounds as well, yet not all eastern or southern eastern cities of Turkey are necessarily associated with minority groups. For instance, cities which are neighboring each other (e.g. Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa in the east) might be predominantly Turkish or Kurdish in terms of ethnicity, yet individuals from both cities are evaluated as easterners. In those terms, being an easterner might be conceptualized as an umbrella term, including people from various ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Düzen argued that in Turkey, when individuals do not have much information about the city or personal information of a newcomer, they would almost automatically attribute the stereotypes of being an easterner or westerner by examining dialects, outfits, and related attitudes and behaviors (2015, p. 65).

In order to explore these dynamics with children, we selected one eastern and one western representative city. Van, a city located near the biggest lake in Turkey on the eastern border, was chosen as the representative eastern city. This city has been pronounced prevalently in Turkish primary school system because of its lake is the largest in Turkey. Yet it is one of the most disadvantaged cities of Turkey in terms of living conditions and access to economic and health opportunities (TSI, 2010). Importantly, people from Van are not socially classified as members of a specific ethnic group. To examine whether children also have certain perceptions and stereotypes towards people living in the western cities of Turkey, we chose Istanbul as the representative western city and as a counterpart of Van. Over the historical course, Istanbul has been the center of politics, culture, and economics (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2017), and it is one of the most known cities by being the most cosmopolitan, developed, and westernized city in Turkey.

For the current study, we recruited children from Ankara, which is the capital city, and geographically in the middle of Turkey's map, to understand their

conceptualizations about being an easterner and westerner. Different from the previous studies, we asked our participants to evaluate two regional outgroups. In previous literature, participants usually belong to one of the groups that were compared for inclusion and exclusion. However, we aimed to explore possible regional stereotypes from an outsider view.

### **Influence of Social-Cognitive Development on Social Inclusion Judgments**

In addition to the social context, children's socio-cognitive developmental processes are influential on their social evaluations (Nucci, 2001). As children get older, their understanding and manifestation of moral and social-conventional domains vary. Even though each knowledge domain has its own developmental course, they also interact with each other depending on children's social and cognitive maturity. In order to assess how development in terms of chronological age shapes their regional perceptions of easterners and westerners, we recruited 10 and 13-year-olds. These age groups were specifically chosen since the transition period from middle childhood to middle adolescence years marks important developmental milestones regarding the evaluation of social issues. In terms of moral domain, around the ages of 9-10, children have a good sense of equality, fairness and reciprocity issues. Compared to younger children, children in this age group start to better understand that strict equality might not be the best solution to moral issues and sometimes exceptions might apply. However, these exceptions still need to be concrete in general for children to make sense (Nucci, 2001). When children hit adolescence, they experience major changes in terms of their interpretation of moral values, both for the groups they belong and the ones they don't belong to. Regarding the social-conventional knowledge domain, children around the ages of 9-10 have a good understanding of social norms and their functions. They also become more aware that social norms can be violated if necessary, but these situations need to be highly salient for them. When they reach adolescence, children also have a better understanding of how social norms protect hierarchies and social roles and sometimes their formations are quite arbitrary (Turiel, 1983, 2006). These changes are accompanied by the further maturation of prefrontal cortex, helping adolescents to be better at abstract thinking and weighing different viewpoints, simultaneously (Steinberg, Vandel & Bornstein, 2012).

Children also experience changes in their social abilities. Compared to younger children, adolescent peer groups are more crowded. As they contact with more peers, they also experience more diversity in their peer groups. These changes in their friendship circles help adolescents to be more tolerant of individuals who have



different values and social and cultural backgrounds compared to themselves (Richardson, Hitti, Mulvey & Killen, 2014). At the same time, their more developed understanding of weighing different knowledge domains makes them also be concerned about group dynamics and group functioning. This dynamic is sometimes accompanied by stereotypic information, especially in the context of intergroup exclusion issues (Horn, 2003). Previous research showed that when inclusion have a salient effect on ingroup functioning and the group harmony is threatened, adolescents evaluate social exclusion of non-stereotypical members as more acceptable (due to the norms about that certain activity), compared to younger children (Killen, Kelly, Richardson & Jampol, 2010; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Malti et al., 2012). For this reason, this period is believed to be an important one to understand how different forms of group memberships are manifested when they are introduced in the context of social inclusion and exclusion.

In light of the previous literature, in the current study, we presented children multifaceted contexts developed by Killen and Stangor (2001) to understand whether situational complexity would govern their inclusion judgment patterns, beyond their socio-cognitive abilities. We manipulated this complexity by providing our participants with *qualification* information about children in the vignettes, who want to be a part of the group. This methodological approach has been used widely in the previous research. By doing so, it was aimed to examine how children coordinate their judgments when they encounter with competing concerns about group success and functioning on the one hand, and moral issues, such as fairness and equality, on the other hand.

### **Current Study and Hypotheses**

The aim of this study was to examine Turkish children's conceptualizations about easterners and westerners and to measure their judgments about them based on social inclusion related vignettes. In other words, we aimed to validate conceptualization of differentiated social status of easterners and westerners and use this criterion in an empirical study to measure children's social inclusion judgments. We first conducted a preliminary study in the form of a semi-structured interview with children in order to explore whether they had clear conceptualizations about Istanbul and Van as representative cities of western and eastern regions of Turkey, respectively. In the main study, the vignette task, participants were presented with equal (two children with equal qualifications) and unequal qualifications (two children with unequal qualifications) conditions and asked for their inclusion decisions and related justifications.

