



Department of Business & Public Administration
MSc Human Resource Management

**IDENTITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES USED BY WOMEN
IN THE CYPRIOT WORKPLACE**

by

Elena Christou

©

MSc Dissertation

Submitted by: Elena Christou

Supervised by: Dr. Christiana Ierodiakonou



Faculty of Economics and Management
Department of Business and Public Administration

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that the thesis I am submitting is entirely my own original work except where otherwise indicated. I am aware of the University's regulations concerning plagiarism, including those regulations concerning disciplinary actions that may result from plagiarism. Any use of the works of any other author, in any form, is properly acknowledged at their point of use.

Student's signature: _____

Name (in capitals): _____ELENA CHRISTOU_____

Date of submission: _____23/5/2024_____

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude firstly to my supervisor, Dr. Christiana Ierodiakonou for her guidance and assistance in writing this thesis, her continuous feedback and mentorship have played a pivotal role in the completion of this thesis.

Also, I would like to thank my family, my partner and all my friends for their support, motivation, encouragement and patience in helping me complete this Master' Degree.

Lastly, this dissertation is for those we have lost unexpectedly this year, and are not here with us now, but always felt proud and supported us in challenging situations.

This work would have not been completed without you, and I feel grateful for going through this with all of you.

Abstract

This dissertation aims to investigate the multifaceted nature of identity management strategies in professional settings, with an emphasis on the experiences of women. Drawing upon a synthesis of existing literature and original empirical research, this study dives deep into how individuals navigate workplace norms while reconciling their authenticity. This research employs an approach that incorporates qualitative research and more specifically focus groups, conducted within the context of the Cypriot workplace. By combining original work and existing literature review the study uncovers a spectrum of identity management strategies ranging from concealment to simple negotiation of identity characteristics. The primary aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the implications of these strategies for individuals' holistic experience while they exist in their workplace in Cyprus. Through the analysis, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in professional settings and is able to offer practical insights for promoting inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. By addressing and communicating the unique challenges faced by women in the workplace, organizations will be able to foster inclusive work environments where all employees feel respected, valued, equal, and safe to bring their authentic selves to work every day. This thesis was inspired by the continuous discussions had with women and the worries they face in their workplace.

Table of contents

1.	Introduction and Content	6
2.	Literature Review	7
2.1	Goffman’s Stigma Theory and Butler’s Gender Performativity	7
2.2	Gender Stigma: Impacts on Women’s Career Trajectories	10
2.3	Strategies in Identity Management	14
2.4	Conclusion: Unveiling the Dynamics of Identity management in professional settings	23
3.	Methodology	24
3.1	Why qualitative research / Why focus groups	24
3.2	The participants	26
3.3	Demographics	28
3.4	The process	29
3.5	Data collection and analysis	30
3.6	Ethical considerations / Data confidentiality and privacy	31
3.7	Limitations	32
4.	Results and Discussion	33
4.1	Themes Identified	33
4.2	Findings	35
4.2.1	Gender Bias in Meetings	36
4.2.2	Unwanted Attention – Gender Dynamics	39
4.2.3	Stigma around Menstruation	41
4.2.4	Emotional Expression	43
4.2.5	Dress Code Pressure	45
4.2.6	Motherhood and Challenges	49
4.3	Discussion and Conclusion	51
5.	References	56
6.	Appendices	62

1. Introduction and Content

In today's diverse and dynamic professional landscape, women navigate a myriad of challenges influenced by societal norms, gender biases, and identity management. While some may conform to established norms, others resist, highlighting the nuanced ways in which women manage their identities in the workplace. This dissertation aims to explore the multifaceted aspects of women's experiences in professional environments, particularly focusing on identity management strategies and the various identities women may choose to conceal during interactions in their workplace. Drawing upon relevant research by Ervin Goffman and Judith Butler, this study seeks to delve deeper into identity management strategies and identity concealment in the workplace and the effects on women's everyday lives.

The proposed research aims to highlight how individuals, specifically women, navigate the complex dynamics of concealing aspects of their identity, exploring the impact on their sense of belonging and well-being. rather than implying a normative expectation, it is crucial to recognize that individuals may choose to conceal aspects of their identity based on personal preferences, societal pressures, or other contextual factors. By examining the insights provided by Butler (1990) and Goffman (1986), this study aims to understand the strategies women employ, such as 'passing' and 'covering' to manage their identities in professional settings.

