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LGB Employees' Experiences of Inclusion or Exclusion in the Cypriot Workplace

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Abstract

In recent years, much progress has been done for minority groups in Europe. However, many groups are still often marginalized or discriminated against for their sexuality. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people's experiences in Cyprus are still a relatively underdeveloped topic, especially as employees. Specifically, these experiences are influenced by the way Cypriot society is shaped through heteronormative patriarchal perceptions and attitudes. The present study investigated LGB employees' experiences of inclusion or exclusion in the Cypriot workplace whilst taking into consideration various working environment topics and factors that may have contributed to fostering feelings of belonging, safety, or exclusion. Twelve male, female, and non-binary participants that were aged between 23 and 33 years old were recruited through snowball sampling and word of mouth. Participants were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Findings identified separation between passive and active inclusion as well as passive and active exclusion in the workplace. Additionally, the role of how masculinity contributes to exclusion and femininity in inclusion in a working environment was discussed. Finally, suggestions of the research topic are explored, in order to identify potential obstacles. Moreover, this will provide guidance on how future LGB related research in Cyprus can be investigated further.

Key words: LGB, inclusion, exclusion, workplace experiences, Cyprus, homophobia

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I.   The Church, the Law and Non-Conformity to the Norm

With a Christian Orthodox background, church's involvement in politics and the persistence of patriarchal heteronormative norms and values, Cyprus is one of the most controversial European countries when it comes to LGB rights (Tryfonidou, 2018). In 1998, the Republic of Cyprus parliament was forced to decriminalise same-sex sexual contact amidst fierce opposition by the Orthodox Church of Cyprus which has historically assumed a central role in the country's social, political, economic, and cultural life. The dominance of heteronormativity in society due to the patriarchal standards instilled by the Church's influence on politics, laws and society, undoubtedly leads to the dominance of the essentialism of heteronormativity being prevalent not only on a superficial level but also on a deeply enrooted in the Cypriot psyche. The consideration of LGB issues as taboo in Cyprus, and the almost absolute absence of insightful, fruitful and meaningful discussions on this topic, lead to underrepresentation of these issues in the media, and generates a lack of awareness about them (Kapsou, Christofi and Epaminonda, 2011). Moreover, through its politics and discourse act as a major force behind the shaping of the national identity of the Greek Cypriots as a gender- and sexuality-essentialist one.

Gender essentialism is the belief that a person, thing, or particular trait is inherently and permanently male and masculine or female and feminine. It relies on the idea that men and women act differently and have different options in life because of intrinsic or essential differences (Meyer & Gelman 2016). In other words, it focuses the idea that men and women are fundamentally different for reasons that are unchangeable. Gender essentialism is often used to excuse gender-based biases in society. (Meyer & Gelman 2016). For example, it can be used to justify the idea that jobs "traditionally" held by women deserve less respect and

lower pay. Gender essentialism is both informed by gender stereotypes and reinforced by them (Meyer & Gelman 2016).

Additionally, gender stereotypes are reflected through the concept of sexuality essentialism; the notion that being heterosexual is the norm. As such, this may promote assumptions about how relationships "should" work as per the societal norm. Thus, sexuality essentialism is rooted in normalised gendered behavior. For example, asking a non-heteronormative couple, "Which one of you is the man?" assumes that the traditional male role is necessary for a successful relationship. That further implies that one of them must be performing the societally constructed male role. (Meyer & Gelman 2016). The negative beliefs about LGB people and their relationships held by society are often referred to as homophobia (negativity about gays and lesbians) and biphobia (negativity about bisexual people), as they often do not conform to the expectations of a traditional Cypriot individual according to the set societal norms. With gender and sexuality essentialism reinforced by the Church, laws and politics, until 1998, with homosexuality's decriminalisation, it was almost impossible for LGB people to come out without being seriously negatively affected both socially and financially (Trimikliniotis & Stavrou Karayanni, 2008). This was because they would soon find themselves cast out from family and the rest of the society. For example, the Church of Cyprus remains an influential political body whose teachings on national, sexual, and gender identity has a great impact on society. The Church is a supporter of the heterosexual ideal and applies the view of a typical heterosexual family as the sole moral and ethical standard. In the repeal of the sodomy law in 1998, Archbishop Chrysostomos stated his opposition to the decriminalization of homosexuality, which publicly indicated the institutional homophobia present in the Church (Trimikliniotis & Stavrou Karayanni, 2008).

On paper, Cyprus has the pioneering laws and measures that can be taken, when it comes to protecting an LGB individual against discrimination. Specifically, Article 28 (2)

prohibits discrimination 'based on community, sexual orientation, race, colour, religion, language, sex, political affiliation, ethnic origin, social status wealth or any other reason' (Cyprus Bar Association, 2019) and discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited since 1 May 2004 by The Equal Treatment in Employment and Labour Law of 2004 (58 (I)/2004) indirectly, although not explicitly stated. The majority of these laws are not explicit however in how they protect LGB people and sometimes are vague enough to allow acts of discrimination to bypass, especially in a societal setting. It is unknown to what extent these are actually applied and practiced in the workplace. As discrimination appears in many different forms, and allegedly, affects LGB people in all aspects of their everyday life, the workplace inevitably, is one of the most important areas of focus. Additionally, it is important to note that 11 of the 56 members of the parliament walked out in protest of the 1998 decriminalisation vote, some joining the protesters outside the Parliament (Kamenou et al., 2019). The law was eventually passed with 36 votes in favour and 8 votes against (Kamenou et al., 2019). What is also important to note is that it took another two years to have deliberately offensive terms describing homosexual relations – 'unnatural licentiousness' – removed from the new legislation (Kamenou et al., 2019). The most recent change to date for LGB rights was the approval of Civil Partnership for same sex couples in 2015 (Equaldex, 2020)

In 2012 Cyprus was labeled as the least gay-friendly EU country, stated by a rights group (Nielsen, 2012). Specifically, a recent study by FRA (2020) noted that in Cyprus (51%) LGB students hide their sexual orientation at school. What is more, the proportion of people who feel discriminated against when seeking for job had Cyprus at one of the highest percentages, 18%. Moreover, the share of respondents who felt discriminated against at work for Cyprus was also one of the highest, at 30 %. Cyprus' LGB hate-motivated crime harassment to the authorities was at a 2%, whilst 38% of the respondents feared of a

homophobic and/or transphobic reaction from police as the reason for not reporting a physical or sexual attack. As there is a lack of same-sex marriage recognition and proper protection of discriminated LGB people, it is understandable why 30% of respondents had felt discriminated in the workplace (Equaldex, 2020; Tryfonidou, 2018). Moreover, the fact that homosexuality is seen as an illegal military behaviour and conversion therapy not being banned. (Equaldex, 2020; Tryfonidou, 2018) also explains why LGB students hide their sexual orientation, as they are afraid of the potential discrimination and consequences.

It is often that minorities or anyone that does not fit in what is perceived to be the norm can be or feel excluded and marginalised. Consequently, as a sexual minority, LGB people in Cyprus have allegedly dealt with discrimination in every living aspect, in some cases even have been reportedly harassed or ridiculed even by state authorities, and particularly by the police (Trimikliniotis and Karayanni, 2008). The lack of practical legal protection of the LGB community, in combination with the fact that LGB people that live permanently in Cyprus often do not wish to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity, has consequently led to the underreporting of incidents of violence and harassment against them (Trimikliniotis & Karayanni, 2008). Specifically, gay bashing[1], lesbian and/or transsexual assault, exist but they do not get reported (Trimikliniotis & Karayanni, 2008). Moreover, assaults on gay men in cruising parks with the intention of mugging[2]. Additionally, verbal discriminatory language is not taken seriously by the police. The language that Cypriots use when talking about LGB people often incorporates derogatory terms (adelfi, lougkra, poustis, tsoutsou, loula, travesti) that are still not considered reprehensible even among police members and politicians (Trimikliniotis & Karayanni, 2008).

Little to no progress has occurred regarding LGB rights in Cyprus since 2015. Kamenou et al. (2019) outlined how following the end of the British rule of Cyprus in 1960,

the recognition of LGB rights has been a slow and difficult process. Specifically, she argued that this was due to the prevailing nationalist politics (Kamenou, 2020), which emphasised the Cyprus problem as an ethnic issue, thus hindering mobilization on issues of sexuality and gender non-conformity (Kamenou et al., 2019, Kamenou, 2020). Ultimately, these have constantly been perceived as issues that are less important politically, as the Cypriot divide and unification have been perceived as much more important priorities that need to be dealt with. Kamenou et al. (2019) additionally expanded on how nationalistic discourses tend to enjoy more appeal in postcolonial, ethnically divided, and conflict-ridden contexts, like Cyprus, where the stakes of a widely shared national identity are particularly high. Consequently, Cyprus's historic turns – involving the British colonisers' discourses that fueled interethnic hatred and nationalism led to the delegitimization of sexual and gender nonconformity on the island (Kamenou, 2020). As a result, heterocentrism[3] and cisgenderism[3] prevailed in society and thus has dominated the legal, political, social, economic, and cultural mechanisms of lives' regulation and hierarchisation (Kamenou, 2020). This mainly has to do with the power the church has over the government and the political decisions that are to be undertaken. Therefore, the influence of the Church on political decisions and the establishment of laws leads to a halt in the progress of LGB rights. Additionally, society's perception of LGB rights is heavily influenced by not only the laws and the government, but also the opinion of the Church, leading to the cultivation of intense anti-homosexual views and perceptions.

