

Moving from intersectional hostility to intersectional solidarity: Insights from LGBTQ individuals in Turkey

Abstract

Extant literature offers rich insights into intersectionality at individual and institutional levels, but sheds very little light on intersectional encounters between individuals and institutions. This paper attempts to fill this gap by investigating intersectional encounters as interactions between the individual and institutional intersections. Using a thematic analysis on qualitative interview data of a purposive- and snowball-selected sample of 11 LGBTQ adults in employment in Turkey, this paper finds evidence to support the existence of a multidimensional typology of intersectionality, where conflicting and complementary individual and institutional intersections create a four dimensional intersectional typology in the form of intersectional hostility, intersectional struggle, intersectional adjustment, and intersectional solidarity. Implications of these findings for theory, practice and future research conclude the paper.

Keywords

Individual intersectionality, institutional intersectionality, intersectional hostility, intersectional struggle, intersectional adjustment, intersectional solidarity, LGBTQ, gender, sexuality, class, Turkey

Introduction

In the last thirty years, researchers have paid considerable attention to the intersectional approach in order to understand the interplay of categories of inequality on choices of chances of individuals in various institutional contexts such as work, education, and law (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Mayer, Surtee, and Mahadevan, 2018; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012a, 2012b). Intersectionality is defined as “the interaction between [several] categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008, p. 68). The main reason for considering intersectionality as an adequate methodology to explore inequalities at work is that inequalities have complex and intertwined nature, thus they cannot be analysed through a single category focus, which would fail to capture the complex reality of intersecting inequalities that individuals experience (Aydin and Ozeren, 2018; Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, and Bell, 2011). Intersectional analyses in its original form used gender as a cross cutting category in order to provide a better understanding of the complex way that “gender disadvantage is created and sustained in the workplace” by individuals from different class and ethnic backgrounds (Healy et al., 2018, p. 2). Intersectional analysis has been developed with the recognition that gender differences interacted with other elements of social distinction and became more complicated.

Having recognised the necessity of an intersectional approach, Acker (2006) reconceptualised her widely cited framework “inequality regimes” by integrating class, race and ethnicity into the model. Similarly, Hancock (2007) suggests that “more than one category of difference (e.g., race, gender, class) plays a role in examinations of the complex [inequality dynamics]” (p. 251). More recent studies broadened the scope of intersectionality by considering the intersections between various other categories such as sexual orientation (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016), disability (Mik-Meyer, 2015), religion (Kaplan, Sabin, and Smaller-Swift, 2009), age (Mahon and Millar, 2014; Kelan, 2014) and occupational status (Tatli, Ozturk, and Woo, 2017).

Assuming that intersections reside in individuals and in institutions, the theory of intersectionality has taken two leanings: individual level intersections and institutional level intersections (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012a; Tatli et al., 2017). The former approach to intersectionality which dates back to its origins in law (Crenshaw, 1991) focuses on individual differences, which are grounded in social forces such as gender, ethnicity and class, and shapes the unique life experiences of individuals. This is the most common treatment of intersectionality and majority of the intersectionality studies (i.e., Cole, 2009; Farough, 2006; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). The individual intersections were grounded

on individual level of analysis, exploring how individual intersections are shaped by intersectional social frames.

Although a considerable amount of intersectionality research at the individual level used salient and cross cutting social categories in a binary order or in some kind of hierarchy, “salience can transcend time and place” (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b, p. 180). Besides, contextuality such as temporal and geographic specificity which interacts with salient categories can lead to the emergence of new social categories and can make fixed categories artificial (Fuss, 1991; McCall, 2005; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b). For example, there can be countless number of gender categories rather than only man and woman depending on the answer of “is it biological sex that distinguishes a man from a woman and if so what is biologically male and female?” (McCall, 2005, p. 1778). Furthermore, the treatment of intersectionality based on predetermined and salient categories in a hierarchical order “leads to static accounts of diversity” (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b, p. 180).

Some scholars caution us that intersectionality studies based on “the fixed, predefined, essentialist notions of identity categories” (Dennissen, Benschop and van den Brink, 2018a, p. 3) ignore the complex reality of inequalities that emerges from the multiple interactions of individual differences and institutional arrangements (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b). The latter form of intersectional studies looks for institutional intersections. In line with Scott (2008) we adopt a broad, sociologically informed definition of institutions to include the significant institutions that an individual encounters in their life cycle, such as the family, education, work, health care, and law, the encounters with which have a significant constituting impact on how individuals experience workplace relations. Roseneil et al. (2017) demonstrate that institutions such as family and civil society have a constituting and reproducing role in citizenship behaviour. Each institution has intersectionality in its identity, i.e. corporate identity, as each institution, akin to an individual, is gendered, sexualised, and classed in complex and multifaceted ways. Studies on institutional intersections question practices, processes and norms in institutions leading to differentiated outcomes for people from different backgrounds (Acker, 2006; Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, 2011; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2013). We treat intersectional identities of individuals and institutions as dynamically evolving, in a state of interplay and multifaceted, rather than settled, consistent and static phenomena. For example, individuals and institutions may be homophobic, biphobic or transphobic in certain regards, under certain conditions and settings but not in others. The relationality between the individuals and institutions in mutually constituting each other complicates the analyses of individuals and institutions as absolutely distinct entities. Resultantly, we frame individuals and institutions as relational entities and the encounter between them as a dynamically changing phenomenon, the meaning of which is embedded in a specific temporal and historical context.