We expected to find a significant pattern of (1) choosing the socially advantaged child in the vignette in the equal qualifications and (2) choosing the socially disadvantaged but more qualified child in the vignette, in the unequal qualifications conditions, more frequently. For justifications, we expected a dominant tendency towards making (3) moral and stereotyping justifications in the equal qualifications condition, and (4) group functioning justifications in the unequal qualifications condition. The influence of children's perceptions about the members of different geographical regions within Turkey on their inclusion judgments is a novel theme. For this reason, even though an age effect was expected on both children's social inclusion decisions and justifications, the direction of this effect was evaluated as exploratory.

## Preliminary Study

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were 22 children (11 females, 11 males) between the ages of 10 to 14 ( $M_{age} = 11.8$  years,  $SD_{months} = 1.22$ ) living in Çankaya district in Ankara. All participants were native Turkish speakers.

#### Procedure

Necessary ethical permission was maintained from Human Subjects Ethics Committee at Middle East Technical University, and parents who responded to our study announcements were contacted. All of the participants were visited in their houses. Before starting the interviews, parents were informed about the interview content, and parental consents were collected. Later, parents were asked to provide a suitable room for the interviews to protect the privacy and maintain the reliability. Children were also informed about the study and questions, and their verbal assents were collected. All the semi-structured interviews were conducted by the main researcher, who was extensively trained in interviewing children regarding social and moral issues. During the interviews, there were no third parties in the rooms, and all the answers were written down by the main researcher. Interviews approximately took 20 to 30 minutes. None of the children refused to participate in or complete the interviews.

## Measures

**Interview questions:** Before developing the interview questions, statistical data demonstrating economic, social, demographic and cultural indicators of the cities in Turkey published by TSI (2010) was carefully examined. 15 questions were formed by the main researchers in order to elicit children's prior knowledge about Van and Istanbul, their general perceptions towards people living there, and to understand whether children were aware of the disadvantaged social and economic conditions in the eastern region (see Table 1 for the interview questions).

Table 1

### *Questions of Preliminary Interview Study*

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- Have you ever visited Istanbul and/or Van?
- Can you show me the geographical location of Istanbul (Van) on this map?

According to you,

- Who lives in Istanbul (Van)? / What kind of people do you think they are?
- What do people living in Istanbul (Van) do for a living, what might be their occupations?
- Where do they live/how are their houses?
- What might be their religion?

If you were asked to compare a person/a family living in Istanbul and Van...

- Which person/family might be in a good position economically? /have more money? Why?
  - Which person/family might be living in a better home? Why?
  - Which person/family might be better educated? Why?
  - Which person/family might be treated faster and better when they are sick? Why?
- 

## Results

This preliminary interview study concerned the descriptive characteristics of children's perceptions on "eastern and western" ways of living in Turkey. With this aim, answers to each question were evaluated individually, and in this section, percentages and frequency distributions of the predominant themes were presented.

### **Prior Travel Information & Geographical Knowledge Assessment**

First of all, there were no children, who were either born in either Istanbul or Van. In addition, none of the children reported any prior visits to Istanbul and/or Van.

When they were asked to show the geographical location of Istanbul and Van on a blank Turkey map, all correctly showed the exact location of Istanbul. In the case of Van, they either showed the exact location of the city ( $f = 20$ ) or correct regions and approximate geographical location of it ( $f = 2$ ).

### **Children's Perceptions about Istanbul**

Children were asked four questions about Istanbul and their answers revealed a convergent pattern. Majority of children perceived Istanbul as a socially advantageous city and provided most of the typical characteristics of a socially advantaged group. Specifically, they mentioned at least once in their reports that people living in Istanbul should be wealthy ( $f = 19$ , 86.36%), well-educated ( $f = 14$ , 63.63%), famous ( $f = 11$ , 50%), and modern ( $f = 4$ , 18.18%). For instance, one child's statement was "I think wealthy people live in Istanbul as in the movies." Most of the children reported that people living in Istanbul should be well-educated ( $f = 10$ , 45.45%) and have "decent" occupations ( $f = 14$ , 63.63%). Four of them stated that they could be whatever they wanted to be. The most frequent examples given by children were being an actor/actress ( $f = 7$ , 31.81%), boss/corporate officer ( $f = 6$ , 27.27%), doctor ( $f = 4$ , 18.18%), and teacher ( $f = 2$ , 9.1%). Only one child mentioned that there might be unemployed people in Istanbul, as well. When we asked children about the living conditions of people in Istanbul, 16 of them stated that they might be living at "tower blocks" or in villas/luxury and modern homes ( $f = 15$ , 68.18%). Only one participant stated that houses in Istanbul might be similar to theirs.

In order to elicit a possible confounding factor in children's judgments, they were also asked what might be the religion of people living in Istanbul. Children gave various answers indicating that this information perceived as irrelevant. They stated that they either didn't know, their religion did not matter or, they might believe in anything they want ( $f = 21$ , 95.45%). In addition, a minority of children stated that they were "like us" ( $f = 3$ , 13.63%) and they might be Muslims ( $f = 3$ , 13.63%).

