Minority Stress of Workers as Internal Customers: A Case Study in Turkey

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LGBT+ workers are invisible in Turkish work life. This paper aims to investigate LGBT+ workers as internal customers and how their performance in the workplace is affected by minority stress. Since LGBT+ individuals face covert discrimination in the workplace, this might cause minority stress. According to this argument, this study will investigate whether minority stress causes performance loss in the workplace and whether this affects LGBT+ people's performance as internal customers. Grounded theory approach has been used in this research. To conduct the qualitative study, 36 phone interviews were conducted. Participants were recruited with the snowball sampling method. The interview form was prepared according to the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index questionnaire and included a video that shows a job interview. Based on the results, minority stress causes performance loss in the workplace. The findings highlight that LGBT+ individuals generally prefer not to be out at their workplaces because of internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and prejudiced events concerning their sexual identity and gender expression. Furthermore, nondiscrimination is not legally enshrined in Turkey. LGBT+ individuals face covert discrimination in the workplace, which affects their performance as internal customers. Only a few Non-Governmental Organizations have reported on LGBT+ individuals' working situation. This research paper comprehensively examines their work lives and attitudes towards companies.

Keywords: *LGBT+, internal customer, minority stress, gender, workplace*

Introduction

The customer is the person or organization that buys the goods and services of a business. Currently, the concept of the customer has changed, and the person or company that buys the product is called a partner (Eichorn 2004). However, the concept of customer is divided into two: The enterprise employees are identified as internal customers, and those who buy products from the company are external customers (Conduit et al. 2014).

Presently, the objectives of the enterprises are to meet the mandatory needs of internal customers—namely employees—and satisfy external customers. Businesses uphold the expectations of internal and external customers above all else, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty to ensure improvements and innovation

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(Kağnıcıoğlu 2002). When LGBT+[1] individuals are employees of enterprises, the first problem they encounter in the workplace is discrimination or micro-aggressions. In the literature, the concept of discrimination is defined as treating an individual in an unfair way, which is different from other individuals in similar circumstances but not rationally justified (Van-Laer and Janssens 2011). In this context, LGBT+ employees are exposed to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender expression, decreasing their job satisfaction and productivity. Discrimination based on sexual orientation, also known as "heterosexism" (Waldo 1999, Smith and Ingram 2004), encompasses the range of negative attitudes arising from homophobia against individuals and groups with sexual orientation identities other than heterosexuality.

In Turkish literature, the social and working life of LGBT+ individuals is discussed by analyzing discrimination in every aspect of their lives. The biggest problem of LGBT+ individuals in working life is the issue of visibility. If co-workers apprehend that they are members of the LGBT+ community, they might face discrimination (Tang and Yu 2021). Still, if their sexual orientation and gender expression apparent are not apparent and not understood by the companies they apply or work with, they can partially work freely (Opall 2021). However, once their identity becomes evident in their working life, it will become more difficult (Özbek 2017). The discrimination they face in working life is likely to manifest itself in cases such as not being invited to a job interview, not being hired, being dismissed, getting low pay or no compensation, getting a low-performance rating, not getting a promotion, or postponement, having rights curtailed, having duties changed, and so on (Öner 2015). Furthermore, Anti-discrimination legislation covering sexual and gender identity does not exist in Turkey, so LGBT+ rights are not protected.

According to Tejeda, even in safe and LGBT+-friendly businesses, people can express adverse reactions towards gays and lesbians. The insecure environment for the lesbian and gay employees also causes minority stress related to exposing their identity. In such work environments, LGBT+ workers try to hide their identity to avoid hostile and unwanted reactions. In this context, LGBT+ employees have various adverse reactions to discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender expression in their workplace (Tejeda 2006, Burchiellaro 2021). Brooks (1981) and Meyer (1995) explain the theory of minority stress to explain the stress LGBT+ workers face in many countries.

The socio-political climate in Turkey and discourses towards LGBT+'s also affect their work lives. To ensure social coexistence, these people should be given free working environments. LGBT+ individuals are not different from non-LGBT+ individuals. They deserve to be treated as equal to other employees without prejudice. The satisfaction of LGBT+ employees -which is increasing day by day for businesses- as internal customers also strongly affect the external

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[1]There are several terms for LGBT+. The latest term is LGBTQIA+ which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. The "+" sign is a placeholder to recognize this is a burgeoning community that is constantly in flux as they access and/or create the words they need to represent their lived experiences more fully and accurately. In terms of clarity and simplicity, LGBT+ is used in this research.

customer satisfaction. The purpose of this paper is to investigate LGBT+ workers as internal customers and how their performance in the workplace affects minority stress. Since LGBT+ individuals face covert discrimination in the workplace, this might cause minority stress. According to this argument, this study will investigate whether minority stress causes performance loss in the workplace and whether this affects LGBT+ people's performance as internal customers. Even being LGBT+ is taboo in Turkey; being an LGBT+ worker is harder than this. This community needs to be heard. If this study can reveal the minority stress and feelings that LGBT+ employees experience in their workplaces, it may encourage workplace owners to take precautions against the negativities experienced and to engage in activities aimed at ensuring external customer satisfaction through internal customer satisfaction.