Treatment of intersectionality in empirical studies has predominantly engaged with individual categories of difference as individual experience is fundamental in understanding the intersectional outcomes. In this paper we demonstrate that there is utility in exploring intersectionality at the intersection of individual and institutional levels. As such we move beyond the polarised take on intersections as either individual or institutional phenomenon and tackle intersectionality as a relational phenomenon that gains meaning at the encounter of individuals and institutions in context. An intersectional study that includes individual experiences connected with larger social and institutional structures can offer helpful guidance for understanding “intergroup relations, social issues, and systems of inequality, and for informing interventions and social justice work” (Wijeyesinghe, 2017, p. 5). In parallel, drawing on a study of 11 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals from Turkey, we explicate how intersectionality features as forms of solidarity and hostility in work environments. As such we posit that in addition to the efforts of individuals, the institutions should also integrate new and more effective diversity initiatives supporting institutional intersections to their existing diversity management programmes if inclusion is aimed at societal and organisational levels (OECD, 2018; SHRM, 2009).

This study contributes to the existing intersectionality literature in three distinct ways. First, it operationalises the concepts of intersectional hostility and intersectional solidarity both at the individual and institutional levels, in which there has been few empirical studies. The paper achieves

this by examining the real life experiences of individuals across different institutional settings. Employment is a relational activity and employment patterns are highly influenced by interlocking inequalities that emerge from the categories of institutions that cannot be overlooked (Campbell, 2015; Colgan and McKearney, 2012; Eveline, Bacchi, and Binns, 2009). By adopting a relational perspective (Ozbilgin and Vassilopoulou 2016; Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008) which traces the engagement of different stakeholders such as the society, the state, the legal framework, public services and private sector organisations, and trade unions, the study provides an exploration of intersectional identities of participating individual and the institutions with which they interact. Second, the study explores one of the least studied identity categories in the intersectionality literature, i.e. sexual orientation (Colgan, 2011; Hines, 2011; Wright, 2016). Alongside gender and sexuality, this paper also considers class as a category of identity. The paucity of empirical research on intersections of sexuality and class has been particularly highlighted (McDermott, 2011; Taylor, 2007). Unlike studies that focus only on the material side of social class and ignore its deeper cultural meanings, and research that considers sexuality “within a narrow framework of identity and discrimination” (Andersen, 2008, p. 122), this study seeks to explore intersections of gender, sexuality and class at the individual and institutional levels to understand how these intersections construct unequal working conditions in organisations. Third, this study investigates the unique life experiences of LGBTQ individuals who “make up an important part of the global talent pool” (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016, p. 781). Although LGBTQ individuals are confronted with significant challenges in work environments (Bell, Ozbilgin, Beauregard, and Sürgevil, 2011; van Ewijk, 2011; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, and Wright, 2007; Rumens, Aydin, and Todd, 2016; Whittle et al., 2007) such as “receiving unequal pay scales, facing difficulties in securing career advancement and subjectivities in assessing their performance” (Ozturk, 2011, p. 1101), they have been largely understudied because of “the popularity of some diversity categories over others coupled with the implicit pecking order of diversity strands” (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016, p. 784) in the diversity management field. In a similar way, some strands of diversity and equality such as gender equality has garnered transnational solidarity whereas other categories such as ethnicity and sexual orientation had patchy progress in their struggles for equality internationally (Ozbilgin, 2018). This situation created a significant gap in diversity management research with respect to LGBTQ individuals’ concerns in workplace, thus this study contributes to filling this gap.

Individual and institutional intersections of gender, sexuality and class

Fluid, complex and contradictory systemic inequalities (Castro and Holvino, 2016; Holvino, 2012) emerge from the intersections of individuals’ perceptions about their multiple identities and culturally embedded processes and practices of organisations that are taken for granted and often regarded as value neutral (Alcoff, 2005; Holvino, 2010; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, and Nkomo, 2016). Drawing on Acker’s (2006) inequality regimes framework, we focus on the intersections of gender, sexuality and class as multiple identities and “particular policies, rules, conventional practices of organising work, and ways in which people interact with each other” (Acker, 2011, p. 70) which serve as the bases for the construction of inequalities in organisations. Yet, our treatment of intersectionality of gender, sexuality and class is one which considers categories of difference as embedded in each other, rather than as entities which have hierarchical or cumulative relationships with each other (Kamasak, Ozbilgin and Yavuz, 2019). In our intersectional analysis, gender is defined as “socially constructed differences between men and women and the [stereotypical] beliefs and identities that support inequalities” (Acker, 2006, p. 444). Although sexual orientation is different from gender, it cannot be understood without reference to gender (Hassard, Holliday, and Willmott, 2000). Skidmore (2004) suggests that studying sexual orientation “opens up new insights into the power relation of gender” (p. 229). Gender and sexual orientation are intertwined and inseparable (Castro and Holvino, 2016; Wright, 2016) in a sense that gender is the often unstated and implicit roles afforded to women and men in society “as well as a ‘common-sensical’ heterosexualisation in gender relations which is called heteronormativity” (Winker and Degele, 2011, p. 55). Therefore, structures, processes, policies, rules and practices that were grounded on “unquestioned assumptions” (Winker and Degele, 2011) of heteronormative ideology result in “institutionalised heterosexuality as the standard for legitimate and prescriptive arrangements” (Ingraham, 1994, p. 204) in work organisations. In addition to gender and sexual orientation, power and social relations can be highly influenced by class (Andersen, 2008; Ozbilgin et al., 2011; Wright,

2013) since “class is derived from the social origin of a person, the cultural resource of education and profession as well as the resource of social networks and relationships” (Winker and Degele, 2011, p. 55). Although class-based power relations may result in considerable income and wealth inequalities, their effect is not limited to economic inequalities. According to Bourdieu (1986), resulting from its deeper sociological and cultural roots, class has society-wide effects including living and working conditions, family structure, social relations, voluntary work, selection of occupation and finding job. So, we consider class as a social division which positions people socially as well as economically advantaged or disadvantaged in work organisations (Ozbilgin et al., 2011; Taylor, 2007, 2009). At the interplay of gender, sexuality and class, LGBTQ individuals also experience ingroup intersections, as have unique challenges such as homophobia (Fraise and Barrientos 2016; Hudson and Ricketts 1980), biphobia (Monro, 2015), transphobia (Köllen, 2016; Mizock et al., 2017) and queer bashing (Burns 2000), which sometimes unites them under one banner for common struggles, despite their different challenges.