### **Children's Perceptions about Van**

Children were asked the same set of questions about Van and their reports indicate a dominant social disadvantage perception towards Van and people living there. They stated that people living there should be "like peasants" ( $f = 10$ , 45.45%), uneducated ( $f = 10$ , 45.45%), poor ( $f = 9$ , 41%) and illiterate ( $f = 6$ , 27.27%). In a parallel fashion, children expected them to be involved with husbandry ( $f = 12$ , 54.54%), agriculture ( $f = 9$ , 41%), or they were unskilled laborers ( $f = 5$ , 22.72%). In

addition, five children (22.72%) reported that people in Van did not want to work because they were lazy, and three of them (13.63%) reported that people might go there only when they had to do obligatory services, such as being a soldier or a doctor. When children were asked about the living conditions, 19 of them (86.36%) reported that their houses might be like old, broken country houses. In conclusion, children provided almost all typical characteristics of a socially disadvantaged group. For the religion question, children provided similar answers as they did for the questions regarding Istanbul. The commonly stated answers were as they didn't know ( $f = 15$ , 68.18%), they might believe in anything they want ( $f = 5$ , 22.72%), they might be Muslims ( $f = 4$ , 18.18%) and they were "like us" ( $f = 3$ , 13.64%).

### **Comparisons of the Living Conditions**

Children were also asked to make comparisons between Istanbul and Van regarding people's access to economic, social, educational and health opportunities. All of them ( $f = 22$ , 100%) stated that people in Istanbul should have better economic (e.g. having more money) and living conditions (e.g. having more beautiful/comfortable houses) compared to people from Van. When they were asked what might be the reason behind that situation, all referred to Istanbul as a developed, modern, and rich city. In addition, five children (22.73%) stated that people in Van were poor because they did not like to work. When children were asked to compare educational opportunities in both cities, 19 of them (86.37%) chose Istanbul as a better city. Only three children (13.64%) evaluated Istanbul and Van as equals. In terms of the reason behind their choices, children provided various statements supporting their perceptions. For instance, they reported that Van was an underdeveloped city ( $f = 8$ , 36.36%), they didn't care about education much ( $f = 5$ , 22.73%), teachers didn't want to live in Van ( $f = 4$ , 18.18%), technology was more developed in Istanbul ( $f = 5$ , 22.73%). In the final question, all children stated that healthcare opportunities in Istanbul were better ( $f = 22$ , 100%), and 11 of them provided justification that the hospitals were older/worse/destroyed in Van ( $f = 11$ , 50%), good doctors didn't want to go and serve in Van ( $f = 11$ , 50%), and people built more developed/equipped hospitals in Istanbul because they had more money/are rich ( $f = 9$ , 41%).

### **Discussion of the Preliminary Study**

Children's reports showed that they had prevalent and common perceptions towards people living in Istanbul and Van. Overall, they attributed Istanbul an advantageous and prestigious status in terms of people's qualities, occupations, and

living environments. On the other hand, they perceived Van as a city having many social disadvantages about the ways of living, especially through attributing negative stereotypes to the people living there, such as being uneducated, illiterate or rude. As a result, children attributed a higher social status to the people living in Istanbul, whereas they attributed a lower social status to the people living in Van. Importantly, children chose to praise the people living in Istanbul by attributing their status to the individual accomplishments of people living there. However, the majority of children blamed people living in Van by holding negative perceptions towards people living there (e.g. “Their conditions are bad because they don’t know how to have a proper job”, “They are lazy”) to explain the disadvantages. This distinction between children’s judgments showed that they had negative views and stereotypes about the people living in Van for the most part.

After confirming our conceptualization of differentiated social status of easterners and westerners, we conducted our main study that was dependent upon social inclusion judgments about these regional perceptions.

## **Main Study**

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

For the main study a total number of 150 children were recruited, including 41 female and 34 male 4th graders ( $N = 75$ ,  $M = 10$  years,  $SD = 4.17$  months), and 43 female and 32 male 7<sup>th</sup> graders ( $M = 13.06$  years,  $SD = 0.31$  months). Children were attending public schools in Çankaya district of Ankara, where generally middle and upper-middle SES families live. While mothers ( $M = 40.31$ ,  $SD = 6.12$ ) were college ( $N = 85$ ) and high-school ( $N = 65$ ) graduates; fathers ( $M = 44.56$ ,  $SD = 5.91$ ) were college ( $N = 89$ ), high-school ( $N = 43$ ) and secondary school graduates ( $N = 15$ ). All of the children were native Turkish speakers.

#### **Procedure**

After all necessary permissions were obtained from the Human Subjects Ethical Review Board at the Middle East Technical University and Ankara District Directorate of National Education, parents were contacted by the help of the schools. Once volunteering children were determined by signed parental consent forms, they

were taken from their classrooms during class hours to a pre-scheduled classroom. All the data collection sessions were carried out by the main researcher. In addition, there were two undergraduate psychology students assisting the data collections sessions and organizing the children in the classrooms.