The workplace is a key part of society; thus, this thesis will be looking at the experience of LGB people in the workplace. Experiences in the workplace can be both negative and positive, therefore this thesis wants to explore the topics of inclusion and exclusion in the working environment, focusing on how LGB employees feel in the Cypriot working environment, and if they have a general support system they can rely on. Do they

feel safe? If not, why? How comfortable are they with their sexuality or gender expression in the workplace? Do they have to hide their sexuality? Majority of the research discussed has focused on countries abroad, specifically first developed countries in Europe (France), the United Kingdom and America as well, where research, literature and laws have been heavily expanded, improved, and progressed for LGB rights. In a country, where LGB issues have been considered taboo, with little to no awareness, underrepresentation, and non-existent discussions on these issues (Kapsou, Christofi and Epaminonda, 2011), how are LGB people in Cyprus meant to feel safe, validated and included in society that is thriving with patriarchal heteronormative beliefs instilled? These questions will be further explored in the following Literature Review chapter, where the aim is to contextualise them. This will then be followed by a chapter on the methodological approach of the research topic, which will cover participants, design, interview and data analysis procedure and any ethical concerns will be discussed. Moreover, a chapter dedicated to the key findings and results will be outlined, analysed and discussed in depth. Finally, the limitations, suggestions and conclusions of this dissertation will be explored and expanded on in the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

    I.   **The workplace: A space of hostility**

          LGB people still experience discrimination, in amongst other spheres, the workplace. When LGB people experience discriminatory attitudes, they can internalize them as shame, guilt, and fear (Eliason et al.,2011). In addition to the attitudes of individuals, there are external sources of stress stemming from societal discourses and institutional beliefs and practices that heterosexuality is the only option for healthy individuals and relationships. The societal-level influences result in laws and policies that ignore or pathologize people who do not fit societal norms. Individual attitudes combine with institutional practices to create numerous obstacles that LGB people must surmount to navigate safely through the world, especially the workplace. Thus, the workplace is a crucial societal aspect because of its importance to economic survival and quality of life which leads it to be experienced either a space of belonging or a space of threat.

          For LGB employees, workplace discrimination is marked by a lack of consistent formal policies and informal, prejudicial treatment that affects material outcomes including decisions about hiring, firing, job assignments, promotion opportunities, and fringe benefits (Lewis, 2009). Safety is an important element for LGB workers. Causal attributions represent an important link between workplace safety problems and the actions that are taken to manage them. In fact, actions to manage safety derive more from attributions than from actual causes and can be characterized by incorporating the attribution theory model (Kelley, 1967), specifically through situational attribution, where LGB workers would try to assign and explain the cause of a specific behaviour (discrimination), leading to potentially the determination of a hostile environment and feelings of unsafety.

Eliason et al. (2011) revealed that many workplaces lack policies and procedures that would make LGBTQ nurses feel safer and more included and that many coworkers, supervisors, and patients had exhibited discriminatory behavior or verbal harassment, sometimes leading to significant consequences for the LGBTQ worker. To feel much safer in the working environment, efforts to correct the current workplace climate for LGB employees would involve changes in workplace policies, education of the health care workforce, and advocacy from nursing professional organizations. What is more, the workplace remains a challenging site for LGB employees to navigate and LGB employees experience dignity threats in the workplace. Research shows that LGB people's dignity is threatened by a range of identity sensitive inequalities that undermine their safety and security when they claim authentic gendered/sexual identities (Baker, S. J., & Lucas, K., 2017). Specific safety and security threats to safety and dignity include social harm, autonomy violations, career harm, and physical harm. This is mostly prevalent in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields where systemic inequalities are present (Cech & Waidzunas, 2021). Allegedly, scientists who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) are more likely to experience harassment and career obstacles than their non-LGBTQ colleagues (Cech & Waidzunas, 2021).

II.   The workplace: A space of belonging

The workplace proves to be an environment where safety, dignity and comfort are threatened because of LGB people's sexual orientation or gender expression, general non-conforming behaviour, prevalently in fields where white heteronormativity is dominantly evident (Cech & Waidzunas, 2021). Furthermore, clustering of gay men and lesbian women in certain occupations may lessen anticipated discrimination, encourage identity disclosure, and enhance psychological safety in the workplace (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996; Morrow et al., 1996). Consequently, these working environments may

act as an environment of safety where LGB people may seek a support network and understanding regarding their identity, leading to some working fields being more LGB dominated than others such as the arts and fashion (Hancock, Clarke, & Arnold, 2020).

Working with LGB employees seems to have its benefits as well Everly, Shih, and Ho (2012) observed in their empirical study that participants who worked with openly homosexual co-workers did better on both cognitive and sensory-motor tasks than those who were unsure about their work partners' sexual orientation. Coming out at work, according to Drydakis (2011), can make lesbian employees feel more secure, which can lead to happier work experiences, more open relationships with co-workers, and increased productivity. This creates a bond of trust, reliability and comfort between LGB employees and their other co-workers, as by coming out to them they demonstrate that they can be someone who can be trusted and that they can feel safe around. Similarly, King and Cortina (2010) pointed out that there is no difference in job performance between LGB and heterosexual employees. Powers (1996) argued that organizations lack the skills, information, tools, and resources needed to effectively manage workplace concerns involving gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. As a result, most businesses struggle to get the best out of the ten percent of their workforce who identify as sexual minorities.

Powers (1996) suggested that when these concerns are not addressed, two things happen: firstly, employees who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans do not feel included in the organization; and secondly, it is not possible to expect optimal performance when people, any people, are excluded rather than included. Powers (1996) also emphasised on occasions where organizations send messages to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered employees that encouraged them to hide their sexual orientation at work. Employees who spend their time hiding—as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans employees frequently do to protect themselves and their jobs—underperform (Powers, 1996). Moreover, a study in Asia,

specifically Hong Kong, outlined how even for many multinational companies who may have progressive policies and programmes in the US and Europe, these are not implemented locally (Kaplan et al., 2010). Therefore, whilst the practices and policies are there, inclusion and safety are still at risk of having their safety threatened.

Considering the above, this thesis explores LGB workers' experiences in Cyprus local or multinational organizations which are found in a patriarchal and Christian orthodox locale that tends to marginalize them and threaten their safety. Additionally, it explores the extent to which normative societal values are actually reflected in the working environment.

III.   "I don't have an issue with gay people, but…"

Inclusion and exclusion in the workplace are of equal importance, especially social aspects of inclusion and exclusion. Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process which involves the lack of denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to most people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political (LibertiesEU, 2021). Aasland and Flotten (2000) defined social exclusion as a multifaceted phenomenon with a social disadvantage being in place such as denial of formal citizenship rights; exclusion from the job market; denial of civil society involvement; and denial of access to social venues. LGB people, like other marginalized populations, experience most, if not all of these social exclusion characteristics on a regular basis. Social inclusion on the other hand is defined as minimal social involvement, social isolation, and powerlessness. While social exclusion is tied to poverty, it is a different idea that is also linked to the essential concept of social capital. Stone (2001) defined social capital as the networks of social ties which are characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity. This in turn may encourage teamworking behavior and assist to the formation of a cohesive society. In a recent Australian study, social

poverty was connected to lower levels of social trust and greater levels of criminality

(Cameron, 2005). The process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part

in society as well as the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people,

disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards,

2008). Consequently, inclusion enables LGB people to feel as if they belong, whereas

exclusion marginalizes them heavily. Inclusion in the workplace can range from a written

policy or practice to bringing awareness about LGB issues and celebrating pride. Inclusion

does not mean integration necessarily, but it is reached when the needs of LGB employees

are fully integrated throughout all key systems and processes of the organization internally,

visibly represented externally, and when leaders include all aspects of diversity in a

transparent manner (O'Donovan, 2018).

Incorporation of LGB people in the workplace enables the cultivation of an

environment of safety, belonging and support. It is important for an organization to convey

what diversity and inclusion means to it, how it translates to business results and why it is

important. Education as a tool, whether in organizations or schools, seems to be one of the

most important aspects in normalising LGB individuals in society. Specifically, reports from

GLAAD (2015) have found that increased knowledge about LGB people leads to lower

levels of discomfort toward this community, and thus can reduce anti-LGB discrimination in

society and the workplace. Moreover, Haider-Markel (2007) reveals that for the LGB

population religion, political ideologies, open support for LGB civil rights, and institutional

characteristics all have a role in the development and enforcement of LGB-related legislation.

Social movements are critical for advancing LGB rights, especially in society and the

workplace (Corrales, 2015). For example, when more LGB candidates are elected to the

legislature, the number of pro-LGB laws introduced, as well as the number of pro-LGB bills

passed, grows. Similarly, LGB representation improves the likelihood of a state enacting

strong anti-discrimination legislation. As the number of LGB legislators grows, so does the number of anti-LGB measures submitted and enacted, resulting in a bad result for the LGB community.