In our study, intersections between gender, sexuality and class are demonstrated in how working class LGBTQ individuals are confronted with material challenges, exclusion and ridicule from colleagues, and unequal career opportunities in their work. However, these inequalities do not emerge as a result of individuals’ own choices but through their interactions with culturally embedded institutional norms, codes and practices which tolerate only the heteronormative order and create otherness, construct heterosexual males as “rational, competent, physically and analytically superior doers” (Tatli et al., 2017, p. 410), and characterise social class of individuals based on their universities, language use, where they live and their social ties (Castro and Holvino, 2016).

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is a serious problem in the Turkish workplace context as it is in other developing countries (Omar and Davidson, 2001; Ozbilgin and Woodward, 2014; Ozeren and Aydin, 2016). Socio-political context and liberalisation of economy in the last decade has engendered specific problems such as closure of venues, increased violence and harassment for working class LGBTQ individuals, while offering the appearance of highly commercialised forms of freedom for middle and upper class LGBTQ individuals in Turkey (Aydin, 2017; Ozbilgin 2017). Dominant patriarchal family structure that is supported and perpetuated by the Islamic traditions and codes makes overt heterosexuality a norm and considers other sexual orientations as socially unacceptable (Kogacioglu, 2004; Ozturk and Ozbilgin, 2015). Sexual minorities are “objectified as a source of shame and revulsion, a threat to an idealised, pure family order” (Ozturk, 2011, p. 1106). In this context, working-class LGBTQ individuals are an invisible and hard to reach group in work organisations. In the same line, existing institutional codes, regulations and structures are generally in favour of “ideal” type of workers, i.e. male, heterosexual, middle class, Sunni Muslim and of Turkish ethnicity, which lead to complex and multiple forms of inequalities at work. Each individual has different strategies for negotiating their choices and chances in life. LGBTQ individuals dynamically adopt their strategies to a range of institutional settings and encounters. From this point of view, it is important to investigate intersectional inequalities in a dynamic way as acts of solidarity and hostility in intersectional encounters.

Methods

The field study of this paper involved 11 interviews with LGBTQ individuals from purposely selected range of backgrounds in Turkey. Since reaching out to vulnerable groups is difficult, a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods were used (Browne, 2005; Ozturk and Tatli, 2016). We approached 4 participants through personal contacts and these participants directed us to other 7 participants. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, identities of participants were disaggregated from the recording and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. We have also ensured that none of the material contained information that can lead to the identification of an individual participant. The age range of participants is between 18 and 37. More detailed demographic information about the participants are provided in Table 1. Given the complex and embedded characteristics of individual and institutional intersections (Acker, 2006; Davis, 2008; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b), a qualitative interviewing approach which provides rich insights into previously

understudied phenomena was employed (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). In line, a qualitative survey which includes 30 semi-structured questions was designed. The face-to-face and voice recorded semi-structured interviews allowed us to ensure flexibility and spontaneity in conversations as well as enabling us to control the structure and focus of questioning (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2003).

Table 1 inserted here

The interview questions focused on life experiences of the informants across different institutions such as family, education, work, health care, and law (Leachman, 2016). As such, the interviews revealed the sources and types of homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia and class related discrimination faced by interviewees and the extent of compulsion for disclosing their sexual and gender identities at work. The fully transcribed interview data were treated by a thematic analysis using the relational perspective by Ozbilgin and Vassilopoulou (2018) which “fosters the integration of micro and macro organisational perspectives and provides a framework to study organisational phenomena in dynamic and processual terms” (p. 151). Besides, a multi-perspective approach that considers involvement of people in workplace interactions “in shaping and reproducing [institutional] structures and processes” (Layder, 2004) was adopted. Thus, the interplay between individual agency and institutional structures was explored in this study.

The study has a number of limitations. Participants of this study are from a vulnerable group who is hard to reach in Turkey. The sample size is small and limited, despite our efforts to increase diversity in the group by distributive characteristics. Building trust and rapport with the participants was challenging as the data that we collected is sensitive. We were not able to present rich descriptor of any individual participant’s experiences in order to protect their anonymity. The LGBTQ community is small, under considerable risk of hate speech, harassment and violence and individuals are easy to identify if we are to give detailed description of their experiences. This has meant that we presented our findings and analyses in aggregate insights in the main and used quotes sparingly.

Analyses and results

Our study demonstrates that participants have complex set of intersectional identities at the individual level and they report their encounters with varied institutions and institutional intersections. Intersectional experiences of participants highlighted the dynamic and varied nature of intersectional experiences, in a spectrum, ranging from hostility to their intersectional identities to support and solidarity with their intersectional identities in different institutional settings. In order to account for the richness of the participants’ intersectional encounters, we explored intersectional encounters across two dimensions: intersections of individuals and intersections of institutions. For each dimension, we noted that intersections were either complementary in some regards, supporting each other, or they conflicted, causing tensions both within the institutional setting and/or in the psychosocial experiences of the individual. For example, at the individual level of intersections some participants identified that their religious beliefs contradicted with their sexual orientation. Others, found discourses which transcended such conflict, finding complementarity between their religious beliefs and sexual orientation. At the institutional level, some institutions such as some families were homophobic in their ethos and identity and some other institutions such as workplaces were more tolerant. Yet the institutional intersectional identities were not fixed and static. Thus, the individuals have not had consistent but dynamically changing experiences of intersectional conflict between their identities depending on the nature of the institutional encounter that they have experienced. The institutions of family, education, employment and law, which were pertinent for our participants, had very different intersectional character, in which sexuality, class and gender identities either competed with each other or coexisted without problems.