Before handing the vignettes in, a warm-up activity (a neutral story about a tree planting activity taking place at school) was practiced in the classroom by the main researcher. Later, the paper-and-pen formatted questionnaire, including the group activities vignettes, was administered. It took approximately 30-35 minutes for children to complete it, and none of the children, whose parents signed the consent forms, refused to participate or complete the study. Children were debriefed about the study's aims and a summary of the results was provided to the school counselors. In addition, parents were informed that the results could be reached through the school counselors.

## Measures

**Group activity vignettes.** Previous research used vignette method with child and adolescent samples extensively in order to explore their social inclusion judgments (e.g. Killen & Stangor, 2001; Malti et al., 2012; Nesdale, 2000; Richardson et al., 2014). For the current study, the group vignette methodology of Killen and Stangor was adopted (2001) (equal and unequal qualifications) with an exception in creating the groups to be compared by the participants. In the current study's vignettes, the participants, as living in Ankara, used their judgments to include either of the two regional outgroup members (either a child coming from Istanbul or Van). The content of the vignettes was developed considering the insights gained from the preliminary study.

With group activity vignettes, it was aimed to examine whether children use their attributions which were found in the preliminary study about the people living in Istanbul or Van when they needed to make group level social inclusion judgments. We presented children with two different sets of situational complexities under two different conditions. Firstly, they were asked for their decisions about social inclusion. Later, they were also asked to report the specific justification about that decision in an open-ended fashion. All children were presented with both versions of the vignettes belonging to different conditions in the same order. In both conditions, the order of choices presented to participants was counterbalanced across the entire sample.

In the first condition, *equal qualifications*, there were two candidate students with equal qualifications, one coming from Istanbul and the other one from Van, both of whom intended to be a part of a reading group. We presented the vignette as the following (translated from Turkish):

“There is a reading group in the school. This reading group intends to recruit one new member for the reading competition that would be organized in their school. There are two children who want to be a member of this reading group; both are newcomers to the school one from Istanbul and one from Van. Both children are able to read equally fast, accurate, and by emphasizing each word successfully. Whom do you think the reading group should include? Why?”

The reason behind choosing reading group as the context of the group vignette activity is twofold. Firstly, as it was revealed in the preliminary study, children made discrepant attributions towards people living in Istanbul and Van in terms of their education level. While children had an overall negative view towards people living in Van as less educated, underqualified, illiterate; they perceived people living in Istanbul as more educated, and competent. Considering these dynamics, we found it suitable to use reading group theme in our vignettes due to its relatedness to educational competencies. Secondly, during the historical course of Turkey, people from Istanbul had a reputation for speaking the best form of Turkish, which is considered to be free of other regional dialects. On the other hand, people living in other regions of Turkey (e.g. Black Sea region, Aegean region, etc.) have different dialects, and the people from eastern cities speak Turkish with a specific eastern dialect or accent. With this idea, after developing the vignettes, we conducted a pilot study ( $N = 7$ ,  $M_{age} = 11.6$  years) for refinement of vignette contents and wording. All children were capable of understanding the vignettes and the questions presented to them. Taken together, reading group activity is a comprehensible activity for Turkish school-aged children that they should be familiar with, and that is applicable to the study goals.

For the two candidate students coming from different cities, while the child coming from Istanbul was denoted as the *socially advantaged child*; the child coming from Van was denoted as the *socially disadvantaged child*.

In the second condition, *unequal qualifications*, we changed the original methodology used by Killen and Stangor (2001) and attributed superior reading qualifications to the child who did not fit into the group norms (the child coming from



Van) in the vignette. By doing so, it was aimed to see the interplay between children's stereotypic attributions and evaluations of qualifications by introducing an important situational complexity. The vignette again included

two candidate students one coming from Istanbul and the other one from Van, both of whom intended to be a part of the reading group. However, this time the student coming from Van had superior qualifications in reading compared to the student coming from Istanbul. We presented the vignette as the following (translated from Turkish):

“There is a reading group in school. This reading group again intends to recruit one new member for the reading competition that would be organized in their school. There are two children who want to be a member of this reading group; both are newcomers to the school one from Istanbul and one from Van. But this time there is a difference; the child who is coming from Van is able to read faster, more accurate, and by emphasizing each word more successfully compared to the child who is coming from Istanbul. Whom do you think the reading group should include? Why?”

**Coding scheme of justifications.** Justifications for each decision were coded categorically, according to the coding scheme used by Killen and Stangor (2001). In addition, 20% of the data was coded by a hypothesis-blind second-coder for the inter-rater reliability. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was found as .82 for the equal qualifications and .85 for the unequal qualifications condition.

**Moral justifications.** When children mentioned fairness, equal access to the opportunities and equal treatment of individuals in the society, their justifications were coded under this category (e.g. “I want to give a chance to the child coming from Van so that the student can also learn new things”<sup>3</sup>).

**Social-conventional justifications.** This justification category includes two sub-categories as stereotyping and group functioning. Since these justifications referred to different mechanisms, they were coded under each of the sub-categories.

**a. Stereotyping justifications.** Our first study showed that children had various stereotypic perceptions towards people living in Van especially, such as being

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<sup>3</sup> All the examples provided were the actual reports of our participants. They were translated into English.

uneducated, illiterate, not modern and rude. Based on this insight, children's justifications referring to the stereotypical attributions to Van and Istanbul were coded under this category (e.g. "The child coming from Van can't read well because easterners don't have a proper education").