Literature Review

Internal Customer

Internal marketing was first introduced by Berry (1981, p. 34) as "viewing employees as internal customers, viewing jobs as internal products, and then endeavoring to offer internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organization". Employees in the businesses are seen as internal customers and the labor is seen as a product (Berry 2002, p. 67). According to Varey and Lewis (1999), internal marketing aims to attract and retain "service-oriented", "customer-conscious" employees to help the perceived service quality and effective foreign marketing of the enterprise as a way of providing a competitive advantage to businesses. Even in sustainability issues satisfied internal customers are willing to volunteer their time on organizations activities (Munro and Arli 2020)

Greene et al. (1994, p. 8) defined the recruitment and retention of the best employees as internal marketing by applying the marketing philosophy and practice to the employees who serve external customers. Motivating the employees, coordinating the relations of different functions, and being customer-oriented is at the center of the internal marketing strategy (Rafiq and Ahmed 2000, p. 451). If the organization provides strong relations between the peer or organization as a whole, the internal customers should experience psychological connectedness (Grace et al. 2017). Accordingly, it can be said that external customers' satisfaction is related to the performance of internal customers (Lings 2004, pp. 409–411). In this way, it is necessary to consider the relationship between internal and external customers in evaluating the relationship between the business and the customer. The attitude of satisfied internal customers towards external customers will ensure that customers are satisfied. Satisfied customers will increase the financial performance of the business (Øgaard et al. 2008, Bai et al. 2006, Güven et al. 2005).

Minority Stress Theory

Minority stress is defined as psychosocial stress resulting from minority status (Brooks 1981). This concept is based on the premise that LGBT+ individuals, like members of other minority groups, are subjected to the chronic stress associated with being stigmatized. Brooks developed the minority stress concept for the psychological consequences of discrimination and prejudice. Brooks claimed that the subordinate status attributed to minorities leads to an increase in stressful life events (e.g., discrimination), leading to a lack of self-confidence and diminishing security and causes performance loss in the workplace (Waldo 1999, p. 220). Meyer identifies the categories of minority stress and thus took Brooks' work a step further. According to Meyer (1995), minority stress is not about having a lower status but refers to conflicting ideologies that cause stress. Meyer's conceptualization includes three sub-categories; Internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and prejudice events.

Minority stress theory defines stress processes, including bias experiences, rejection expectations, hiding, concealment, internalized homophobia, and healing coping processes (Meyer 2013). In this study, Meyer's conceptualization is used to analyze the discrimination and job satisfaction of the interviewees. Using Meyer's (1995) minority stress theory, researchers have revealed the adverse personal effects of discriminatory experiences and minority stress processes on LGBT+ individuals (Meyer 2003). LGBT+ victimization has been associated with worse mental health outcomes in the workplace (e.g., Velez et al. 2013) and decreased job satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Ragins et al. 2007). In the work environment, the individual needs to adapt to such conditions as homophobia or sexual stigmatization, but these conditions cause significant stress that affects LGBT+ employees' physical and mental health (Herek and Garnets 2007, Dohrenwend et al. 1992). In this context, there is a decrease in job satisfaction.

Öner (2017) found that even in the most secure business environments for lesbian and gay minorities in Turkey, lesbians and gays experience the minority stress differently than their heterosexual counterparts. In Turkey, white-collar lesbian and gay employees spend much more energy than heterosexual individuals to survive in the business environment, not to experience a decline in job satisfaction and job success, as in other areas (Öner 2017).

According to Kaos GL's (an association for LGBT+) report (2017), LGBT+ individuals must deal with many difficulties ranging from being unable to find jobs because of their identities and hiding their identities in workplaces, experiencing discrimination because of their identities and being fired. In this context, these individuals face the obstacle of invisibility because they fear losing their jobs, yet the employed or unemployed LGBT+ individuals fear that they will not find a job (Ragins and Cornwell 2001). According to the American Psychology Association's (2018) fact sheet report, 42% to 68% of LGBT+ individuals experience employment discrimination (Badgett 2012). Furthermore, 47% of transgender reported that they were also discriminated against in employment, experienced expulsion, and were denied promotions. More than 25% reported losing their jobs due to discrimination based on gender expression (Grant et al.

2011). Although they showed more success, many employees said they received late promotions or did not receive promotions. 90% of transgender people reported that they faced harassment, maltreatment, or discrimination in the workplace due to their gender expression (Grant et al. 2011, Griffith and Hebl 2002). LGBT+ individuals work for lower wages than employees with similar training and experience. Male members of the LGBT+ community earn less than heterosexual males, and lesbians make less than heterosexual women (Doğan 2015, Ragins 2004). Therefore, it seems that even LGBT+ employees working in LGBT+-friendly workplaces are not exempt from the negative consequences arising from the lack of protection against discrimination in the labor market (Yılmaz and Göçmen 2016).