Intersectional experiences of both individuals and institutions in some cases suffered from conflicts as certain identity categories competed with each other. For example, certain religious beliefs and LGBTQ rights were hard to reconcile at the individual and institutional levels and they caused various

forms of personal and institutional conflicts. Turkey has a predominantly Muslim population. However, the country has a secular constitution and a relatively moderate approach to practice of religion (Aytac and Carkoglu, 2017). Even in this liberal setting religion often emerged as a category that conflicted with sexual orientation identity. Yet, sometimes categories of identity at individual and institutional levels supported each other. For example, some participants found strategies for reconciling their social class or education with their sexual orientation. Even in the case of religion some participants found inclusive frames of belief that allowed them to reconcile their sexual orientation identities and religious beliefs. Across their life spans, participants experienced both complementarity and conflict, depending on the congruence with the institutional environments which they encountered. Hence, in this paper we explored individual and institutional intersections from the dimensions of complementarity and conflict.

If the institutional and individual intersections conflict, participants showed *intersectional hostility*, and the intersections were hard to reconcile and tensions existed between them (Healy, Bradley and Forson, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2016). For example, some participants reported how heteronormativity at schools and their LGBTQ identity contradicted. Families in some cases pursued homophobic, biphobic and transphobic strategies against participants and the intersectional encounter with families presented participants with hostilities.

If the institutional intersections conflict but individual intersections are complementary, participants displayed forms of *intersectional struggle* (Healy et al., 2011; Tatli et al., 2017). For example, some participants from middle class backgrounds were familiar with liberal discourses and human rights issues and saw no conflict between their sexual orientation and other identities. But, they experienced institutional encounters such as workplace challenges to their sexual orientation identity. There were examples of struggle with institutional norms and intersections in order to seek their rights.

If the institutional intersections are complementary and the individual intersections are conflicting then there was intersectional adjustment as the individual learns to reconcile their different intersectional identities in a context where there was not a tension in the institutional encounter (Dennissen et al., 2018a; Rodriguez et al., 2018). For example, some participants noticed that they experienced difficulties in accepting their sexual identity and noticed that their friends and sometimes family, workplaces or other significant institutions were supportive and more understanding than they have given them credit for. Similarly in their workplaces they were made to feel welcome when they came out. In those times, participants experienced a period of adjustment and accepted their intersectional identities. This also happened when some participants entered universities. They were able to accept their intersectional identities with the support of friends and allies in the relatively liberal environment of universities which have LGBTQ student networks.

Finally, if the intersections are complementary for both the individual and the institution, there could be intersectional solidarity to progress multiple causes across sexual, class, ethnic and other identities together (Colgan, 2016; Dennissen, 2018b; Rodriguez et al., 2016). For example, some participants considered their sexual identity as congruent with their religious, ethnic, class and other identities. In such cases, when the institutional intersections were similarly congruent and complementary, they were able to show solidarity across multiple categories of identity rather than to lock themselves into confines of their sexual identity politics alone. This happened in the form of helping others who are struggling with their multiple identities or helping develop institutions to accept sexual orientation and other forms of equality, building allies, organising to combat homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and varieties of discrimination. Some participants experienced such examples of intersectional solidarity in their encounters with their families, educational institutions and work.

Table 2 below outlines the typology of intersectional encounters from intersectional hostility to intersectional solidarity as experienced by our participants, as defined above. In the subsequent sections further evidence is presented on each form of encounter between individual and institutional intersections.

Table 2 inserted here

Individual intersections

LGBTQ individuals have varied individual experiences of intersectional identity for three primary reasons. First, there were variations and similarities among the sexual orientation groups that form the LGBTQ label. There were distinct sexual orientation identities under the broad umbrella of the LGBTQ label. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans and queer individuals reported some common but predominantly distinct experiences and unique struggles towards equality. Despite reported differences, a degree of intersectional solidarity was also evident for our participants. There were some inter-category differences as often mentioned in the literature (Köllen, 2016). Trans participants were more vulnerable due to their higher levels of visibility, and more complex experiences of coming out in an increasingly dangerous context of Turkey where trans murders were tacitly condoned as daily occurrences. However, gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer participants were more strategic about their choices of being out and remaining closeted. One participant, Resmiye explains the strategies she adopted in order to find a job and hide her identity in the workplace.

Although I do not have a lot opportunities to find a job, I always try to obtain as much as information possible about the organisation to which I plan to apply.... In every organisation I worked I concealed my identity, I only had one friend who knew my life preferences. (Resmiye, 32, lesbian, educator)

Other categories of etic diversity (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b) such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, belief among others form intersections of identity for this group. There were struggles and challenges which were common to all participants such as the awareness of negative social stereotypes and a range of LGBTQ specific disadvantages, biases and stereotypes that they face in families, and in domains of education and work. Yet, there were also distinct experiences, For example, religion was often used to explain an intersectional conflict as conservative Islamists in Turkey were less open to sexual orientation equality. One queer participant, Nazli, suggests that the negative stereotypes on LGBTQ individuals have religious roots.