This ultimately will be reflected not only in society, but also in the workplace as well, as it seems that promoting normalisation of LGB people in society, it becomes more accepting to have them in the workplace and less of a taboo topic to discuss (Reynolds, 2013). Thus, it can be emphasised that encouragement of representation and education regarding LGB people, appear to be very important factors in creating feelings of comfort and promote inclusive, positive, and pleasant experiences in the workplace. Consequently, inclusive workplaces are ones that allow people of socially marginalized groups to be themselves and participate to the best of their abilities (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2017; Sarkar, 2015). As a result, inclusive workplaces are defined by a sense of involvement and contribution from all members, as well as a recognition of varied personalities. Workplaces that are inclusive value diversity and encourage employees to express it as they allow each individual to maintain their individuality while working toward organizational goals (Shore et al., 2011). Thus, LGB employees who feel included (rather than excluded) are happier with their careers and more devoted to their company (Pink-Harper, Burnside, & Davis, 2017; Lloren & Parini, 2017).

The concept of social and economic inclusion and exclusion, commonly referred to as SEI, provides a useful framework for thinking about the ways in which LGB populations are rendered invisible or are assumed to conform in some manner to dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality (Taylor, Jantzen, & Clow, 2013). This is extremely important as it contexualises the different ways social and economic inclusion or exclusion can positively or negatively impact LGB employees. Inclusion is accomplished when employees do not feel that their sexual orientation will be an indicator for their social and/or economic induction

into the workplace. Exclusion also takes specific forms for these communities. One important example is erasure/invisibility, which refers to the total exclusion of LGB people from research, policy, practice, or action (Taylor, Jantzen, & Clow, 2013). In other words, a normative understanding of sex and gender as binary and immutable means that society and the workplace do not even see these populations, let alone understand that LGB communities have been completely excluded from a practice or policy (Taylor, Jantzen, & Clow, 2013). This can happen either on an individual or community level.

IV.   LGB Microaggressions in the Workplace

Moreover, microaggressions play an important role in excluding LGB people from the working environment and society. Initially contextualized in the form of racial discrimination, racial microaggressions have manifested in more covert or well-intentions forms – often by individuals who were unaware of their biased behaviours (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) defined three forms of microaggressions; a) microassault an explicit racial derogation that can be verbal or nonverbal; b) microinsults that are communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity and c) microinvalidations, which are communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person belonging to a particular group. Of the three, micro assaults are considered to be more intentional; they are an explicit derogation with the intention of harm through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposefully discriminatory actions. Although they are often unintentional and sometimes even well intended, microinsults can offend or ridicule the recipient. Finally, microinvalidations are communications that negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the marginalized group. As people of color had attained more rights and opportunities than in the past, it had become less socially acceptable for people to maintain or vocalize racial biases. Accordingly,

microaggression scholars argued that people (particularly those who belong to dominant identity groups) may no longer participate in overt or bigoted behavior, but instead may engage in unconscious or subconscious behavior that may be reflective of their implicit biases (Sue, 2010). These have been prevalent not only towards different races and ethnicities, but also towards individuals in general that do not conform to the normative. Specifically, the use of heterosexist/transphobic terminology, endorsement of heteronormativity/ gender binaries, assumption of sexual pathology, and discomfort or disapproval of LGB identities or experiences are few examples of microaggressions towards LGB people (Nadal, 2019). Numerous studies revealed negative outcomes such as depression, low self-esteem, and trauma among LGB people who experience microaggressions (Nadal, 2018; Nadal et al., 2016).

LGB microaggressions occur more frequently than do instances of overt discrimination. LGB microaggressions often are directed and experienced on an individual level (Pulice-Farrow, Clements, & Galupo, 2017). Microaggressions have also been used to understand LGB experiences within specific relational contexts, such as friendships (Pulice-Farrow, Clements, & Galupo, 2017) and romantic relationships (Pulice-Farrow, Brown, & Galupo, 2017). Because sexual orientation is often signaled or assumed based on relationships, an individual may not be read by others as a member of the LGB community, but their identity may be inferred when seen in public with their partner and children, making them a more visible target of discrimination. Moreover, LGB youth, including adolescents, face anti-LGB discrimination, including everyday subtle forms of microaggressions. Munro, Travers and Woodford (2019) drew on the microaggressions framework and found that in the case of LGB adolescents, microaggressions that occur at the interpersonal level pervade their social (peer), school, and home contexts. As these contexts are part of society like the

workplace, this could potentially be reflected in the working environment, leading to microaggressive behaviour being present towards LGB employees.

What is important to draw from the previous section outlining and discussing microaggressions, is how prevalent these are in an everyday environment, whether this is a school setting, a familial setting, how LGB families are often disregarded because of heteronormativity and societal norms. Microaggressions are often sugar coated from locals and the environment as "jokes" or something that should be taken lightly, but majority of individuals may not realise how harmful it can be to LGB people. Munro et al. (2019) used the following example of LGB microaggressive behaviour: "you don't look/sound gay/lesbian". As the workplace is an extension of society, it is important to dive into not only the exploration of the policies and practices established to protect LGB workers in the workplace, but also what is done to make them feel more included, safe, or validated. As previously mentioned, workplace discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) employees is commonplace in Cyprus and data by the FRA (2020) previously discussed show that lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents have experienced discrimination at work (30%).

This is similar to the United States, where it was found that 27% of LGB employees experienced discrimination at work (Sears & Mallory, 2011). It was also stated that, 2 million people leave jobs annually due to constant minor remarks, muttered jokes, and emails which were microaggressive (Burns, 2007). Gates (2011) estimated that more than 9 million American adults identify as LGB, making this both a civil rights issue and a costly workplace issue that deserves attention. Resnick and Galupo (2019) wanted to identify the extent of microaggressions in the workplace and how they affect LGB employees. They heavily discussed how the heteronormative assumptions dimension of LGB workplace microaggressions describe the everyday heterosexism employees experience in the

workplace. Often, when committing heteronormative assumption microaggressions,
employees may not realize they are marginalizing their LGB colleagues. They further
expanded that regardless of the intent, the message is one that serves to invalidate or
denigrate the experiences of the LGB employee. It was argued by Resnick and Galupo (2019)
that since these microaggressions are deeply ingrained into our workplaces and often occur
unconsciously, they may be harder to recognize and change. Some examples of
microaggressions that negatively impacted their participants were experiences related to their
name, gendered language, clothing, and bathroom usage. This ultimately leads to the question
in place, how is this reflected in Cyprus?

      Whilst there is some work that looks at LGB experiences in Cyprus, there is very little
work that focused on LGB workers in the workplace and how their experiences are. Thus,
this study aims to explore what it may be like for an LGB person working in Cyprus and what
their workplace experiences are like regarding inclusion, safety, and exclusion. Additionally,
there will be a strong focus on the factors that contribute to feelings of safety, threat or
belonging will be explored

Chapter 3: Methodology

When a researcher or investigator wants to learn more about a new topic of study or determine and hypothesize important concerns, qualitative research approach is recommended (Jamshed, 2014). As such, in order to capture general social interactions regarding the workplace for LGB employees in Cyprus, a qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative research aims to understand different social concepts and phenomena from the perspective of the participant, utilising interpretation, meaning and understanding through their point of view. (Merriam, 2002) Literature on queer topics, such as LGB experiences in the workplace has not received as much insight or coverage in Cyprus. Whilst this topic has received attention across other countries in the world, even in specific sectors, it has not been explored enough in Cyprus. Consequently, the research topic of this thesis was formed, "LGB Employees' Experiences of Inclusion or Exclusion in the Cypriot Workplace" with the aim to shed light on the experiences of LGB employees. Specifically, this topic aims to identify the actions or factors that contribute in making employees feel included or excluded. As such, what factors influence or foster feelings of inclusion/exclusion, what actions have or have not been taken by the working environment to generate feelings of inclusion or exclusion for LGB employees, and how this may relate to feelings of security and safety in the workplace.

In order to achieve this, a qualitative research approach was adopted in the form of interviews. Qualitative research focuses on the interpretation of the perception of people from social perspective using various qualitative data collection tools including interview and social query. Result of a qualitative research tends to be interpretive and analytical (Glesne, 2006). To conduct an in-depth study on any social or educational phenomena based on participants' view, proper integration of qualitative research is essential. This methodology was chosen because qualitative research enables a more personalized and in-depth exploration of LGB experiences in the workplace compared to quantitative.