Design and Methodology

Research Model

As we stated above, internal customers' performance is affected by their satisfaction in the literature review. Moreover, minority stress has an influence on the satisfaction level for LGBT+ workers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Research Model*
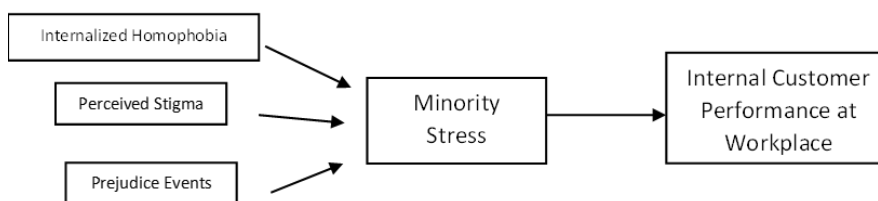
Participants and Procedure

Given the goal of explicating LGBT+ workers as internal customers and learning how discrimination and equality policies affect their attitudes, in-depth interviews were planned as the primary research technique. Nevertheless, due to the sensitive circumstance of LGBT+ individuals in Turkey, many interviewees did not want to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, structured interviews were created, and potential participants responded to the questions via phone calls, and the researcher wrote down the participants' answers. This is one of the limitations of this research. Because there is no face-to-face connection, interviewers cannot get the preliminary information relayed through a respondent's body language (Irvine et al. 2013, Newman et al. 2002). However, due to the sensitive circumstances, this limitation is accepted. For further research, interviewees who accept face-to-face interviews will be identified.

The participants took part in the research voluntarily and did not receive any rewards for their contribution. Interviews have been completed between

September-December 2018. The participants were chosen with a snowball sampling method. An invitation e-mail that contained instructions for the research was sent to employees' work e-mail addresses based on their friends' recommendations. This e-mail also explained the procedure and aims of this study and guaranteed the anonymity of the results. The e-mail also contained an approximately 5-minute video that had a short part of an episode of a well-known soap opera, *Avrupa Yakası,* which includes a scenario about a man in the job interview who was accused of being LGBT+ and lost his potential job. Participants were asked to watch the video before the phone interview.

For the study, 485 LGBT+ workers were invited. The interviewees were chosen using criteria and snowball sampling (Teddlie and Yu 2007). The starting worker of the sample is a well-known representative of the LGBT+ community; however, their name and organization cannot be disclosed due to the confidentiality rule. A total of 80 phone calls were made in Turkish, but 44 interviewees wanted to withdraw from the research during their phone call, so they were removed. The researchers have discussed the reason why interviewees withdrew from the interviews. Reasons given by interviewees ranged from fear of being exposed, not being interested in the questions, or being abroad at that moment and not available. However, most of the participants who withdrew from the interview said that they had participated in this kind of research before but considered it a waste of time in Turkey. Therefore, they did not want to spend time on this interview.

Thirty-six of them finished the interview with enough answers to evaluate. Phone calls lasted 30-45 minutes, yielding almost 120 pages of typed transcript. All 36 of them were sent a consent form, and they chose to sign them electronically with their nicknames. The main aim of the interview was clarified at the beginning of each phone call. Anonymity and confidentiality of the results were guaranteed. The results were analyzed with the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis program.

The interviews and the transcriptions of these interviews have been completed in Turkish. First-cycle coding completed in Turkish as well. After second-cycle coding translation to English has been made for the quotations. After the translation made by the researchers, an English native speaker who is also a member of LGBT+ community check for the translation and made the corrections according to maintain the internal relevance.

The questions were primarily based on the questions from the Human Resources Campaign (HRC)'s Corporate Equality Index (CEI) questionnaire. Launched in 2002, CEI is the first internationally recognized benchmarking report for enterprises to measure their level of involvement in LGBT+ awareness against their competitors. The process of being certified as an LGBT+-friendly company by the CEI is one of the best practices to meet the needs of its employees and ensure that LGBT+ employees are treated fairly in the workplace[2]. According to

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[2]Using the CEI, in 2018 the HRC gave the label of "the best place to work for LGBT Equality" to 609 companies that had a 100% rating, as they met each criterion in the research. According to CEI criteria, employers with the highest scores are spread throughout almost every sector and area in the United States and other regions where they do business. 59% of CEI-rated employers have global operations, and 98% of their work protection based on sexual orientation and gender expression in their international activities.

Tayar's (2017) work on diversity ranking systems, there are 12 rankings worldwide. Only two of them -the USA and Italy (Tayar 2017, p. 199)- include nondiscrimination questions. The researchers asked for both questionnaires from the institutions, but HRC was the only one that sent the entire questionnaire. The CEI questionnaire covers nondiscrimination protections, including those for contractors in the US, and prohibition of philanthropy where non-religious organizations discriminate against LGBT+ people (Human Rights Campaign 2015); therefore, the questions were adapted into open-ended questions. Following HRC's questionnaire, a list of questions and prompts for the interviews were created. Although a discussion guide was followed, the interviews also aimed to let interviewees describe their own experiences. The interviews began with a general question that asked informants about their experiences of "being out with their gender identity and sexual orientation". Probes followed this general question to discern their feelings about other people's reactions to their gender expression or sexual orientation. After that, they were asked about their experiences in the hiring process and work atmosphere as LGBT+ workers. Finally, they were asked how they felt about the guy in the video and whether they had faced anything like that in their interviews. The discussion guide included 7 demographic and 19 in-depth questions.