Homosexual and bisexual women face with specific stereotypes. Their orientations are not considered at all and are generally treated as unfortunate spinsters who could not find suitable men to marry. Unfortunately, this is the situation in the Western part of the country, in Eastern Turkey the situation worsens since they are forced to marry by their families. Transexuals face with the heaviest harassment in the society and I believe all these treatments and negative stereotypes were created by religious thoughts. (Nazli, 24, queer, intern in medical school)

Another participant Melis verifies the thoughts of Nazli on how trans people encounter the harshest stereotypes and even physical assault reflecting on her experiences in the street outside the school:

It was two years ago, there was a guy in the same school who somehow got my pictures which show that I was not a straight individual. He and his friends assaulted to me in the street, my friends involved in the hustle and bustle and we had to run away at the end. (Melis, 20, male to female transexual, student assistant)

There were emic (locally meaningful) differences for the LGBTQ individuals from Turkey, including place/region of birth, rural/urban identity, education level among others that have significant effect on formation of intersections of the LGBTQ individuals from Turkey. For example, the place of birth presents an emic category for our participants (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b), as it provides them with strong family-like ties with people who are from the same place of birth (hemsehri) as them. Hemsehri ties which provided heterosexuals with opportunity and networking structures often presented threats to the wellbeing and security of LGBTQ individuals in our study, with some exceptions. An urban heritage, however, presented participants with a complementary intersectional identity and yet rural heritage was more hostile to the LGBTQ identity. Certain professional identities such as catering and arts and creative industry were reportedly more open to the LGBTQ identity (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012a) than others such as teaching and engineering, which were regulated with heteronormative principles which were hostile to the LGBTQ identities. One participant, Poyraz, explains how he

experienced his urban trans identity in a conservative transphobic town, which made his transitioning more difficult than education in one of the larger cities in Turkey:

Here it is more relaxed. But I studied for my undergraduate degree in (name of the city removed), which is a more conservative and closed minded city. I had a girlfriend there and first time her family heard about me, they severely opposed to our relationship. They told us that we were both female and this relationship must end. Besides, they threatened me several times, called “psycho” and even punched once. Apart from this, I was beaten while I was having a job talk in (name of the city removed) just because I disagreed with the boss... Once, I went to a public toilet and entered to female rooms because male rooms were full and I was unable to wait. A woman discerned me and started to shout “get out of here, you are a man”. A couple of women came out of the toilet and slapped me and I just ran away. (Poyraz, 24, female to male transexual, waiter in a restaurant)

Institutional intersections

There were a number of institutions which feature as significant in shaping intersectional experiences of our study participants. In line with the existing intersectionality literature, the significant institutions which were reported in our study were the family, friends and relatives, education, work organisations, law, healthcare and the state (Healy et al., 2017; Leachman, 2016). For our participants intersections did not simply exist as markers of their individuals identity. Institutions that the participants have encountered had intersectional identities. Institutions such as family, education were sexualized, gendered, ethnicised and positioned by class, belief and other categories which had an impact on the subjective and objective experiences of the study participants. Turkey is a society with strong family ties, and heteronormative mores, a disciplinarian education system, relatively unregulated labour market, a Muslim majority population with moderate approach to religious norms, and a justice system under considerable deregulation. Religiosity and sectarian animosity, sexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and tense ethnic relations permeate institutional practices in the country (Selek, 2018; Berghan, 2007; Ozbilgin, 2017).

There is lack of coercive pressures, such as equality laws, that can force institutions to adopt principled approaches in terms of equality across all strands in Turkey. Opinion polls in the country suggest levels of hostility towards anyone who does not fit with the sunni, family oriented and conservative values of the society (Carkoglu and Bilgili, 2012; TSSEA, 2018). As such minority groups, women, single individuals, people with disabilities, foreigners, and LGBTQ individuals are subject to social exclusion in neighbourhoods (TSSEA, 2018). Ahmet’s experience resonates with the general feeling of compulsory heterosexuality in understanding the intersections of the most significant institution in the country, i.e. the family. Even in this case, the family with its hostile intersections did contain allies which was helpful for Ahmet in his attempts at combat intersectional conflicts in the institution of family. What appeared as interesting in Ahmet’s account was that the institution of family was not a cohesive institution. Sometimes it served allies sometimes threats:

My sister-in-lawIt is as if she is my adoptive mother, because she is with me since my childhood. We are really close, like friends, like two confidants. We are everything together, and I wanted her to know about this. I thought, if she knew, she could help. I believed, if my sister-in-law ostracized me, I would not want anyone else to know, but if she did not, everyone should know, because she knows and feels what I do every aspect of myself. Hence, she told me I was not doing anything wrong, and I held my head higher. Then my brother learned about it, my older sisters learned. It then blew up all over. They were saying I am a ‘faggot’, a ‘bender’... My social media account was stolen by my elder sister. I was always kept under check. There is a term in Turkish gay slang as ‘running tricks’, and they were thinking I was doing that. That is, pardon my French, but they thought I was in prostitution. My older sister implies that... I am always in danger at home. I received threats like that that they would kill me, kick me out of the house, not let me live if I did not fix this orientation, and I still receive these threats. I did not want to be a person who gets crushed or scared by facing the smallest pressure, and I want to fight back. I want to take care of this

face-to-face with my family, and I want to be a person who keeps his head up against these threats from my family. (Ahmet, 18, gay, furniture builder)

Education as an institution remained limited in relation to its support for LGBTQ identity. In particular LGBTQ individuals found their encounters at schools as challenging. Yet, universities provided a more liberal context where LGBTQ networks emerged and students were able to secure support and build friendship ties and allies. Schooling to university education the institution of education didn't offer consistently supportive environment for intersectional identities of LGBTQ students and staff. Particularly for LGBTQ staff being open at work does not appear to be an option as LGBTQ individuals face legal and cultural barriers to employment in sectors of education both in schools and universities. The limited support that universities offer is to students through fledgling number of LGBTQ student clubs and networks.