*b. Group functioning justifications.* This category was coded when children referred to group functioning and cohesiveness in their justifications (e.g. "It is best to choose the more qualified child for the sake of the team").

*Psychological justifications.* This category concerns the justifications about the individual choices and preferences (e.g. "I just want to choose that child").

*Other.* The Other category referring to the justifications that do not fit into any of the categories given above was not included in the data analyses (less than 5%).

## Results

### Data Preparation

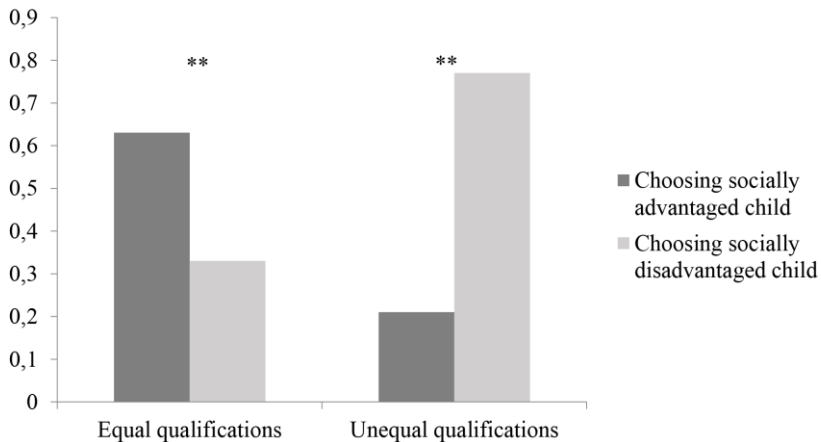
Before conducting the analyses, participants' social inclusion decisions were transformed into a two-level within-subjects variable. Participants got the score of one for the decision they made (e.g. choosing the child coming from Van) and zero for the decision they didn't make (not choosing the child from Istanbul in this example). This procedure was applied to the whole data for equal and unequal qualifications conditions separately, in order to calculate the proportion of each decision within the data set.

For the justifications of inclusion decisions, participants were allowed to use multiple justification domains. For example, a participant might justify her/his inclusion decision by using both stereotyping and group functioning domains. In the cases like this, participants could get partial scores (.50-.50) for each justification category they used. This partial coding pattern was only observed for five participants. Since it was less than 5% of the data set, it wasn't included in the analyses. Similar to the inclusion decision coding, participants got one point for every justification domain they used. By doing so, the proportion of each justification domain (moral, stereotyping, group functioning, or psychological) was calculated for equal and unequal qualifications conditions separately. Justifications for inclusion decisions were also transformed into a four-level within-participant variable. This

transformation method has been used widely in previous research on social and moral judgments, and it has found to be more reliable to conduct ANOVA-based analyses compared to log-linear analyses (Conry-Murray & Turiel, 2012; Kahn, 1999; Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa & Smith, 2001).

### Social Inclusion Decisions

In order to examine whether children's inclusion decisions differ depending on their age and study condition, a 2 (age: 10-13)  $\times$  2 (condition: equal qualifications, unequal qualifications) ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted on the last factor. Since there were no differences for participants' sex, it was dropped from all final analyses and wasn't included in the reports.



\*\*  $p < .001$

**Figure 1.** Social Inclusion Decisions by Condition

Contrary to our expectations, the main effect of age was not significant,  $F(1,148) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .19$ . However, as expected, the interaction between decisions of participants and condition was significant,  $F(1,148) = 68.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .31$  (see Table 2). In the equal qualifications condition, children decided to include the socially

advantaged child (child coming from Istanbul,  $M = .63$ ,  $SD = .48$ ) more frequently compared to the socially disadvantaged child (child coming from Van,  $M = .33$ ,  $SD = .47$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.32, .53]. In the unequal qualifications condition, they decided to include the socially disadvantaged but more qualified child ( $M = .77$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) more frequently compared to the socially advantaged child ( $M = .21$ ,  $SD = .40$ ),  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.43, .69] (see Figure 1).

### Social Inclusion Justifications

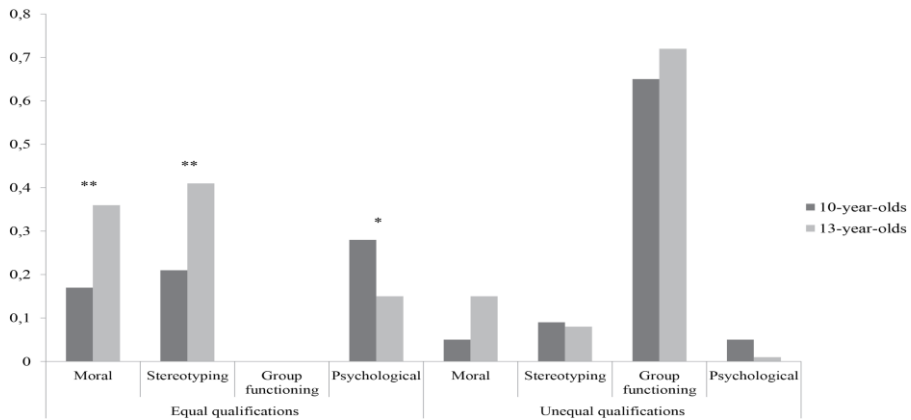
In order to examine children's justification patterns on the basis of age and study condition, a 2 (age: 10-13)  $\times$  2 (condition: equal qualifications, unequal qualifications) ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted on the last factor.