The 36 participants work in several industries, including education (4), entertainment (2), food (7), public (1), health (5), Civil Society Organizations (3), and several areas of the private sector (14). The sample also included a range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Each participant was assigned to a sexual orientation and gender identity according to his/her identification. Accordingly, the participants are queer (7), bisexual (6), trans-women and trans-men (5), lesbian (3), gay (11), asexual (1), intersex (1), and pansexual (2). Half of them have been working for less than one year in their companies. In all, 36% of them have been working there between 1-3 years, and the rest have worked more than four years at their company. Nearly half of the participants (47.2%) work in small companies with 1-50 workers, while 25% work in companies with more than 501 people.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, overt relationships with participants were created and anonymity of the results was assured. In order to maintain internal validity, and in consideration of the environment for data collection, two of the participants were asked to confirm the results. They confirmed that the results were consistent in itself and constituted a meaningful whole. At the same time, the data were checked by two academics who had previously worked on this topic.

For external validity, the research sample, data collection process and data collection environment were defined in detail before the research commenced. The results of this research are available for application in similar environments and in other countries (Başkale 2016) Furthermore, recommended interview techniques such as probing the participants were used. The second issue regarding data quality is an interpretation of the results. To ensure the accurate interpretation of the experiences of the participants, enough time was reserved for clarifying the codes. One of the participants, a leader in one LGBT+ association, was asked to

read the results. She/he said that the findings are consistent with what she/he had stated in the interview (Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

Findings

This research has been designed based on the grounded theory. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology that involves the application of inductive reasoning and also involves the construction of hypotheses and theories through the data itself. So the ideas and concepts are emerged from the data that has been collected (Sbaraini et al. 2011). So the grounded theory is well suited for understanding social processes which have attracted little prior attention (Milliken and Schreiber 2012). The reason why the grounded theory has been used in this research is that the previous research about LGBT+ workers and the assumption of them to be internal customers is lacking in depth and need new point of view on this topic. So the process of job interviews can be specified and understood in the LGBT+ communities' point of view.

According to the grounded theory, predetermined classifications for codes, themes, and categories were not used to clarify the interviewees' understanding of discrimination and minority stress as internal customers. At the first stage of the study, data collection and qualitative data coding were conducted. The themes arose from the first stage, descriptive and in-vivo coding (Miles et al. 2014). To facilitate the analysis, these codes were organized into second-cycle systematic patterns as themes. (All relations between categories and codes can be seen at network analysis in Figure 2). Based upon the grounded theory, the main themes were derived from the interviews as Table 1.

Table 1. *Themes and Variable Relations*

Themes	Related Variable	Literature
general feelings when being out	Internal Customer Performance at Workplace	Waldo 1999
application process	Minority Stress	Meyer 1995 Ragins 2004
interview process	Minority Stress	Meyer 1995 Ragins 2004
hiring process	Minority Stress	Meyer 1995 Ragins 2004
working area attitudes	Internal Customer Performance at Workplace	Waldo 1999
general company attitude towards LGBT+ workers	Internal Customer Performance at Workplace	Waldo 1999

The findings revealed that LGBT+ internal customers in Turkey are hesitant to be out at every stage of their work lives. However, NGO workers are freer to be out than corporate workers. Psychological interpretations of these findings were made according to the minority stress theory (Brooks 1981, Meyer 1995). As seen in the network analysis in Figure 2, there are many connections between the application process, interview process, and hiring process.

Figure 2. *Network Analysis of Data*
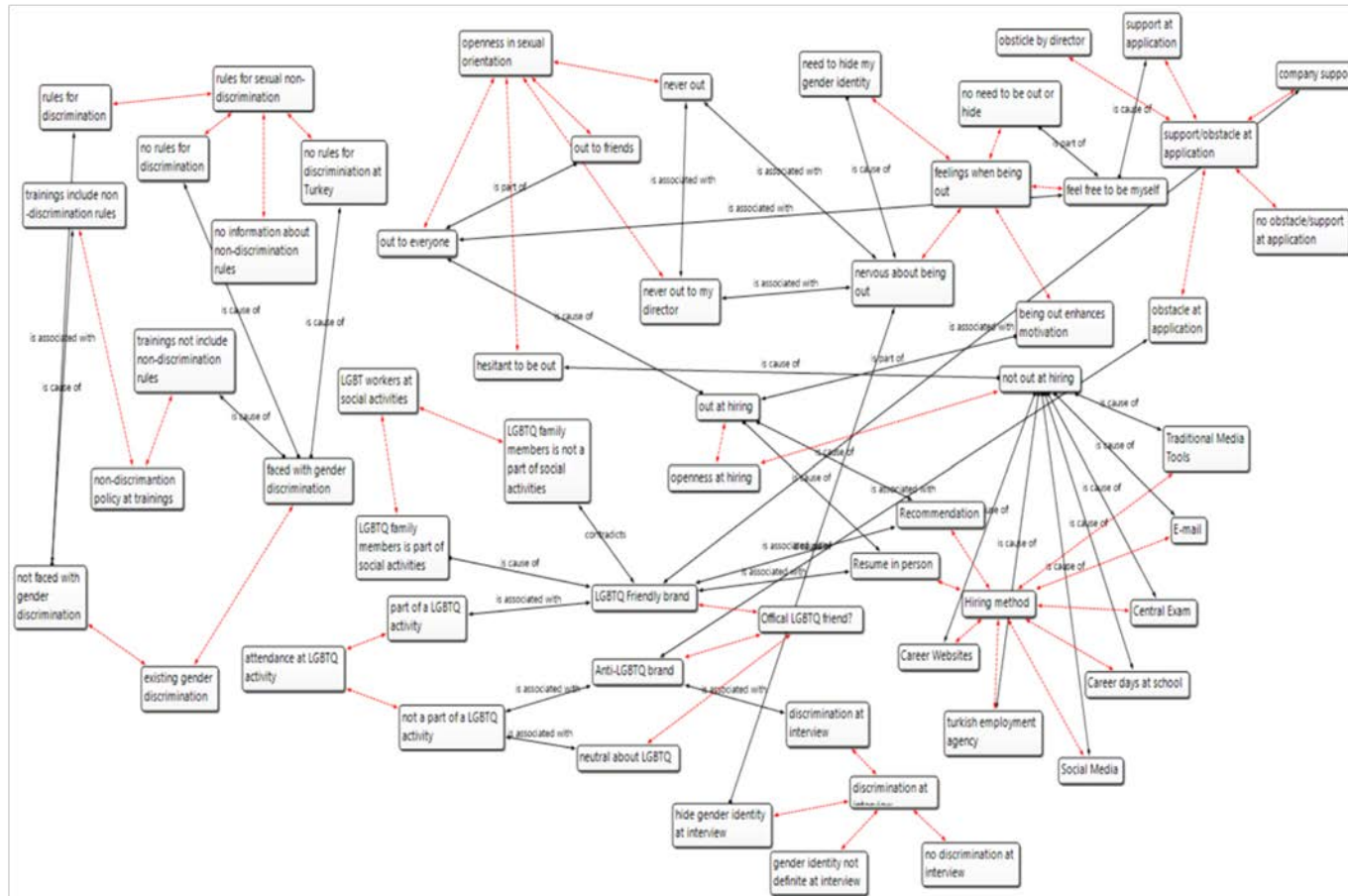
General Feelings when Being Out