The state was also a significant institutional apparatus as an umbrella structure with complex functions within it, which serve as employer and service provider to vast numbers of people. Although equality among citizens is enshrined in the constitution, the state apparatus is similar to the family in terms of its strong support for the tastes, life choices and conservative tendencies of the new religious elite, who remain relatively antagonistic to LGBTQ identities. Besides education, the police, healthcare, and military service are the state institutions with unique traditions and ethos of serving LGBTQ individuals. The relation between these state institutions and the LGBTQ individuals had periods of calm and yet appear to be antagonistic at the moment.

Evren explains how he chose not to attend a qualifying exam for state employment due to fears that his trans identity would be revealed and he would be denigrated. Even when employment was offered, LGBTQ individuals faced barriers such as forced relocation to other cities and offices and bad treatment:

That is, if I became a civil servant before this process, if I started this process later, I think I would definitely experience a problem. After all, this is a state job, and even if I do not know them in person, as I heard, others trans people were being assigned to other cities after their sex change. (Evren, 26, female to male transexual, cook in a restaurant)

One of our participants, a male to female transexual Melis who came to Turkey for studying her university degree shares her negative feelings on state institutions:

If I was a straight person, I would think about getting a public service like healthcare in this country, but as a trans person I don't think that I would be able to get help from a state institution. I think I would experience the worst of everything in a police station..... and the same prejudices against trans people I have experienced in other parts of the world are here as well. In public transport people look at me as if I am a sick person, sometimes they ask me "is it an illness?" and this brings up other questions about HIV and stuff. (Melis, 20, male to female transexual, student assistant)

Work organisations in Turkey had varied degrees of sympathy towards LGBTQ identities (Ozturk and Ozbilgin 2015; Ozturk, 2011). Despite negative expectations of some individuals some workplaces had progressive managers and owners who supported LGBTQ workers. Yet in the absence of legislative protections, LGBTQ individuals were exposed to precarity at work, if they came out of the closet they might lose their jobs. Availability of allies was not always guaranteed and evident in the interviews. Participants who found allies at work enjoyed more positive experiences with their intersectional identities.

Overall, Turkish institutions have served a life cycle of intersectional encounters to LGBTQ individuals (Ozturk, 2011). The intersectional identities of LGBTQ individuals remain unaccepted and challenged by institutional intersections which remain normatively heterosexual, male, paternalistic, close knit, middle class dominated, and inspired by religious and traditional morals (Ozturk and Ozbilgin, 2015). In such a context, there remains limited if any room for positive framing and encounters for LGBTQ individuals. In the next section we explore four encounters between individuals and institutions which framing the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ individuals.

Understanding intersectional encounters between individuals and institutions

We identified four different intersectional encounters between individuals and institutions. Our participants have experienced these types of encounters depending on their own identity formations and the intersectional identities of the significant institutions which they interface with. What complicated the intersectional encounters was the ability of some participants to pass as heterosexual. Most participants were partly out across their institutional encouragers. Some of them were only out to their friends, some were out to some or all of their family members. Some of them were out to colleagues and/or bosses at work. While being closeted prevented overt possibilities of hostility and solidarity for the study participants, participants still experienced psychological forms of hostility and solidarity in their intersectional encounters. One participant, Ahmet, explained how he decided to remain closeted to his family after observing their beliefs and discourses:

I come from a family from Eastern Turkey. Because of this it (LGBT identity) is treated with antagonism. Although I attempted at telling my family. Ultimately, I didn't tell them because their actions and discourses were very harsh about the LGBT issues. (Ahmet, 18, gay, furniture builder)

When the participants were out, the cases of hostility and solidarity sometimes took overt form and remained tacit in some cases. Passing or coming out were significant in understanding intersectional encounters of our participants as they were forced into the closet across many formal encounters and enjoyed limited experiences of coming out when they are with allies and friends.

Intersectional hostility

Some participants reported that their own intersectional identities and the intersectional identities of the institutions had antagonism towards LGBTQ identities and life choices. In such a context participants experienced what we term here as intersectional hostility. Participants experienced conflict because of their belonging to different identity groups and socio-demographic categories which were hostile to one another. For example, the workplace often presented a hostile intersection for the participants. Those participants who were also uncomfortable with their sexual orientation remained either closeted and chose to be invisible or they experienced hostility. Availability of homophobic discourses at work were justified with nationalism, religiosity, or productivity discourses. Participants who faced intersectional hostility often reported these encounters as traumatic and cathartic for them. Sometimes hostile intersectional encounters have led to withdrawal behaviour and other times participants developed resilience and counter strategies in order to overcome commonplace social injustice.

Even in cases of intersectional hostility, there were examples where participants who made peace or reconciled the hostile aspects of their identity conflicts, either by suppressing their sexual orientation or accepting their sexual orientation despite internal conflicts and external hostility. Ahmet explains how he managed to reconcile his religiosity and strong family ties with his sexual orientation at least in his thoughts, despite continued external pressure.

Since the day I was born, my life was traumatic. I was not accepting of myself. I had thoughts like I would humiliate my family, how would I face my family? By the way, I am a very religious person. I was associating this with religion, too. I was asking myself, you are such a religious person, how could you feel like this? I have accepted who I am for about a year. In this one year, I advanced pretty far in terms of the concept of LGBT individuals and my own sexual identity. Some are angry that I advanced too far, but I think like this: I have harmed myself for years, and I am trying to alleviate this harm in one year. (Ahmet, 18, gay, furniture builder)

Intersectional hostility was more common experience among participants who had lower levels of education and who came from more traditional, rural and religious segments of Turkish society. Intersectional hostility contained degrees of self-hate and institutional antagonism, which often caused emotional and material damage to participants. Yet, participants displayed varied degrees of agency in order to combat or accept their own as well as institutional framing of their sexual orientation.