In line with our hypotheses, the interaction between condition and justification was significant,  $F(3,444) = 110.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .43$  (see Table 2). Children made moral ( $M = .32$ ,  $SD = .44$ ), stereotyping ( $M = .31$ ,  $SD = .46$ ), and psychological ( $M = .21$ ,  $SD = .41$ ) justifications more frequently in the equal qualifications condition, compared to the unequal qualifications condition (95% CI [.13, .29], [.15, .30], [.11, .25] respectively;  $p < .001$ ). In the unequal qualifications condition, they made group functioning justifications ( $M = .68$ ,  $SD = .46$ ) more frequently, compared to the equal qualifications ( $M = .00$ ,  $SD = .00$ , 95% CI [.61, .76],  $p < .001$ ).

Table 2  
ANOVA Results for Social Inclusion Decisions and Justifications

|                                 | Sum of Squares | <i>df</i> | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------|----------|------------|
| <i>Inclusion Decisions</i>      |                |           |             |          |          |            |
| Condition                       | 27.74          | 1         | 27.74       | 68.39    | < .001   | .31        |
| Age * Condition                 | 1.04           | 1         | 1.04        | 2.85     | .094     |            |
| <i>Inclusion Justifications</i> |                |           |             |          |          |            |
| Condition                       | 44.98          | 3         | 15.29       | 110.14   | < .001   | .43        |
| Age * Condition                 | 1.09           | 3         | .37         | 2.66     | .046     | .02        |

Analyses also revealed an age x condition interaction on justifications,  $F(3,444) = 2.66, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Follow-up comparisons were performed for mean justifications between ages-within conditions. The interaction effect was observable only in the equal qualifications condition (see Figure 2). 13-year-olds made significantly more frequently stereotyping justifications ( $M = .41, SD = .49$ ) compared to 10-year-olds ( $M = .21, SD = .41, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, .35]$ ). In a parallel fashion, 13-year-olds made also more moral justifications ( $M = .36, SD = .48$ ) compared to 10-year-olds ( $M = .17, SD = .44, p = .047, 95\% \text{ CI } [.003, .24]$ ). On the other hand, 10-year-olds made more psychological justifications ( $M = .28, SD = .45$ ) compared to 13-year-olds ( $M = .15, SD = .35, p = .047, 95\% \text{ CI } [.002, .26]$ ) in the equal qualifications.



\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Figure 2.** Social Inclusion Justifications by Age and Condition

### Decision-justification associations

Finally, as an exploratory part, we examined which decisions yielded to which type of justifications. For the equal qualifications condition, children who chose the socially disadvantaged child in the vignette made moral justifications ( $M = .84, SD = .37$ ) significantly more frequently, compared to the ones who chose the socially advantaged child in the vignette ( $M = .05, SD = .23, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.68, .88]$ ).

Whereas children who chose the socially advantaged child (child coming from Istanbul) used more stereotyping justifications ( $M = .55$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) compared to the ones who chose the socially disadvantaged one ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.35, .63]).

For the unequal qualifications, when children chose the socially disadvantaged (but more qualified) child, they made more group-cohesiveness justifications ( $M = .86$ ,  $SD = .35$ ) compared to the children who chose the socially advantaged child ( $M = .12$ ,  $SD = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.59, .87]). However, when they chose the socially advantaged but less qualified child, they made more stereotyping ( $M = .32$ ,  $SD = .47$ ) justifications compared to the children who chose the socially disadvantaged child ( $M = .03$ ,  $SD = .16$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [.12, .47]).

### General Discussion

In the current study, we introduced a novel concept of social status based on the regions individuals live in and examined whether children use their perceptions of individuals living in the eastern and western regions of Turkey, as a salient factor influencing their social inclusion judgments. Our study involved a novel approach for examining children's social inclusion judgments in the context of group membership criteria. Previous research predominantly recruited participants who were members of at least one of the groups that were compared using hypothetical scenarios. As a novel approach different from the previous research, we specifically recruited participants, who did not belong to any of the geographical groups compared in the vignettes. In the present study, participants were recruited from a third city -Ankara- in the mid-country, in order to learn children's conceptualizations about being an easterner and a westerner, as geographical outsiders to both groups. We also expected to elicit children's judgments about regional social status differences, but in the first place, we wanted to make sure that this kind of conceptualization, regarding differentiated social status, existed for them.

First of all, children's reports both in the preliminary interviews and the main study, revealed a pattern regarding stereotypical attributions, in an expected way, towards individuals living in representative eastern and western cities of Turkey. Children systematically attributed positive stereotypes to westerners, such as being more educated, modernized, and intellectual; whereas they systematically attributed negative stereotypes to easterners, such as being uneducated, illiterate, and rude. Our

findings empirically showed that children's stereotypes about regional social status are quite powerful, unanimous, and adopted early in life, possibly through being exposed to their parents' perceptions and the larger society that they live in. As an important notion, the children were aware that individuals living in Van had unequal access to economic, social, educational, and health opportunities compared to individuals from Istanbul (TSI, 2010, 2013). These set of results were coherent with the premises of Social Justification Theory. Individuals tend to come up with explanations to justify inequalities between low and high-status groups, and most of the time these explanations include stereotypes (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004). This way, inequalities can be perceived as 'more' ordinary. In a parallel fashion, our participants also tried to rationalize the disadvantageous situation as if it was easterners' own fault, by attributing negative characteristics to them. On the contrary, they attributed social advantages to westerners and referred to their advantageous status as individuals' own accomplishments; which are both typical examples of stereotyping.