The discussion of the questions about being out reveals that participants generally do not openly discuss or express their sexual orientation and gender identities at their companies. This might be explained by the fact that conservatism[3] is culturally dominant.

> Respondent (R): I cannot explain that I am gay. A few years ago, maybe I could, but not now…This might be explained by the socio-political context that is becoming increasingly conservative. Also, human rights are decreasing day by day in this country. (Arthur, gay man)
> R: I don't need to be out, actually. I can hide my sexual identity, obviously... My company is close to the government, so they need to look conservative. How could they employ a queer? (Ivy, lesbian)
> R: I am really nervous about being out at my job interviews. I feel weird about it. I prepared potential answers to potential questions about this issue to not affect my interview performance. Also, it needs to be consistent with my attitudes after hiring. (Olivia, trans woman)

As internal customers, the motivations of all workers are so crucial for the company. Furthermore, as a respondent has stated, "being out enhances motivation" for the LGBT+ worker.

> R: Hiding your sexual orientation requires energy. And this consumes a person's soul. Being out enhances a worker's motivation, and leads to increased work efficiency. (Sally, lesbian)
> R: I do not need to hide my sexual orientation. Actually, I repress my attitudes and clothing, but my colleagues know that I am gay, and it seems they don't have any problem with that. So, I feel blended into the crowd. Obviously, this motivates me; it means the company accepts me and I have to pay back to this attitude. I have to work hard for my company. (Jack, gay man)

According to the participants, being out at the beginning is associated with being out during the hiring process. If applicants feel supported during the application process, their motivation rises, and they feel free to be themselves. In all, 47% of participants are nervous about being out during a job search. Furthermore, 36% of them need to hide their sexual identities and are nervous about it. This shows that minority stress affects their mental well-being. Their minority identity and perceived stigma, which assumes that they carry the prejudicial pressures, affect the interview performance.

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[3]Turkish conservatism has a different meaning from conservatism in other countries. Conservatism in Turkey is predominately at odds with the established state structure, tending to be critical of the founding principles of the Turkish Republic whereas most forms of conservatism elsewhere tend to endorse the principal values of the state. Conservatism in Turkey inspired and strongly influenced by political Islam. Therefore, Turkish conservatism tends to be more socially conservative, religious, and in favor of centralized solid leadership. Governing party refers that their ideology is conservative democracy which is generally referred to as Turkish-style conservatism (Özkan 2016, Yavuz and Öztürk 2019).

Application Process

The respondents were asked which application channel they used. Most of them (39.5%) used recommendations by an acquaintance to apply. Only 2% used the Turkish Employment Agency and private employment offices. This finding highlights the lack of belief in the reliability of these channels and the suspicion of "profiling". The high number of participants searching for a job through recommendations from an acquaintance might mean that these participants look for a workplace that is relatively or LGBT+ friendly. Companies' social media posts also show their support for LGBT+. This helps LGBT+ applicants trust the company.

> R: When I applied for my job, it said in the job advertisement that they have a nondiscrimination policy on the grounds of sexual identity. That really relieved me and made me feel enthusiastic. (John, gay man)
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> R: The first thing I do before I apply for the job is to look for their social media accounts. I saw their post about the Pride March. You cannot imagine how happy this made me feel. After this, I applied for the job immediately. (Harper, bisexual woman)

Participants stated that they felt supported during the application process if the firm was somewhat LGBT+ friendly. This is related to their openness to all their friends. If they are out to everyone, they might be out during the application process. In all, 77% of participants said that they saw neither support nor obstacles at the application stage. However, three participants said that they saw obstacles during their application because of the military service criteria.