I.   **Participants**

Due to time constraints and limitations, the specific thesis focused on LGB people as it was believed that the total LGBTQ+ spectrum could not be represented with the number of participants that would be recruited. Additionally, the focus of the study emphasizes on matters in the working environment related to sexual orientation rather than the gender aspect. In total, 12 participants were recruited from a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The sample was recruited mainly through social media posts and word-of-mouth. Convenience (or opportunistic) sampling is a technique that uses an open period of recruitment that continues until a set number of subjects, events, or institutions are enrolled (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Convenience sampling selection is based on a first-come, first-served basis. Sexual minority identification is extremely stigmatized, and despite advancements in LGB peoples' social environments, they are still declared as of a sexual minority status. LGB people face legal discrimination in the workplace, as well as rejection and violence. With so much at stake, LGB people may be hesitant to reveal their identities to researchers. Thus, snowballing or word-of-mouth techniques make use of participants as referral sources, especially in groups that may be difficult to identify a sample for and therefore, participants recommend others they know who may be eligible (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). This means that in the context of LGB experiences in the workplace, an LGB employee that is comfortable sharing their sexuality and experiences may be more likely to recommend or suggest a person that may also feel comfortable talking about their experiences. Nevertheless, with snowball sampling it can sometimes the probable sampling error can be unidentifiable, and generalizations can be drawn (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Moreover, the initial contacts may direct the researcher to people with similar characteristics (e.g., open LGB employees will introduce other open LGB employees), preventing access to other members of the target group (Sharma, 2017). In this

case, snowball sampling may limit the researcher to open or closeted LGB workers, younger or older generations, more men or more women, etc. As a result, snowball samples should not be thought of as representative of the population under investigation.

Five participants self-identified as female, one as genderfluid and six as male. Of the 12 participants, six self-identified as gay, three as bisexual and three as lesbian. The one participant who identified as genderfluid listed their sexuality as gay. Nine participants were Cypriot (Greek-Speaking) whereas the other three participants were Greek, aged between 23 and 33 years old. Participants were required to have a minimum of two years' work experience in Cyprus and be over the age of 18 to participate. Moreover, participants were selected from a variety of working industries including information technology, forex, retail, education, food & beverage, and design. (Table 1)

Pseudonym	Gender	Sexuality	Age	Industry
Sue	Female	Lesbian	23	Retail & Secretarial
John	Male	Gay	28	Retail & Arts
Jake	Male	Gay	27	Retail, Office, & Arts
Ethan	Male	Gay	25	Retail
Taylor	Genderfluid	Gay	23	Retail
Joanna	Female	Bisexual	24	Retail, Waitering & Design
Jenny	Female	Bisexual	26	Retail, Waitering & Forex
Lily	Female	Lesbian	30	Retail Managerial & Forex
Linda	Female	Lesbian	33	Education
Andrew	Male	Gay	32	IT & Technology
Peter	Male	Bisexual	24	Retail & Office
Joseph	Male	Gay	23	Media & Arts

The main difficulties that were apparent when recruiting participants for this research was interviewing bisexual people, specifically men. Jabbour (2020) discussed the general skepticism among both scientists and laypersons that male bisexual orientation exists.

Additionally, skeptics have claimed that men who self-identify as bisexual are homosexual or heterosexual. Therefore, it is assumed that bisexual men may have felt less inclined to participate in the study due to general views and perception of their sexuality by society. Finally, older participants were harder to find as the initial available pool prior to the snowball sampling mainly focused on early 20s up to mid-30s. Additionally, social media was the main mean of gathering participants which meant that a large population of LGB employees may not have had the chance to see the research topic, and as a result, representation of LGB experiences in the workplace mainly focuses on the specific sectors mentioned for the age range of 23-33.

II.   Design & Interview Procedure

To begin with, a semi-structured interview design was employed with a pre-existing interview template. A life course calendar was used that was accompanied by a semi-structured interview guide that focused on themes of inclusion, exclusion, and safety in the workplace. This was developed by the ALLIES Program in Cyprus. The interview guide was assessed to identify how fit it was for the research topic, carefully going over the pre-existing questions and the themes they were targeting. Specifically, themes surrounding feelings of inclusivity, belonging, safety, representation, comfort, education, discrimination, professionalism were explored through the interview guide. Once the design of the interview guide was finalized, the social media posts were shared. The participants who showed interest in the interview were asked if they have worked in Cyprus for two years to confirm the minimum working requirement and were then scheduled for an interview. Depending on the participant's availability and location, interviews were scheduled either in person or online. If the interviews were to happen online, interviewees were asked to have their camera on. 24 to 48 hours before the interview, they were given the joint information sheet and consent form (Appendix A) that they were to sign before the interview process. In the scenario that the

interviewee could not send the consent form back in time for the interview signed, they were asked to give their consent through the voice recording after verifying that they have read the information sheet and did not have any questions. Additionally, they were informed that the interview would remain anonymous and that they would be given a code-name that would help match their life-calendar with their voice recording. Moreover, they could avoid answering any question that made them uncomfortable and that if they felt necessary, terminate the interview process at any point. They were notified that if this were to happen, their data would be immediately destroyed. Once full consent was obtained, whether through writing or through the voice recording, the interview procedure was initiated. The participants were all asked the same set of questions starting with demographic information such as date of birth, gender, and sexuality.

III.   Ethical Concerns

An emerging ethical issue was the delay of written consent forms by the participants. It is critical for qualitative researchers to describe which data will be gathered and how the data will be used ahead of time (Sanjani et al., 2014). The concept of informed consent emphasizes the researcher's obligation to fully educate participants about all aspects of the study in a language that the participants can understand (Sanjani et al., 2014). In order to avoid any issues with consent when the written consent form was not signed on time, verbal consent was adopted whenever written consent was not provided on time. Participants were often reminded during the recruitment procedure that the interview would remain anonymous and that they would be given a codename solely for the purpose of matching their life-calendar with the recording. Additionally, to avoid any personal relationships or conflict of interest taking place, participants were affiliated very little to no extent with the researcher to avoid any biases taking place. However, bonds of trust and understanding were formed between the researcher and the participant. This was mainly due to the fact that the researcher

belonged in the LGB minority group as well, sharing some of their own experiences to connect with the participant on a more personal level. This enabled a transparent and open conversation about topics that may be sensitive to some, especially when having to recall triggering experiences of being excluded in the workplace or being present during events of discrimination.

As the researcher was part of the LGB community, the participants most likely felt more comfortable, more at ease and more willing to open up about experiences as they would often say "you know" to the researcher, indicating that there was a different kind of connection because of the relating sexuality. However, as the researcher was a male-presenting individual, it may also be likely that there was a shift in the dynamics when interviewing female participants. Gender may have played a role as well in relating to experiences or enabling female participants to be open about their experiences to the researcher. Moreover, lesbian, gay and bisexual experiences can be vastly different, therefore, bisexual and/or lesbian participants may have also been more hesitant to open up to the researcher. Finally, the ages between the researcher and the participant were not of a great difference, and thus would enable better communication and understanding, building an atmosphere of understanding and reliability.

IV.   **Data Analysis Procedure**

Members of a community (specifically the LGB community in this case) can provide useful information about the values, beliefs, or practices (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995), specifically in such a sensitive topic, experiences of LGB people in the workplace. Thus, a thematic analysis was employed as it would provide rich and extensive insight and information about LGB workers in Cyprus and their workplace experiences. Generally, thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight

into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set, for example, for LGB matters (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Through focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis is a good approach to research something about people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values from a set of qualitative data.

Thematic analysis served as an important method of analysis to LGB Experiences in the Cypriot workplace through the systematic coding and analysis of qualitative data, which can then be related to larger theoretical or conceptual topics, specifically the different forms of inclusion and exclusion that are present in the workplace. Thematic analysis enabled a collective sense of shared meanings and experiences in the Cypriot workplace by LGB to be identified, grouped and thoroughly analysed.. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities. Additionally, thematic analysis allows a lot of flexibility in interpreting the data and allows you to approach large data sets more easily by sorting them into broad themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

When applying thematic analysis, the first step was to begin going through the data. It was important to get a thorough overview of all the data collected before individual items and topics were analysed. This involved transcribing and translating the interviews from Greek to English.. Afterwards, coding took place, this meant highlighting sections of the text – usually phrases or sentences – and coming up with shorthand labels or "codes" to describe their content. This focused on the content of work experiences, specifically inclusion, exclusion and safety. Afterwards, the codes created were looked over and patterns among them were identified. At this stage, it was decided whether some of the coding was vague or not relevant enough as it did not appear in the data often enough and were discarded. Coding regarding professionalism, masculinity, femininity, ignorance, discrimination, rejection was grouped together to create the themes below. Themes were compared to the data set once decided to

solidify their usefulness and accurate representation. In this case, broad themes were dissected into smaller categories and were named accordingly. Finally, the analysis of the data, which will be noted further, was analysed thoroughly with the discussion section addressing each theme in turn. Five themes emerged from the interviews and analysis. Each theme will be thoroughly analysed and discussed, with a series of subthemes and categories deriving from the main topics. The main themes are:

- Passive Inclusion Through Ignorance

- Passive and Indirect Exclusion

- Active Inclusion Through Action

- Active Exclusion Through Discrimination & Rejection

- The Exclusion of Masculinity and Inclusion of Femininity

Each theme contains its own subthemes which are very important in analysing the experience of LGB in the workplace. All interviews were coded manually during open coding. The interviews were analysed, and the researcher coded each interview and analyzed for broad categories or themes. Links and connections between the broad themes were identified so that related themes could be merged into clusters. Categories with internal convergence and external divergence were classified accordingly. This process allowed consistency and thorough analysis to take place as there were key details that were extracted from each coding. In the next analysis phase, selective coding, categories emerging from the similarities in the open codes were identified. Selective coding was employed where the main quotes and analysis were finalized into the five main themes. This involved winnowing the data, and reducing it to a small, manageable set of themes to write into the final narrative. In the process, 'families' of themes were created with various sub-themes and categories.