Intersectional struggle

Some participants made peace with their own intersectional identities and they were comfortable being LGBTQ. Yet they were also exposed to institutional encounters which are antagonistic to LGBTQ intersections. Participants who were better educated with democratic and liberal values and human rights and secular frames were often at peace with their sexual orientation identities. Yet, the Turkish institutions do not always offer similar liberal contexts which can accommodate and value sexual orientation intersections (Ozturk and Ozbilgin, 2015). Some participants explained that they had to struggle against religious structure in their families, autocratic control and overbearing supervision in education and at work which denigrated their sexual identity. There were struggles against institutional intersections which set barriers against LGBTQ individuals. Akin explains how the state control restricts freedoms of association and organising for LGBTQ individuals in Turkey.

You ask for permission for the smallest demonstration or event, but these are rejected for made up excuses. Most of these was similar in Mersin, too, but we succeeded in the face of all prohibitions. State officials, or I say state elders, do not allow it, approve it for different reasons. We are restricted this way. This is why we do not have much visibility, we are not seen by others. (Akin, 23, gay, cook in a hotel)

As the above account highlights when the individuals intersections were harmonious and the institutional intersections are hostile, individuals often found themselves in a position of struggle in order to realise their life choices and practice their basic human rights of assembly and protest.

Intersectional adjustment

When the participants had conflict in their intersectional identity and yet the context of the institutions to which they were exposed was supportive they might experience intersectional adjustment, a process by which they reconsidered their own identity and relationship with their LGBTQ identity. Participants who experienced such supportive settings often reported making peace with their own sexual orientation and adapting to the liberal feeling in their new institutional setting. For example, some participants had support in their families who helped them accept their sexual identity. Similarly having allies at work helped some participants in resolving their internal conflicts in their intersectional identities. Some participants explained that being in touch with student networks during their university studies have helped them develop positive view of their own gender and sexual identities.

Social movements have played important roles for participants to gain awareness about their own gender and sexual identities, providing them with positive enforcement to accept their identities and resolve their internal conflicts. Participants sometimes could see the availability of social movements such as the Gezi Park movement or the LGBTQ movement which offer them possibilities of reconciling their intersectional identities. One participant explained that they wish to remain in the closet although they are aware of LGBTQ networks and movement offering openness and coming out. The process of adjustment means that the individual reconciles their different intersectional identities.

I do not have an activist side in any issue. Only once, at the times of the Gezi Park protests, was the most activist period of my life, yet drinking beer in the park was activism for me. Thus, I am not connected to any solidarity groups, events or organizations. In fact, I am keeping a distance, I am not inside of it much. It may be true that this is caused by a certain tension. You know, it is true that I am afraid of what would happen to me if I get in it, start living openly, but in general, I am a person who prefers to live this life secretly. Just as I would experience this secretly as a straight person, I am experiencing it secretly as an LGBT individual because it is not any different... (Fatih, 22, gay, staff in an art gallery)

Realising that the conflict exists only in their own framing of their own intersectional identities some participants have re-adjusted their attitudes towards themselves based on more relaxed attitudes that they perceived from the institutional encounters. However this was not always the case. Some participants wished to remain in the closet despite the relaxing of norms and availability of support structures. We need to explore deeper the multiple belongings to different networks ties such as

family, friends work, education and in wider social and domestic contexts. Exploring availability of a single institutional encounter is not sufficient to understand the intersectional experiences of an individual to accept or keep their internal conflicts or to understand their choices to remain in the closet or to come out.

Intersectional solidarity

When participants and their immediate institutional and social environment offered possibilities of intersectional complementarity, they were able to show solidarity with a wider network of individuals. In such case individuals joined networks to advance possibilities of equality for LGBTQ individuals. Availability of other LGBTQ friends and allies made significant difference to the intersectional encounters of the participants to have elements of solidarity. For example, some participants had supportive parents and high levels of knowledge and positive awareness about their own LGBTQ identities. For these participants and their allies in their families, there were examples of solidarity and self-organising in order to advance the cause of LGBTQ equality and welfare. Similar cases were reported with workplace allies and LGBTQ networks at universities which encouraged participants to help other LGBTQ individuals. One participant, Evren, explained his vision for solidarity when a suitable opportunity arises:

I have a problem, I hope I will solve it, but do not know when. I feel very lucky about my family, but I have many friends who experience difficult situations. Think of an establishment with a gym, a café, a guesthouse. Think of somewhere big like the resting areas for soldiers. One day, a fundraising event is organised for Evren's breast surgery. Another day, a fundraiser for a friend who does not have money for medication. The money in the register is distributed this way. I have such a plan where people can support each other. I am thinking of a place that is not only for LGBT individuals, but a place where all people who are not homophobic can exercise, eat and drink at the café, a place where people's minds can be changed. Not exactly like an association, but like multiple facilities. Of course, I do not know whether it is possible or not. I cannot provide financial support yet, but for example, I can invite someone I do not know at all to my home and host them. Unfortunately, I cannot provide other types of support yet. I have introduced them to my family. We accepted them, spent time with them. We are still hanging out, doing things together. I can say, with some friends, we are like family. (Evren, 26, female to male transexual, cook in a restaurant)

Our study shows that individuals are able to overcome their own intersectional tensions and conflicts when the context is supportive. In the same way, the participants were able to show intersectional solidarity towards LGBTQ individuals and other social movements when the institutional setting was not hostile to their identities. Our analyses lends support to organisational change interventions which recognise the significance of changing institutions through organisational development activities rather than to fix individuals through training and awareness raising alone.