> R: When I saw the job advertisement, I noticed a sentence about nondiscrimination. At first, I was relieved, but a few sentences later, I saw "Men must complete military service" criteria. How on earth can I complete it? I am exempted from military service because I am trans. But how can I explain that? This means I am going to expose myself. So, I withdrew my application. (Mia, transwoman)
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> R: Hegemonic gender roles make me angry when I look for a job. They are looking for a "male specialist who upholds social morality". How can I apply for this job? I uphold social morality in my own ways, but not the ways they think are essential. I am gay, and I think that they don't want a feminine man specialist. (Oscar, gay man)

The results show that if the job advertisement gives a definite gender for the applicants, LGBT+ individuals get confused and may be hesitant to apply for the job. This also is associated with the company's general attitudes towards LGBT+ people. If the company is openly anti-LGBT+, no one from the LGBT+ community will apply for the job.

> R: When I saw the job advertisement, I saw they look for a man who has experience in accountancy. According to my ID, I am a man, but when I look into the mirror, I don't see a man. I know that company very well; they are a fanatic anti-LGBT+ company. When Pride comes, they nearly curse us. The job is perfect; the salary is perfect; the company is prestigious but only for a straight man, unfortunately not for a gay man. (Arthur, gay man)

On the other hand, the hiring method is another parameter used by LGBT+ workers. 38% of participants found their jobs via recommendations. The idea behind this is to be known before if their sexual orientation or gender expression is apparent. However, some participants want to be anonymous before the interview, applying for jobs through career websites (10%), social media (10%), and central exams for public institutions (15%).

> R: I found my current job via my best friend. She is also lesbian like me. My friend gave information to the company about me before my application. So, I felt comfortable when I went to the interview. (Ivy, lesbian)

Interview and Hiring Process

Most participants stated that they hid their sexual identity during the interview (42%) or that their sexual identity was not definite (36%). It is clear from their comments that they hid their sexual identity or gender expression because of their perception of social homophobia or how they would be treated if they carried the social labels attributed to LGBT+ individuals. These perceptions cause minority stress. During their job interviews, LGBT+ interviewees are asked questions about their lives that might expose their sexual identity or gender expression. To hide this, interviewees gave vague answers.

> R: I need that job. I have a life too. During the interview, they asked me if I plan to marry…even though it is not appropriate to ask a straight person. Of course, I prevaricated, but I guess they understood the situation since I look more feminine than a straight guy. (Charlie, gay man)
> R: I guess we lesbians are luckier than gays. They cannot discern our sexual orientation easily. That helps us cover ourselves during the interviews. They might think that we are masculine, but that's it. (Emily, lesbian)

The participants who said they were open during the interview process stated that they knew the company had a clear nondiscrimination policy. They also said that their interview performance was positively affected by it. They feel more confident during the interview because they do not need to hide their sexual orientation. This make them feel secure.

> R: Before I applied, I asked on the phone whether it was a problem that I am a trans man. Still, they invited me to the interview (...) I know I am "the" expert, but it is good to know that they were interested in my work experience. (Leo, trans man)
> R: I'd been to several interviews before my current job. I am always open to interviewers about my sexual identity. A few of them told me that there would be a problem with my sexual identity because their boss is a bit conservative. (...) They accepted me for the job, but they only asked that I be careful about my outfits. I guess that is a fair request. (David, gay man)

It is clear from the interviews that when LGBT+ individuals are open in public, they generally are open at interviews and during the hiring process. It seems that being out at interviews motivates and increases people's moods during

the interview process. However, if they decide to hide their identity during the hiring process, the application methods used are generally anonymous, such as career websites or e-mails.

> R: I never tell them my sexual orientation at the beginning. If they understand later, maybe I'll explain - but not at the beginning. This will eventually affect their behavior towards me. So, I don't want to be judged. To maintain that secrecy, I usually apply for jobs via career websites like Kariyer.net. It is so easy to hide your sexual orientation. They invite you according to your abilities. No judgment. (John, gay man)

Finally, participants were asked what they thought about the video sent to them. Their standard answer was that this is the normal situation. Nearly every interviewer does the same thing in Turkey. They have not faced this kind of situation before, but they all agreed that this is the usual response in Turkey.

Working Area Attitudes

The minority stress does not finish once the interview is over for the LGBT+ individuals. It is just starting. The openness of one's sexual orientation or gender expression at work may cause stress that might affect the performance of an LGBT+ worker. In all, 25% of participants responded that they are never out at the workplace, and 27% of them said they could be out to the colleagues they trust once they have established a relationship with them. Another 19% said that they never tell their directors or supervisors. Only 10% of the participants said they could be out to everyone in the workplace. Nevertheless, some of these respondents said this only happened when there was a nondiscrimination policy.