Building upon the results elicited from the preliminary study, we further investigated whether children would use their regional perceptions and related stereotypes as a legitimate social inclusion criterion when they were presented with group level activities. Children's reports regarding their social inclusion decisions showed that social complexities presented to them were influential factors shaping their judgments. Regardless of age, when children in the vignettes -one newcomer from Van and one from Istanbul- had equal qualifications in reading task, participants chose to include the child coming from Istanbul more frequently, as hypothesized. This finding should also be considered with the information obtained in the preliminary interviews. Children predominantly assumed that individuals living in Istanbul should be more competent. Similarly, when participants were presented with a vignette including no additional information about the protagonist in the stories except their hometowns, they favored the child coming from Istanbul more frequently. Previous literature showed that when a situation becomes complex and there is no additional information, stereotypic attributions are evoked (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2006). Likewise, in the current study, stereotypic perceptions were shown to influence participants' inclusion decisions.

In the unequal qualifications condition, we gave superior reading qualifications to the child coming from Van. This manipulation included an information against the common stereotypes, as also revealed by our participants' decisions in the equal qualifications condition. In the original study conducted by

Killen and Stangor (2001), researchers attributed superior qualifications to the child, who fit the group norms. They did this manipulation to assess whether participants would continue to support their judgments of not excluding peers solely on the basis of group membership when group success became salient. However, different from these dynamics, we aimed to examine how children would weigh competing considerations of social attributions and stereotypes on the one hand, and qualification information on the other hand. Our findings showed that when the socially disadvantaged child had superior qualifications, participants favored that child more frequently by relying on the qualification information. In other words, participants used their stereotypes when two children in the vignettes were equally qualified, but they also preferred to ignore their stereotypes over qualifications which made an important contribution to the existing literature.

Previous literature on moral judgments of children usually examined both the decisions and justifications of children. In a similar vein, the current study also aimed to examine children's justifications about why they chose what they chose. Justification analyses provided important information regarding how children coordinated competing considerations of individual rights, fairness, and group processes, simultaneously. Results were in line with the hypotheses showing that qualification information was a significant factor shaping children's justifications. When the children in the vignettes had *equal qualifications* for reading, the participants more frequently made moral, stereotyping, and psychological justifications. Previous literature suggested that in multifaceted situations, both children and adolescents modify their reasoning according to their most accessible knowledge about that issue (Horn; 2003; Turiel, 1983). This variety in children's domain usage could be evaluated as they had clashing judgments about easterners vs. westerners, especially when newcomers had equal qualifications. While some children evaluated the inclusion of a newcomer based on the values of fairness and equality, others prioritized social-conventional values by using stereotyping justifications. In addition, some children also reported that their decisions were solely personal choices. As an important detail, none of the children used group functioning justifications in this condition. In other words, they didn't consider deciding between two equally qualified children in the vignette as an issue of group success and/or functioning, and this is a unanimous decision. Rather, they approached the issue of deciding between socially advantaged and disadvantaged, yet equally qualified children, as an encounter of moral values, and social norms and stereotypes.



In Turkish cultural context, perceiving easterners as socially disadvantaged and westerners as socially advantaged groups are common stereotypes (Tuzkaya et al., 2015). These perceptions were also evident in our preliminary interviews. However, even though children were aware of this social dynamic, the analyses examining the relationship between participants' decisions and justifications showed that children evaluated this issue from different perspectives. In the equal qualifications condition, participants who chose the child coming from Van were the ones who made moral justifications more frequently. This pattern might be evaluated as an act to rectify past disadvantages. For example, a participant's report "I think in that city -Van-, they don't have many chances to get a good education, so I want to give a chance to that child" was a good example to this perspective. This finding was also parallel with the previous studies suggesting that children had the insight to compensate past disadvantages by relating them to the moral concerns (Rizzo & Killen, 2016). On the other hand, participants who chose the child coming from Istanbul in the vignette were usually the ones making predominantly stereotyping justifications (e.g. "In any case, I think the child coming from Istanbul would be better in everything"). The coherent pattern between decisions and justifications revealed that children didn't make their judgments randomly, rather they were aware of the dynamics revolving around this issue.

In the case of *superior qualifications*, participants predominantly made group functioning justifications. The qualification information and in turn, the group success, seemed to outweigh children's stereotypes. Although participants evaluated this social dynamic on the basis of moral and social-conventional domains most frequently, if group success was threatened, they predominantly valued by focusing on qualification information. In tune with the previous literature, our findings revealed that the context of exclusion and the information given to children were important factors shaping children's judgments (Helwig, Tisak, & Turiel, 1990; Killen & Stangor, 2001; Killen, McGlothlin, & Lee-Kim, 2002). The children's decisions and justifications indicated existing conceptualization about easterners and westerners and used them as inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, they were not tied to their existing stereotypes and perceptions all the time, rather they were able to coordinate their judgments based on the social complexities presented to them.