Our findings from Turkey present a contrast to studies from countries where LGBTQ identity experiences lower levels of adversity and the legal protections are stronger. Aydin and Ozbilgin (2019) explain that the unique impact of the national context shows mostly as divergence of priorities for LGBTQ organising in the case of Britain and Turkey. In more regulated and supportive environments, adversity that participants experienced leads to solidaristic behaviour (Antias, 2014; Bassell and Emejulu, 2014; Wiley 2012). One striking finding is that Turkish national paternal shows that ethnic conflict is more pronounced than religious conflict (Aytac and Carkoglu, 2017). Yet, for LGBTQ individuals, religion was more significant source of conflict than ethnicity in the country. They struggled with conservative religious segments of society. Our study points out to a complex relationship between intersectional solidarity and the institutional context. Our participants were able to show overt solidarity only when their lives, livelihoods and/or socio-economic were not at risk and covert intersectional solidarity rest of the time.

Another dimension although not frequently noted in the interviews was the connectedness and solidarity developed through use of internet technology and social and dating applications. Some intersectional solidarity was secured via virtual means and in the safer context of anonymity that

internet social network sites provided. Networks are formed, groups have communicated and individuals supported each other in the virtual environment which provided a safe space for intersectional solidarity, in the absence of real spaces and venues in some cases. Yet, even the virtual space was under state control and many LGBTQ web sites and applications are banned in Turkey under state sanctions. Although their European counterparts find new forms of virtual solidarity, LGBTQ organising and solidarity also remains constrained in the virtual space.

Conclusion

Intersectionality solidarity remains the next challenge for progressive social movements for equality, most of which to this date remain fragmented and isolated. We are witnessing intersectional thinking taking root in social and organisation theory (Acker, 1990, 2006; Crenshaw, 1991; Muhr and Sløk-Andersen, 2017; Dennissen et al., 2018a; Mayer, Surtee, and Mahadevan, 2018). Yet the treatment on intersectionality in the literature either locks it to individual level, focusing on the spectrum of etic and emic categories of difference that individuals hold or focused on institutional processes, policies and rules that generate differentiated and intersectional outcomes (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012b). Our study transcends this dichotomous treatment of intersectionality in a way which brings it dynamism by focusing on intersectional encounters between individuals and institutions. We address this inattention by exploring intersectional encounters by dimensions of complementarity and conflict.

We identified a typology of four intersectional encounters between individuals and institutions based on our field study. First, the intersectional encounter can take the form of intersectional hostility, in which individual and institutional experience conflict against LGBTQ identity in their intersections. The resulting process is hostility and antagonism in the institutional encounter of the individual. Second, intersectional encounter can take the form of intersectional struggle if the institutional context is hostile to the LGBTQ identity and the individual has more complementary intersections that complement their LGBTQ identity. In these cases individual struggles against the structure of the institution trying to challenge or resign by remaining closeted. Third, the intersectional encounter can be intersectional adjustment if the LGBTQ individual who is troubled by their sexual orientation finds him or herself in a more accepting context. This kind of intersectional encounter adjustment allows the individual room for selecting from a wider range of frames of identity in the institutional context. Finally, when the individual and institutional intersections are complementary to LGBTQ identity, individuals are able to move beyond self-interest towards solidarity with others for social progress.

We note that our participants experienced these four forms of intersectional encounter as they engaged with different institutions across their life course. Each type of intersectional encounter in our typology is a construction, emerging from a unique interaction between an individual and an institution. Therefore each of our participants experienced these types of encounters across different institutional settings.

Our study has some distinct contributions to practice of intersectional approach in the field or diversity management. First, diversity management efforts should not simply focus on individual intersections. Trying to fix individual intersections may partly work if the individual experiences internal conflict in accommodating different aspects of their intersectional identity. As our study demonstrates organisations cannot fix intersectional conflict by focusing on individuals alone. Intersectional encounters are co-created by institutions and individuals. Diversity management interventions can fix institutional structures, processes and attitudes towards LGBTQ and other intersecting categories of difference. The Global Diversity and Inclusion report of Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed that only 2 per cent of organisations had LGBT equality initiatives in 2008 and this situation does not seem to change in 2018 according to the report of workforce diversity in European Union (EU) states by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD report (2018) states that “while most EU Member States have laws, strategies and policies focused on gender and people with disabilities, a few take a broader perspective” (p. 5) which comprises other groups of people such as “the ageing workforce, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) groups, employees with migrant background and specific ethnic groups” (p. 6). Therefore, diversity management should broaden the scope of its current diversity initiatives which address the intersections of institutions and LGBTQ individuals (OECD, 2018; SHRM, 2009).

Second, our analyses show the utility of changing institutional approaches to diversity. Because the encounter is more strongly shaped by the institution than by an individual effort. The fashionable diversity training programmes focusing on unconscious bias training of individuals should not be considered as a one-size-fits-all solution since their potential “to change behaviour [may] depend on the type of bias (e.g. symbolic, modern, colour-blind, aversive or blatant)” (Noon, 2018, p. 198). Moreover the utility of anti-bias training programmes is questioned in terms of activating stereotypes (Noon, 2018), “inspiring unrealistic confidence in anti-discrimination programmes” (Dobbin and Kalev, 2018, p. 49), leaving privileged few feeling left out and reducing their support to diversity (Plaut et al., 2011) and creating negative reaction in participants who feel their self autonomy is controlled. Thus, moving the focus from individual training to changes in institutional intersections is a more effective strategy for rendering intersectional encounters more conducive to solidarity. Such diversity interventions encompass a wide range of policies that include revised business processes and hiring and recruitment processes supporting diversity, flexible working arrangements, a talent management focusing on diversity in the entire talent pipeline, and adapting an organisational culture that exclude any kinds of category hierarchies. Finally, as a future research direction, studies in this field should focus on individual and institutional strategies for coping with adversity and hostility in intersectional encounters.

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