> R: It is an unfortunate situation that I cannot be myself at the workplace. I know that my colleagues make fun of me because of it. Or gossip behind my back. I don't want to be a person who has a target on their back. So, I decided not to tell anyone. But someday, when I get used to them and learn their opinions about queer people, why not? I'll tell my colleagues… But never my director, of course. I am pretty sure that will affect my promotion prospects. (Charlie, gay man)
> R: I cannot hide my sexual identity, even if I wanted to hide. It is apparent that I am trans. I have a blue ID card[4], but my outside looks like a woman. I have not finished my legal transition process then I'll get my new genderless ID card. Everything is happening in front of their eyes. So, I have to be out. At first, I felt the tension in the office. Sometime later, they accepted or got used to the situation. Now sometimes, I feel touchy about jokes, but generally, we're ok. (Olivia, trans woman)

These responses show that LGBT+ workers are not necessarily discriminated against by their colleagues but worry that they will be. Minority stress issues show their effects in this matter too. Their sexual identity or gender expression might cause proximal minority stress, affecting their work performance. It is also

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[4]Former Turkish ID cards were different for each gender. Pink for women and blue for men. Today those ID cards have been changed.

essential that LGBT+ workers want to be part of the company's social activities with their partners. This might be possible with the LGBT+ friendly companies, but otherwise, it creates an awkward situation; workers do not want to expose their private life to their colleagues in that manner.

> R: When our company has a picnic, I cannot bring my partner, of course. Still, my supervisor doesn't know that I am gay. Just a few of my office mates. But I cannot imagine that I brought my boyfriend to the picnic, hand in hand? No way… (Jack, gay man)
> R: I am trans, and my company is aware of this. They give me every support they can give. Moreover, I can bring my partner to the company activities because I know that all of my co-workers are LGBT+ friendly. (Leo, trans man)

General Company Attitudes towards LGBT+

Companies establish orientation programs when their new employees start their work. Participants were asked whether their company offered this kind of orientation. If the answer was yes, they were asked whether the information was offered about LGBT+ people and nondiscrimination policy. In all, 75% said that even if they had an orientation program, nondiscrimination at the workplace was not mentioned. However, this does not mean that these companies are anti-LGBT+, only that they do not place importance on nondiscrimination.

> R: When I first started my job, they took me to the orientation program. The topics discussed were on everything I could see. Even how to use a coffee machine. But not a word about nondiscrimination… (Noah, pansexual)
> R: Yes, we have nondiscrimination rules, but not in Turkey. My company is working overseas and nearly all countries except for Turkey have nondiscrimination rules. But not here. This is not the company's fault. Even laws don't recognize us; how can they? So, I am not angry with them. (Sally, lesbian)

Only 19% of participants said their company had a written code about nondiscrimination. In all, 10% of respondents who gave this answer work at international companies. Furthermore, 11% of the participants who work for international companies said there is an ethical code about nondiscrimination at the international level, but not in Turkey. Another essential issue in minority stress is existing sexual identity or gender expression discrimination. We asked participants whether they experienced any discrimination because of their sexual identity or gender expression. In all, 33% said that they had experienced sexual or gender expression discrimination.

> R: Everything was ok before my friends at the office found out that I am intersex. Then, they started to make fun of me. We have a Facebook group. Some of my friends send queer jokes or caricatures via that group. This is so embarrassing. Finally, I got out of that group. (Ava, intersex)
> R: I am trans, completed my transition 2 years ago, and am now legally and physically a woman. At the office, some of my friends insistently ask me about my surgeries, process, pills that I've taken…They want to see my ID, and so on…I don't want to

explain these things to them. That's my private area. I want to be treated normally. (Olivia, trans woman)

LGBT+-friendly companies are more flexible about discrimination problems at the workplace. Only 11% of participants said their companies are LGBT+-friendly, but 58%—a vast number—said their companies are anti-LGBT+ and conservative. The rest of the companies are neutral, or their opinions about LGBT+ are not prominent. As a result of these numbers, participants stated that they could not involve their partners in company activities. They are not seen as a family or a regular couple.

R: Our families were invited to the company's foundation day party. I brought my gay partner with me. My sexual identity is not known there. So, everyone thought that we were "friends". (Arthur, gay man)
R: For the annual company picnic, our families could come. My boss knows that I am a trans man. The day before the picnic, he asked me not to bring my partner to the picnic. He told me that this is a family event and we're not ordinary families. How can I love my company after this? (Henry, trans man)

Discussion

LGBT+ workers are invisible in Turkish work life. They hide behind a curtain because they are fearful of losing their jobs. Also, unemployed LGBT+ individuals hide behind the same curtain because they fear not finding a job. So, this research aims to investigate LGBT+ workers as internal customers and how their performance in the workplace is affected by minority stress. All over the world, LGBT+ individuals have these kinds of problems in the workplace (Ng and Rumens 2017, Pichler et al. 2017). Most previous studies regarding discrimination and harassment that LGBT+ workers face at the workplace show that this can be seen in many countries (Thompson and Figueroa 2020, Catalyst 2007, Liyanage and Adikaram 2019, Romanets 2014). The recent research reveals that LGBT+ workers face this discrimination and harassment because of their sexual identity, and this can be in any country like El Salvador (Thompson and Figueroa 2020), UK (Woodruffe and Bairstow 2013) and Sri Lanka (Liyanage and Adikaram 2019). This research enhances the ongoing debate about LGBT+ inclusion in workplaces by adding Turkish LGBT+ workers' problems to the literature.