Chapter 4: Analysis & Discussion

The workplace can be described as a mirror of society. Many of the opinions and views of the patriarchal dominant society previously discussed, can easily resurface in the working environment, potentially creating more inclusive or more exclusive experiences depending on whether society promotes one's individual characteristics or discourages them. Inclusion and exclusion act as either a catalyst or an inhibitor on LGB employees and affect how their workplace experiences are formed. "Inclusion" and "exclusion" as definitions can be vague and fluid, and this was also the case for the participants as each interviewee had a different idea of what inclusion and exclusion meant for them. Therefore, whilst one may have been feeling included in specific working environment circumstances, the other may have felt excluded in the same conditions. Additionally, there were many factors in the workplace that facilitated the generation of feelings of passive inclusion or exclusion rather than active, and vice versa. Consequently, through this research, a clear separation between actively or passively being included or excluded was identified and was present through various ways and forms, enabling a more wholistic understand of LGB experiences in the workplace in Cyprus.

I.   **Passive Inclusion Through Ignorance**

A lot of participants felt that they were included in the workplace, even though there were no active (and in some cases even passive) support from the organizations/companies they were working in. In fact, ignorance fell for some participants under the category of inclusion as it didn't matter to them that they were fully ignored and believed that their sexuality was irrelevant in the workplace. The most common point discussed in passive inclusion, was that they don't care.

"they wouldn't really bother or care what someone does in their personal life or what they do after work. They only care about what work they put out, what you do, how well you produce work. They don't care about what you do, what you wear" – Jake

"they don't care about your sexuality, more so your education, your productivity and how cooperative you are with your team. Sexuality is redundant." – John

"they don't care at all if you're a man, woman, homosexual, they just want robots that get the job done. They don't care how you get the job done, it's as long as you get it done" – Sue

Through these quotes, it seems that there is often an unwritten rule that personal life, and especially sexuality, is something that should not be discussed. In the end, they don't take into consideration any social disadvantage, as long as the job gets done. This demonstrates how some organizations aim to promote inclusion in the sense that personal life and private life should be kept separate and segregated and participants complied with it. When asked about how included they felt in the specific workplaces that promoted this form of segregation, most responses were very positive, rating them high in inclusivity. John saying "what does the organization have to do with my sexuality?" clearly supports the previous statement as at the end of the day, LGB people comply with the workplace's ignorance, as long as they go to work, get the job done, and go home. Thus, they reinforce the notion that their personal life is something that should not be a topic of the workplace, whether this is to protect themselves or because they view it as something unnecessary, encouraging the ignorance of organizations and companies towards the LGB communities, since "they don't really care."

Ozeren (2014) discussed how working with sexual minorities who disclose their sexual orientation, might jeopardize employee performance. This in turn encourages the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Thus, this could be the case in the Cypriot working environment as well. John's comments emphasised on the fact that organizations only care the output. He stated that they prioritise "productivity, cooperation, robots to get the job done". He also noted that "sexuality is redundant". As such, in order to avoid having any

influence on cooperation, productivity, and not having high performing employees with high output as sexuality may be a distracting factor, it is avoided as a topic of discussion in general by the employees and the organization. Nevertheless, this did not seem to negatively impact feelings of inclusion.

Indirectly, LGB employees are encouraged to uphold and encourage segregation between their sexual orientation and the workplace as they view the latter as something redundant or something that will negatively impact the "more important" aspects of working for the organizations. However, Everly, Shih, and Ho (2012), Drydakis (2011) and King and Cortina (2010) all highlighted on the lack of differences between LGB performance compared to heterosexual employees, as well as the benefits that come with working with openly LGB employees that enable feelings of safety and trust to be fostered. Most firms use pragmatic benefits to support diversity management programs, despite the fact that they may be motivated by ethical reasons. The business case claims that a diverse workforce benefits businesses: beneficial financial results might be direct, such as boosting an organization's total profit, or indirect, such as enhancing employee job satisfaction or raising job dedication. The promotion of equality, according to this diverse discourse, works hand in hand with commercial aims (Lloren, & Parini, 2017). Thus, the reason why organizations in Cyprus may still be focusing on ignorance in the workplace, and why participants may feel that this is a form of inclusion may have to do with the influence of society's patriarchal values and the church. Specifically, it derives from the idea that topics of sexuality are still a forbidden or taboo topic that should not be explicitly discussed in society, and consequently, the workplace.

II.   Passive and Indirect Exclusion

Exclusion can take many forms and be defined in various ways. Passive and indirect exclusion in this research is explored on how LGB employees are indirectly or "passively" excluded in the workplace. Micro-aggressive behaviour was one of the most evident ways where passive or indirect exclusion manifested. The most common behaviour was in the form of "gossiping and whispers" which not often explicitly done. Ethan talked about how there were "a lot of ironic laughs and whispers" from his co-workers and in fact they had come up to him and asked he has a "boyfriend or a girlfriend" hinting at the fact that this is done to try and intentionally out them or force them to feel uncomfortable as they were given the option of a male or female partner after mockery was taking place behind his back.

Participants often discussed how "there's a lot of gossiping" and that they "try to avoid as much as possible" by choosing to not disclose their sexuality or try to not exhibit behaviours that may be stereotyped and associated with sexuality. This often made them feel very stressed, frustrated and sometimes depressed. Taylor talked about how "mentally exhausting and draining" it would be to hear homophobic remarks when working with his uncle in a local Cypriot store. Even in the foreign companies, Jenny elaborated how she doesn't want "to talk about it because unfortunately there's a lot of gossiping, even if they aren't from Cyprus, it feels like they're worse!" showing how whether it was a local or foreign organization, that whispering and gossiping about people and their sexuality was a general workplace behaviour. Mara et al. (2020) briefly expanded on ways that LGB(TQ+) people protect themselves in situations where they feel threatened or discriminated against. This is done through reactive (reacting to discrimination), proactive (taking precautions to avoid discrimination), internal (avoid coming out or disclosing their sexuality) or external (talk about work discrimination but not in the workplace or working environment) measures.

Therefore, avoiding exhibiting behaviour that may enable individuals to talk about them or their sexuality, proactive and internal measures are adopted as a defence mechanism. Thus, as they are indirectly excluded through the behaviour exhibited in the workplace, LGB workers protect themselves by avoiding discrimination through precaution or avoid discussing topics regarding sexuality altogether to not raise suspicion. Adding onto literature discussed previously by Resnick and Galupo (2019), it can be seen how heteronormative assumptions, in this case gossiping, can lead to marginalizing their LGB colleagues. This means that participants would tolerate being asked if they were dating someone of the opposite gender, if they were married or even change their partner's pronouns to conform to heteronormativity. Lily admitted that many times she "would refer to my partner as he instead of she so that no one at work would ask me about it".

Moreover, Jakes' male co-worker once made remarks such as "why do you wear a speedo, so your ass can show?" and mockingly followed with "oh, get us one as well." Whilst this may not have been perceived as intentional mockery, it had intense micro-aggression undertones due to the fact that a speedo and ass showing is closely related to homosexual behaviour according to Jake. According to Jake, this comment was based off of their co-workers pre-existing stereotypes and assumptions. The existence of Sue's tattoos that had nothing to do with her sexuality, still had her closely related to being a lesbian and had been often asked at work "oh what are you, a lesbian?" because of their more fluid and androgynous way of presenting herself. Even the perceived compliment from two participants, Taylor and Lily, that were at the same workplace, had their boss say that "I might just hire gay people because you guys actually do a really good job" strongly duels around microaggression, firstly around words such as "actually" which demonstrates that gay people were perceived initially as incapable of doing the job properly and the fact that they are objectified to just a sexuality, rather than people.

a. Fear and Stealth

The Cypriot workplace generated a lot of feelings involving fear and the need to hide sexuality in order to avoid feeling excluded, discriminated against, or fall victim of discrimination and in extreme cases, lose their job. Sue strongly felt that they wanted their co-workers and their employee to "know me as me in the workplace and not as how I am outside the workplace" as she expressed that they felt that they were either unsafe, uncomfortable or that it was something unprofessional. Others felt that it was a bit hopeless to come out or talk about their sexuality because in case an argument in the workplace would erupt because of it, they would have no support, for example Sue's comment "I was one against 20 people, regardless of what I would say, everyone would disagree." Taylor also admitted that "you have to think about if you want to talk about your life at work…you double think about it."

Recent research on LGBT workers' workplace experiences continues to find persisting prejudice in hiring/firing, promotion, performance assessment, salary and benefits, as well as verbal harassment, bullying, and physical assault (Woods 2011: Drydakis 2011; Lewis, 2009). Thus, people who identify as LGB often lie about their personal life, are more likely to display symptoms of depression, avoid people and social gatherings, and are preoccupied and fatigued at work, because they are passively or indirectly excluded in the workplace (Woods 2011). Thus, as there were also some perceptions that "if I were straight and married, it would be easier" demonstrating how sometimes LGB workers felt indirectly excluded solely because they did not fit the heteronormative norm encouraged in Cyprus' society and working environment.