One of the aims of the current study concerned examining age differences in children's moral judgments. In the current study, age differences were only observed in the equal qualifications condition for justifications, not decisions. According to the results, compared to 10-year-olds, 13-year-olds made moral and stereotyping

justifications more frequently, contrasting our expectations. On the other hand, 10-year-olds used psychological justifications more frequently than their older counterparts. When previous studies on this issue were examined, judgment patterns of children were found to vary across age groups, depending on the context presented to them. For example, in overall, children found straightforward exclusion based on group membership wrong (Griffiths & Nesdale, 2006; Killen et al., 2010). However, when there are competing considerations, adolescents reported exclusion of non-stereotypical members as more acceptable, by focusing on group functioning and norms (Malti, et al., 2012). With age, the influence of social context on stereotypes becomes more evident (Raabe & Belman, 2011). Compared to middle childhood years, adolescents have a better understanding of cultural and social differences and they are more tolerant of the violation of social norms (Neff & Terry-Schmitt, 2002; Mulvey & Killen, 2015). However, at the same time, their increased ability to weigh in-groups and out-groups makes them value group cohesiveness and functioning more by having stereotypic perceptions about groups (Horn, 2003; Nucci, 2001). Consequently, they evaluate moral issues in association with group concerns (Helwig, 1995). Previous findings regarding age differences come from frequently studied group membership criteria such as gender and ethnicity. However, based on the context, developmental manifestations of the social evaluations might differ. For example, gender and related social norms are among the earlier social categories that children learn (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Thus, children might manifest more clear-cut developmental differences when they evaluate gender exclusion. Taken together and in line with previous literature, children's justifications also changed as a factor of their age groups in the current study.

Even though 10-year-olds had certain perceptions regarding the members living in eastern and western regions of Turkey, they used their perceptions less frequently when they were justifying their decisions. This finding doesn't mean that 10-year-olds did not have any awareness about this issue, yet they were not using region criteria as frequently as 13-year-olds. Their justifications were mostly focusing on personal choices (e.g. "I just want to choose that child). Even though there were 10-year-olds who made moral and stereotyping justifications ( $N = 16$ ), this wasn't a predominant pattern. 13-year-olds, on the other hand, approached the criteria of regional information based on the domains of moral values and stereotypes. In other words, older children were more aware of the differentiated social status of the easterners and westerners as well as accompanying social dynamics and stereotypes.

The current study aimed to apply a new notion about social exclusion, which was culture-specific, and to examine children's moral judgments on this issue across different age groups. The concepts of being an easterner vs. westerner had been studied by sociology literature, as well as by social psychologists. In the current study, we expected to examine whether this culture-specific issue has been emerging in earlier years in development. The salience of being an easterner vs. a westerner could be argued within the framework of a social status issue, the historical roots of which have been existing in Turkish cultural context for a long time. Throughout the historical course of Turkey, there have been times with elevated levels of socio-political conflicts. Ethnic minorities have experienced a vast amount of social and political problems for many years, such as the language ban and the harsh economic and physical conditions of Southern-Eastern regions (Kirişçi, 2000). Despite these pre-existing social dynamics, our findings emphasized the conceptualization of differentiated perceptions about easterners and westerners beyond ethnic identity, since none of our participants mentioned the ethnic background in the interviews. The lack of ethnic attributions was also supported by the main study results (only 3 out of 150 children mentioned that the child from Van might be Kurdish). Moreover, we deliberately planned not to ask about and prime ethnicity, since we aimed to focus on the social status of easterners and westerners. In order to assure that these differentiated perceptions were not due to a possible distinction between eastern and western people's religious beliefs and practices, we also explicitly asked what these groups' religion might be. Children's answers demonstrated almost identical frequency rates that were attributed to both groups ( $f=4$  for Van and  $f=3$  for Istanbul, stating that they might be Muslim, and the rest either stated that they do not know or care) and that their differentiated view was not dependent on religion or religious issues and remained uniformly about social status.

There are also some limitations of the current study. Even though the present study's theme was novel in terms of social inclusion and exclusion literature, this novelty might also work as a limitation. Findings revealed a comprehensive picture, but they should be replicated by future studies, especially using additional social contexts. In addition, further studies should explore the role of regional perceptions on social inclusion judgments by recruiting participants who are actually living in the eastern and western regions and elicit both ingroup and outgroup judgments. In the current study, we only recruited 10 and 13-year-olds. In order to have a more comprehensive picture of the related dynamics, different age groups, including adults might also be recruited. As a final note, the findings of the current study should be replicated.

Taken together, the current study made a number of novel contributions into the existing literature, including a) investigating the role of regional perceptions and stereotypes in social inclusion judgments based on the differentiated social status of easterners vs. westerners, b) using the domain model in children's judgments with a Turkish sample for the first time, and c) revealing age differences in related judgments, marking the formation of stereotypes about the examined issue. Our findings revealed differentiated perceptions and stereotypes about social status based on regional differences in Turkish cultural context. Future studies might also focus on early intervention projects on children's judgments about these regional differences and design new research specific to certain cultural contexts considering the social status of different groups.

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