LGBT+ has been a tense topic in Turkey. Because of the conservative government, LGBT+ individuals' visibility decreases day by day (Yenilmez 2021). Talking about their rights on legal grounds became nearly impossible for companies. The contribution of this study to the literature is addressing important discrimination areas that LGBT+ workers face in working life in Turkey. Being a minority in society creates stress on these individuals. So, this minority stress causes performance losses at work. This study sees employees as internal customers. It is employers' job to satisfy the internal customers to satisfy the external customers' (Waldo 1999). It can be seen that internal customers are the key factors of creating customer satisfaction. This study considers that it is important to reveal

LGBT+ workers' workers' minority stress problems in Turkey to maintain the inclusiveness and diversity at the workplace.

This research believes that recognizing LGBT+ workers' challenges and bringing them together is the first step to maintain this inclusiveness and diversity. A few of the participants mentioned that they come together in their community except during the Pride Parade[5], which is not a peaceful march anymore in Turkey. Therefore, no entity defends their rights and brings them together. To fight these discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, unionization must be considered. They should obtain social rights just like other workers, and forming a union may allow them to do so. Current labor unions do not oversee LGBT+ rights or have any agenda on creating LGBT+-friendly policies. They ignore them as workers. Therefore, a labor union that specifically defends LGBT+ rights is urgently needed. Furthermore there is a lack of laws that protect the working life of LGBT+ individuals. Although there are laws regulating gender discrimination in the workplace, no laws regulate sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination. These individuals are also hesitant about seeking justice in the courts because they fear prejudice from the lawyers and judges. Therefore, it is essential to increase non-discriminatory laws in order to maintain LGBT+ workers' confidence.

As mentioned, most Turkish organizations have a heterosexist point of view in every aspect of their work. They want distinct gender roles and cannot tolerate sexual identity or gender expression other than heterosexuality and cisgenderism. This marginalizes LGBT+ workers (Bowleg et al. 2008), who face discrimination and ostracization in the form of homophobia and transphobia. This causes stress in the workplace and yields minority stress. All workers in an organization are also internal customers, and all customers, including internal customers, should be made happy to maintain the organization's success. Internal customers who face workplace stress, especially minority stress, cannot be happy in the workplace.

Conclusion

The initial purpose of this research was to explore LGBT+ individuals' workplace satisfaction as internal customers via the theory of minority stress. The findings highlight that LGBT+ individuals generally prefer not to be out at their workplaces because of internalized homophobia, perceived stigma, and prejudiced events about their sexual and gender expression. This veiled discrimination manifests itself through LGBT+ individuals making themselves invisible at the workplace and experiencing verbal harassment, threatening, gossiping and stonewalls for promotion and exclusion. To not be confronted with this, LGBT+ workers prefer to be invisible. It seems that lesbians, bisexuals, and asexuals find it easier to hide their sexual identity. However, gay and trans individuals have difficulties hiding their gender expression and sexual identity during the

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[5]Pride Parade which is also known as pride march is a worldwide outdoor event for social acceptance, legal rights, achievements, and pride of LGBT+ community. This event occurs annually, often late June.

application, interview, and working stages. Participants faced homophobia and discrimination because of being out. Figure 2 shows that every aspect of being out to the companies' companies' attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals. If they are LGBT+-friendly companies, the workers are relieved and can be themselves. They do not need to play a role, so this affects their working performance. It is evident from the results that LGBT+ workers have jobs in nearly all areas, such as blue-collar workers, doctors, civil servants, university academics, and teachers. As internal customers, LGBT+ individuals should not be excluded from the performance support.

This research will serve as a base for future studies in Turkey about LGBT+ workers. Perhaps this work can break the taboo of talking about sexual identity and gender orientation in the workplace. This research also has raised many questions on LGBT+ individuals' needs that need to be further investigated. Further research on LGBT+ workers' rights may offer peace of mind to LGBT+ people in their work lives. What is needed is a research group formed from several institutions, such as universities and other NGOs that create solutions to this blockade.

Managerial Implication

This study addresses significant implications for practitioners, especially for human resources managers. It is hard to hire LGBT+ individuals at companies because of their country's ongoing conservative and heteronormative perspective. Just a few companies recognize them and accept their sexual identity. In organizations, these employees face discrimination, unequal treatment, and harassment as minority groups. Managers need to make provisions to maintain inclusivity and fairness in the workplace. Managers or owners of the companies must create policies. Counselling systems or psychological educations have to be provided for these employees. It is well known that satisfied internal customers make external customers satisfied. HRC's yearly CEI report reveals that most successful companies listed in Fortune 1000 recognize LGBT+ workers, and in 2020, 13 companies in the first 20 of Fortune 1000 got 100 points on CEI scale (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2020) (in 2019, there are 12 companies who get 100 points in first 20 of Fortune 1000) (Human Rights Campaign Foundation 2019). Companies like Apple, Exxon Mobil, AT&T, Amazon, and Walgreen care about their LGBT+ workers and yet they are financially and socially very successful. This study tries to help overcome the biases and prejudices about LGBT+ workers in Turkey and show the companies, especially the managers what these employees feel about this minority stress, because they exist and they cannot be ignored as workers.

Research Limitations

One of the main limitations is that LGBT+ people in Turkey did not want to participate in academic research for fear it would expose them. To accommodate these fears and ensure honest answers, interviews were conducted via phone. For

further research, interviewees who accept face-to-face interviews will be looked for. In addition, we could not ask the health support questions of HRC's index because Turkey's laws do not include separate legal regulations for LGBTQ.

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