It should also be noted that passive or indirect exclusion was present through how LGB was viewed professionally. Participants often danced around the lines of sexuality with

quotes such as "with certainty they do see me as a professional, gay or not" and "if they're gonna buy something, they'll buy it, doesn't matter what I am or who I am." Whilst participants can confidently say they are perceived as professional, they emphasised that whether gay or not, they are seen as a professional. A study conducted by Fidas & Cooper (2019) in the U.S had found that nearly two thirds (59%) of non-LGBTQ employees believe it is "unprofessional" to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace. This was also observed in a Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2014) report where a large-scale survey of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ workers revealed that 70% percent of the respondents indicated that talking about sexual orientation at the workplace is "unprofessional." Therefore, perception of LGB being unprofessional, potentially occurs because of dominant heteronormative views in organisations in Cyprus as their employees may often be perceived as the "norm" meaning masculine/masculinized and heterosexual.

Jenny expanded on the fact that "people don't expect bisexual and lesbian people to be put together, they expect a stereotype. Short, fat, butch, masculine". According to Jenny, being "put together" meant looking more feminine, meaning long hair, heels, appearing more like a "woman". This suggests the idea that being more masculine as a man or more feminine as a woman will make an LGB person appear as more professional. This is also supported by Joseph, as he was asked to "tone it down" when working at an art gallery because of his flamboyant fluid gender expression in clothing. Instead, he was asked to be more "presentable", meaning conforming to how the male gender role should present themselves. Thus, conforming to the expected Cypriot heteronormative patriarchal norm and restricting gender expression that does not fit the assigned birth gender, leads to perceived unprofessionalism. Consequently, LGB employees that do not fit these norms, are passively or indirectly excluded from the workplace and will either have to confine to organisational

expectations of being "put together" or will have to be at risk of outing themselves or being perceived as unprofessional.

III.   Active Inclusion Through Action

Whilst there were many cases of ignorance, LGB people shared many examples of active diversity, inclusion, and support. For example, Andrew working in the tech industry, talked about the "coming out of a trans person at our organization, which was huge. Never happened to at work before or my personal life" The Human Resource Management made sure to come to them,

"and said, Stephanie is she now, we will refer to them as a she, not he. They were trying to give this pronoun guidance to everyone else. It wasn't easy, some people didn't get it. There was misgendering for a while, until they got used to it. They let her go to Germany to get gender reassignment surgery, and let her work remotely when she could, normally."

Furthermore, another participant who identified as genderfluid but sexually as gay said that,

"I had a lot of support from most of them, and never felt excluded. Yeah, actually, one of my managers was a lesbian. Company XYZ is where all the dykes and fags come to work at *laughs* Everyone is open minded, some of them not, but whoever knew, was very ok with it. When you're struggling, you're in a very bad environment like management or the owner. You connect with people that you're having fun with because you don't have another option. I had a relationship that was very good with people at work." – Taylor

Taylor talked about how a supportive and queer working environment made them feel more included and more confident in their choice working in the specific organization because they were indirectly supported through the active acts of inclusion by the HR

Management. Meanwhile, Lily also talked about how negative working environments by management, or the owners can be very struggling and very mentally draining, but what was important for them was that they were all a family and supported one another. The feelings of inclusion did not just come from the employee, but Lily, who was a manager, herself as she also added that "there were a lot of gay people at Company XYZ. The owner once said I'll fire everyone, and I'll just get LGBTQ people cause we did a really good job. We were all like a family." Whilst it is important to highlight the negative connotations behind the backhanded compliment, it is still a form of support that many LGB people did not seem to receive in their workplace. These are both important examples of active inclusion, diversity and support from the human resource management and is something that demonstrates actively making sure that people who are LGB are included in the organization.

Individuals may be their most productive selves in an atmosphere where they can bring their complete self to work, without the distraction of attempting to be someone they are not. This leads to cohesive and effective teams. If an employee feels safe being out and can talk about who they are with coworkers without fear of prejudice or judgment, they will be more productive (Hewlett and Sumberg, 2011). They are better at working as part of a team and are more dedicated – 88% of LGB employees are eager to go above and beyond for their business (Hewlett and Sumberg, 2011). This means that employees that are open about their sexuality in the workplace are more productive, more focused, highly motivated and engaged in their work (Hewlett and Sumberg, 2011)

Many of those who lacked support suggested the implementation of "seminars, workshops, better communication from HR, sharing posts, campaigns" – Lily, or something as small as "a poster or a flag in the office to show that they are LGBTQ+ friendly or that they support LGBTQ+, that they are allies" - Sue and expanded on that "If organizations in general show their acceptance, people who will apply in the future, they will automatically

feel much more OK to apply, whereas the opposite, it would drive away potential LGBTQ+ candidates. It's the little things. All organizations now during pride month they changed their profile picture and covers. Do something so that we can feel a bit more included." -Sue

Company XYZ sets up an ideal example as LGB people apply and work there because they feel included and appreciated; sexuality does not put a halt on their working experience. A culture in which employees can bring their whole selves to work without being distracted by the distraction of trying to be someone they are not leads to an environment in which individuals can be at their most productive and cohesive and effective teams are formed (Fullerton, 2013). As such, the difference between ignorance, passivity and action taking can be observed. Consequently, it can be suggested that organizations who actively include their LGB employees and make them feel like they belong in the workplace, can set a perfect example to the other organizations that are struggling to find ways to support or want to find ways to include their employees. Consequently, it can be suggested that an actively inclusive environment, promotes a healthy working experience for LGB people in Cyprus. Whether support is directly aimed at them or another co-worker that belongs to a sexual minority, motivation and encouragement is facilitated, fostering feelings of belonging and inclusion. This in turn may lead to increased job satisfaction, productivity and improved mental health.

IV. Active Exclusion Through Discrimination & Rejection

Different forms of discrimination and hints of rejection were a common topic of discussion as well as different coping mechanisms to avoid dealing with any potential cases of direct or indirect discrimination. Discrimination is defined as an observed behavior or a decision based on ascriptive characteristics such as race, age, gender, sexuality, or ethnic background (Fibbi, Midtbøen, & Simon). This often becomes a means of direct and/or explicit exclusion in the workplace. In 2013, the European Union Agency conducted a poll on

LGBT rights and discrimination, finding that almost half of all respondents across all of EU

(47%) had personally experienced discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual

orientation in the year before to the survey. Two-thirds of those who had a paid job in the

previous five years – including a majority in every country – had heard or seen negative

comments or conduct directed at a colleague perceived to be LGBT (67 percent) or had

experienced a general negative attitude toward LGBT people (66 percent) during their

employment.

These negative comments, behaviours and attitudes identified by the European Union

Agency Poll were often observed in the interviews as well. Discrimination either from

customers or from management itself was brought up often in the discussion. John had his

manager "bully them" and began to treat him differently after she had found out about his

sexuality, allegedly finding ways to make his working experience much more difficult. John

also once had a negative experience with a customer who said that "bring me a human being"

to get the job done. The use of the words "human being" show active exclusion towards the

gay employee as he was diminished to something less than being human solely because of his

perceived sexual orientation by the customer. This was then further indirectly encouraged

when the manager "didn't do anything about it" and instead allowed the event to happen,

showing the employee that they had no shield whatsoever against events of discrimination.

The combination of being discriminated actively by the customer with the manager remaining

inert and not showing support towards the employee fosters strong feelings of exclusion as

they are unprotected and unsupported.

Moreover, it was a common occurrence to have homophobic co-workers that often

used words to negatively talk about other LGB people, as they often did not know that the

participant was also LGB, and would say "here's the dyke, oh he's gay, look a faggot" which

made the working environment very stressful, very unpleasant and very terrifying due to the

use of slurs, encouraging feelings of exclusion. In general, LGB employees were present during many acts of discrimination, whether this was towards them or directed to other employees or customers. By being present during acts of discrimination, they were excluded as whilst it was not directed to them, they still were indirectly discriminated and/or marginalised in the working environment. There were also instances of bullying and discrimination if a man would appear "more feminine" regardless of their sexual orientation. An instance was described by Joanna whose boss said "New York, it's filled with transvestites." The extended use of slurs in general acts as an inhibitor of creating a positive, working environment for LGB people, making their workplace experiences very stressful, very excluding and may also have a negative influence over their mental health as they are trapped in an environment where they feel they cannot do anything about. At extreme cases, Ethan talked about the fact that he "have heard about jobs that have fired people over being gay or they didn't hire them because of it" illustrating how far LGB people are discriminated against in Cyprus. This demonstrates how excluded LGB employees can be in the workplace as there were many instances where they were unable to do anything, were not supported by their managers or co-workers and sometimes were instead heavily discriminated against or marginalised.

Thus, with their safety threatened, LGB employees often either have to endure a toxic working environment where active cases of discrimination and exclusion are evident or will have to find a working environment that may hopefully be more inclusive, accepting and comforting for them or will have to conform to what their current working environment wants them to do. More often than not, participants remained at their working environment regardless of the toxicity and exclusion, because of the limited options they had, either because they needed the money, or because there were not any alternatives available. With limited resources available and being marginalised and/or disadvantaged in society, LGB

workers were very vulnerable and susceptible to a toxic working environment. This meant that for some individuals, leaving an awful job or a working environment where they were not treated right was not an option in order to survive.

V.   The Exclusion of Masculinity and Inclusion of Femininity

There is strong support in the idea that in the workplace, feeling comfortable, as well as being protected from discrimination, are two mediating factors in generating feelings of inclusivity through safety and comfort (Badgett et al., 2013). These might be significant processes for explaining why LGB-friendly policies lead to greater business results. According to a recent study, firms that want to boost their bottom line by leveraging their commitment to diversity should think about how they can develop and sustain LGB-inclusive workplace cultures while also ensuring the safety and well-being of their LGB employees (Badgett et al., 2013). Consequently, inclusion can be fostered through feelings of safety and feeling comfortable in the working environment which comes directly (or indirectly) when a person feels secure in their workplace. The words "I didn't feel safe" were very common across many interviewees.

Sue discussed how "at work, the homophobic comments made me not feel safe, so yeah, that was definitely my worst work experience. They felt as if being called gay was an insult"; the overall negative working environment made her feel unsafe and insecure about her sexual identity. Sue said that they did not want to talk about their sexuality in the workplace because "it makes me feel safer knowing that they wouldn't make fun of me, or they won't treat me any differently" and emphasised how feeling safe in the working environment makes her want to go to work, whereas feeling unsafe had the opposite effect. What is more, when being in a working environment where employee safety was a priority, created not only feelings of comfort and security, but also generated a more pleasant

workplace atmosphere. This motivated them to want to go to work, as they felt included. Ethan admitted "I never felt included as a gay man in any of my jobs" and Joanna's "I don't feel included as a bisexual woman, no. I won't say it" demonstrate the importance of feeling safe in the workplace for LGB individuals in order to generate inclusion, comfort and security to be themselves, to talk about their personal lives and to not feel restrained to talk about any potential issues they may be facing.

Comfort and safety were very common to go hand in hand when discussing feelings of security in the workplace Taylor would go to the extent of "picking who they would hang out because of their sexuality" and Andrew would be "picking where[he] would apply for a job and make sure beforehand that they would be OK with [him] being gay" or Andrew would even "reject an organization's job offer" because for him, comfort and safety to be themselves was one of their top priorities. Moreover, there is a sense of hopefulness amongst the negativity that derives from feeling unsafe as sentences like "then…, we can all feel safe" present that even though it is something that is not near, it may happen eventually and that they can "all" feel safe, everyone in the community.

Holmes and Schnurr (2006) touched on how femininity is perceived in the workplace, and identified relatively low tolerance for aspects of behaviour perceived as normatively feminine in some contexts. Feminine men and women may have their careers undermined because of the lack of masculine characteristics that they are essentially forced to adopt. In fact, González, Cortina, and Rodríguez (2019) elaborated on employers' conscious or unconscious preference for male candidates and that when identifying candidates for a job opening, employers rely on preconceptions and stereotypes when deciding on their hires. These are divided between masculine and feminine stereotypes of abilities, knowledge, experience etc. As such, this reinforces a system of patriarchal authority favouring men as only in the absence of femininity is a worker considered ideal (Connell, 1995).

Consequently, women and feminine men are at the bottom of the working hierarchy as their characteristics are deemed as unfavourable, undesirable, and unprofessional since they do not fit the patriarchal standard of what is ideal for labour, a working man (González, Cortina, & Rodríguez, 2019). In fact, features which are conventionally associated with femininity may thus attract negative comment or derision in particular workplace interactions, within particular workplace cultures (Holmes & Schnurr, 2006). As a result, though often expressed in covert and implicit ways, such negative reactions could be regarded as evidence of sexism or homophobia in such workplaces. Within Western society, there is a persistent perception that homosexual men are both more feminine and less macho than heterosexual males (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Mitchell & Ellis, 2011). In a patriarchal dominated environment such as Cyprus, this is an important point as according to Cornnell (1995) this means that anything presenting femininity is not perceived as something ideal in the workplace.

These stereotypes may be linked to certain heterosexual men's anti-gay sentiments, with a fear of being associated with femininity included in heterosexual men's wish to distance themselves from homosexual men (Wilkinson, 2004). Indeed, heterosexual males who are too concerned with their own masculinity are more likely to have homophobic views and hostility directed against homosexual men (Kilianski, 2003; Parrott, Peterson, Vincent, & Bakeman, 2008). Furthermore, heterosexual males have been reported to distance themselves from homosexual men when their masculinity is threatened (Parrott, Peterson, Vincent, & Bakeman, 2008). As a result of this perception of homosexual men as feminine, it appears that people who are concerned about their masculinity shun gay males. This is also apparent through Ethan, who was called a "gay thug" by their manager when they were given the opportunity. Ethan briefly expanded on how there was always tension between them and the manager and after they had an argument at work, they found the opportunity to directly attack him because of his sexuality. Moreover, men were often regarded as the source of

homophobic events as they would be making fun of anyone who would not fit the heteronormative norm. Mira's example emphasises this as she talked about how her boss took it upon themselves to talk badly about an individual they had seen at the airport and characterised them as a transvestite.

What is more, the majority of participants agreed that "more usually women wouldn't have an issue with my sexuality" whereas one expanded on the fact that a job where it had only men "they'd have a lot of ironic laughs and whispers" showing how a masculine, male dominated environment created toxicity in the workplace, and they would "come up to me and ask if you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend" to trigger feelings of discomfort, and potential insecurity. In fact, even though women "were not more open minded than the men, I still felt safer" was something that a participant admitted that expanded on the fact that "the masculine energy didn't let me connect", demonstrating how femininity was presented as a getaway and a safety net for participants.

Toxic masculinity and masculinity are two different terms and isn't just about behaving like a man. Instead, it involves the extreme pressure some men may feel to act in a way that is actually harmful, which is apparent in the workplace as well, due to its design of needing to be masculine in order to succeed. There are many definitions of "toxic masculinity" that appear in research as well as pop culture with some of its components being men's physical strength, anti-femininity and encouragement of patriarchal characteristics (Thompson & Pleck, 1986; Daddow, & Hertner, 2021). Toxic masculinity specifically involves dominance, aggression, physical strength, working towards obtaining power and status in order to have respect, and most importantly, reject anything feminine. (Thompson & Pleck, 1986). Consequently, the expansion and development of the workplace overall, with the previous points on masculinity discussed, demonstrates how unfavourable it can be for effeminate men and women, leading to strong feelings of exclusion. As such, this observed

behaviour by LGB people feeling more included, comfortable and safer around women or femininity could be due to the fact that women have often been an excluded minority like LGB people, and thus may feel that women may be more sympathetic and empathetic towards them as they might understand what it is like to be in an environment where who you are as a person is viewed as something negative or as a hinderance. Consequently, these generated feelings of safety may be due to potential attribution between the fact that women are viewed as something safer and more comfortable and men as something threatening, in the workplace.

Consequently, these main themes demonstrate how the workplace has reflected different societal behaviours into the workplace and has either positively or negatively affect experiences of inclusion and exclusion for the participants. Specifically, passive and active cases of both exclusion and inclusion were dominant and were different for each participant, making them each an individually unique experience. Each participants' beliefs, values, perceptions and opinions led to the inhibition or catalytic reaction between positive or negative working environments and the employee's sense of belonging. In fact, characteristics revolving around femininity and masculinity directly or indirectly contributed to creating more inclusive or more exclusive experiences. Thus, through this research, the distinction between actively or passively being included or excluded provided with an important perspective in comprehending and contextualising LGB experiences in the workplace in Cyprus.

Chapter 5: Final Remarks

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to identify the different types of experiences LGB people have in the workplace, whether negative or positive, and how these experiences influence and/or facilitate their feelings of exclusion or inclusion, by exploring their overall experiences in the Cypriot working environment. The results of the study did not only offer a range of different experiences regarding exclusion and inclusion, but they have also revealed various characteristics that differentiate passive and active varieties of inclusion and exclusion. Masculinity, femininity, ignorance, action, discrimination, microaggressions and many more were the topics, that were identified through the research conducted.

I.   Key Findings

This thesis set out to investigate LGB employees' experiences of inclusion or exclusion in the Cypriot workplace with the aim to investigate the different types of factors that may influence feelings of belonging or exclusion. Additionally, the importance of safety and fear were also explored. Through this research, it was identified that there were two distinct ways that employees felt included or excluded, with this being either passively or actively. Passive inclusion focused on ignorance and inaction whilst active inclusion emphasised on taking measures and initiative through action to ensure employees feel included. On the other hand, passive exclusion emphasised on microaggressive behaviour, gossiping and heteronormativity whilst active exclusion emphasised on discriminatory attitudes that targeted the marginalisation of LGB employees.

Moreover, fear of discriminatory behaviour or exclusion led to participants feeling insecure, uncomfortable, and unsatisfied in their working environment often. Often, they felt unsafe and the need to hide their sexuality was prominent. However, when an organization or the employee were openly supportive and encouraging, LGB employees felt much more

included. As such, they felt that they belonged more and had less need to hide their sexuality, were happier and more satisfied at work and most importantly made them feel that they were safe in their working environment.

II.   Limitations

Even though a plethora of previous research has been done on the experiences of LGB employees experiences in the workplace throughout the years in the U.S. and Europe, not enough literature expanded in the context of Cyprus. As mentioned in the literature, the strong patriarchal and Christian influence in society makes Cyprus one of the standouts when it comes to LGB experiences in the context of Southern Europe as well as Middle Eastern cultural context. The absence of studies relevant specifically to the experiences of LGB workers in the context of Cyprus means that this research will enhance the existing body of literature. Additionally, whilst this study aimed to target LGB employees' experiences in the workplace, this is not a representative sample of the older generations of LGB workers in the workplaces, but rather focusing more on young adults up to early 30's.

Furthermore, the individual characteristics of the researcher may have been a limitation in gaining access to specific groups of the population. As the researcher was a young, openly homosexual, well-known individual in the community, it is likely that majority of the sample that was skewed towards similar individual characteristics. This means that the older generation as well as closeted LGB employees may not have felt comfortable or safe speaking about their experiences in the workplace and thus did not want to participate in the study.

Moreover, as there was no segregation between masculine or feminine dominated environments or the public versus the private sector, the results are evidently generalised, as

focusing on one of these two topics would enrich existing data and enhance the limited literature and identify different types of exclusion, inclusion, and feelings of safety.

III.   Suggestions

As the Cypriot societal mindset does not encourage individuals to speak up about their sexuality and their experiences, identifying older closeted and not open LGB workers was harder. In combination with the openly homosexual researcher, this could be a notable area of improvement for further research. Whilst this was influenced by the norm of not wanting to speak about their experiences, the methods used to recruit the participants and how it was approached by the researcher made it more unlikely to identify cases where older LGB workers were not open about their sexuality. Therefore, in the future, researchers should be of diverse sexualities, ages and backgrounds, openly homosexual or closeted. This will enable participants to identify with specific researchers more than others and may be more incline to participate or share their workplace experiences in Cyprus.

If this study was to be conducted again, queer dominated environments, feminine versus masculine jobs and the differences between LGB workers' experiences in the public sector versus the private sector could be targeted to distinguish these differences. As the participants were of a variety of different backgrounds and professions, a wider picture is understood that can be focused even further. What is more, developing a more thorough approach to recruiting employees that are older, whether closeted or open, would enable for a more accurate and representative sample to be obtained. In addition to this, as the results of the study have shown, LGB experiences range from very positive to very negative according to many other different factors rather than just the workplace; a study focusing on what external factors seem to greatly influence experiences as well as feelings of

exclusion/inclusion in specific workplaces or industries, could reveal important dynamics in the Cypriot workplace of LGB friendly environments/industries and not.

Moreover, future research should consider using different means of advertising, as confining only into social media not only limits the initial pool available, but also automatically excludes a major part of the population that may not use specific social media platforms or may not use social media at all. Except snowball sampling and word-of-mouth, posters could be created and physically advertised in different areas of Cyprus. Moreover, collaborating with various Cypriot organizations or universities that would be willing to help advertise the research topic would also benefit the research sample. This will also potentially help identify more bisexual participants, both male and female, that can take part as well as participants that are older or closeted.

In conclusion, this study reveals that whilst the workplace in Cyprus can be very oppressive and homophobic, it can also be very supportive. This provides individuals with a safe working space that they can feel included. For many of the LGB employees in Cyprus, being open in the workplace was not a priority, but rather feeling that they enjoyed the type and element of work that they were doing. If they had a colloquial interaction with co-workers and did not disclose any personal matters, they felt that they were included. The only time incidents of discrimination would be discussed or reported was when the organizations had reliable management, LGB management, or a Human Resource department that was active in including their diversity. Thus, it can be deduced that this study sheds light in many important areas concerning LGB literature in Cyprus and provides a pathway for future research to be explored regarding LGB experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the workplace.

Consequently, this emphasises the importance of an active, well-informed management team or Human Resource department in organizations, as well as the presence and enactment of clear and transparent policies and procedures that exist to provide the employees with a safe working environment. This will not only provide protection to the employees from incidents that may negatively affect their physical and mental well-being, but also to display to potential candidates and society that they are an inclusive workplace. Thus, it is up to the Human Resource Management team of an organization or a company to ensure that their LGB employees feel safe, secure, and most importantly, included in a working environment in Cyprus, as it navigates through its patriarchal liberation.

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Footnotes

[1] Gay bashing is defined as violent behaviour in the form of an attack, abuse, or assault committed against a person who is perceived by the aggressor to be gay (Cambridge Dictionary Press)

[2] According to Trimikliniotis & Karayanni (2008) gay men are seen by muggers as easy prey to attack and rob. Cruising parks are areas where gay men "cruise", which colloquially means to search for someone to have sexual intercourse with, usually for money.

[3] Safezone (2005) defines Heterocentrisim is defined as the concept/ideology and assumption that all people are heterosexual. Ciscentrism is defined as the concept/ideology and assumption that all people are cisgendered (that their gender identity corresponds with their birthsex) according to Lennon and Mistler (2014).

Appendix A – Consent Form & Information Sheet

<u>ΕΝΗΜΕΡΩΤΙΚΟ ΕΝΤΥΠΟ ΓΙΑ ΣΥΜΜΕΤΟΧΗ</u>
<u>ΣΕ ΕΡΕΥΝΑ:</u>

> **Τίτλος ερευνητικής μελέτης:**

"Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual's Experiences in the Cypriot Workplace."

> **Ερευνητής:**

Μιχάλης Κουντουρέσης

> **Τι αφορά αυτή η έρευνα?**

Η έρευνα διεξάγεται στα πλαίσια της διατριβής του ερευνητή, Μιχάλη Κουντουρέση, φοιτητή στο μεταπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα Διοίκησης Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού του Πανεπιστημίου Κύπρου. Συγκεκριμένα η έρευνα θα επικεντρωθεί στις καθημερινές αλληλεπιδράσεις των ΛΟΑ με το χώρο εργασίας τους, συγκεκριμένα εμπειρίες συμπερίληψης ή αποκλεισμού και είτε αυτές χαρακτηρίζονται ως θετικές ή αρνητικές όπως και πως οι συνεντευξιαζόμενες επηρεάζονται από αυτές.

Η συνέντευξη προβλέπεται να διαρκέσει 45 λεπτά με 1 ώρα.

> **Θα είναι ανώνυμες και εμπιστευτικές οι απαντήσεις μου?**

Όλες οι πληροφορίες που θα δοθούν στη διάρκεια της συνέντευξης θα είναι εμπιστευτικές και ανώνυμες. Η ταυτότητά σου και το όνομα οποιονδήποτε άλλων ατόμων αναφέρεις θα παραμείνουν εμπιστευτικά και ανώνυμα. Η καταγραφή της συνέντευξης θα αποθηκευτεί σε υπολογιστή που προστατεύεται με κωδικό. Οι απομαγνητοφωνήσεις και όλα τα άλλα έγγραφα που σχετίζονται με αυτή την έρευνα θα κατατεθούν σε έναν υπολογιστή με κωδικό πρόσβασης. Τα δεδομένα που θα συλλεχθούν θα χρησιμοποιηθούν για ακαδημαϊκούς σκοπούς.

> **Γιατί να συμμετάσχω?**

Η συμμετοχή στη μελέτη είναι εθελοντική. Εάν συμφωνήσεις να συμμετέχεις, μπορείς να ζητήσεις διακοπή της συνέντευξης ή αποχώρηση από την έρευνα οποιαδήποτε στιγμή. Εάν επιλέξεις να αποχωρήσεις από την έρευνα, οι πληροφορίες που έχουν ήδη ληφθεί δεν θα χρησιμοποιηθούν.

> ➤ Με ποιόν μπορώ να επικοινωνήσω για τη μελέτη στο μέλλον;

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> ➤ Όροι και προϋποθέσεις

- o Επιβεβαιώνω ότι έχω μελετήσει τις πληροφορίες του ενημερωτικού εντύπου

- o Είχα την ευκαιρία να κάνω ερωτήσεις και έλαβα ικανοποιητικές απαντήσεις από τον ερευνητή.

- o Κατανοώ ότι αποσπάσματα από τις απαντήσεις μου στην έρευνα μπορεί να χρησιμοποιηθούν ανώνυμα στην διατριβή μου και μελλοντικές ακαδημαϊκές δημοσιεύσεις.

- o Δίνω την συγκατάθεσή μου να γίνει ηχογράφηση της συνέντευξης

- o Με πλήρη γνώση όλων των παραπάνω, συμφωνώ να συμμετάσχω στην έρευνα.

Υπογραφή συμμετέχοντα   Ημερομηνία   Υπογραφή ερευνητή

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