While existing literature has acknowledged the importance of studying women's experience in the workplace, there remains a notable gap in understanding the reasons and the effects on identity management especially in the Cypriot workplace. This gap underscores the need for deeper exploration into how identity management affects individuals' well-being and professional productivity. Thus, this thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the strategies women use in professional context and the reasons behind them.

As we embark on this journey of exploration, it becomes increasingly clear that addressing gender biases, and stereotypes and dismantling the need for identity management are essential steps toward fostering an inclusive and more equitable work environment for all women.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Goffman's Stigma Theory and Butler's Gender Performativity

At the core of this research lies Erving Goffman's Stigma Theory, as presented in 'Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity' (1963). Goffman's theory underscores the significance of social marks and identity concealment, highlighting how individuals actively manage their self-presentations to navigate societal perceptions and norms. Moreover, Judith Butler's work 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity' (1990) introduces the concept of gender performativity, emphasizing how gender is constructed through repetitive actions rather than being an innate trait. (Newheiser, et al., 2017). Butler (1990) argues that gender is not something inherent but is constructed through repeated acts and performances. This idea can be applied to how women in the workplace conform to or challenge gender norms and stereotypes. Moreover, it offers a theoretical lens to understand why and how women might engage in identity concealment or presentation based on societal expectations of femininity or masculinity. Goffman (1986) coined the term 'stigma' to describe any undesirable or negative characteristic that sets an individual apart from others, leading to a perceived tainted identity. Ervin Goffman (1986) explains a stigmatized identity as one that is marked by characteristics or attributes that are socially devalued or discredited in a particular society or context. He defines stigma as a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces the individual from a whole and usual person to an attained, discounted one. Both Butler and Goffman (1986) emphasize the role of societal norms and expectations in shaping individual behavior, and Goffman (1986) discusses how individuals seek to conform to normative

expectations, while Butler's gender performativity (1990) theory highlights how norms construct gender identities.

Goffman's stigma theory (1963) provides a theoretical framework to understand how women engage in identity concealment to navigate the stigmatizing effects of societal norms, biases, and expectations. The frontstage and backstage dynamics highlight the complexities women face in maintaining a professional image, while also managing their authentic selves. This theory allows us to explore how women strategically conceal aspects of their identities to avoid potential biases and create a positive impression. The theory adds depth to our examinations of the strategies women employ to balance authenticity with societal expectations in professional dimensions. Goffman's theory introduces the concept of stigma as a social mark that disqualifies an individual from full social acceptance. Stigmas can be visible, such as physical disabilities, or invisible, such as unconventional gender expressions. Stigmas lead to identity spoiling where an individual is seen as deviating from societal norms. Goffman (1986) also highlights that individuals with stigmatized attributes actively manage their identities to avoid the negative consequences of stigma. Professional identity management includes concealment strategies aimed at controlling others' perceptions. For women in the workplace, this might mean hiding aspects of their identities that would lead to biases or discrimination. Swann et al., 2009, highlighted that people have the ability to assume various identities depending on the context and social situation. More specifically, a woman can be warm with her children, or be distant around employees. To navigate this complexity and predict others' behaviors, individuals engage in identity negotiation, which involves reaching agreements with relationship partners, for example in this situation, a colleague or manager. In order to understand these negotiations, we need to dive into Goffman's (1956) concept of frontstage and backstage. The Frontstage part of a person's life is when they are in the presence of others, particularly in public settings. It's the performance aspect of social life. In the front stage, individuals actively manage their self-presentation to create a desired impression on others, this involves adopting certain roles, behaviors, and expressions that align with societal norms and expectations. Goffman (1959) likens the frontstage to a stage in a theater, where individuals play their parts to an audience. People are typically

more conscious of their actions and behaviors on the front stage because they want to project a particular image and gain social acceptance. Backstage, in contrast, represents the private, unobserved aspects of an individual's life. It's where people can be their true selves. In the backstage, individuals may drop their social masks, relax, and be more authentic. It's where they can express emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in the behind-the-scenes area of a theater, where actors can be themselves without the scrutiny of the audience. Erving Goffman's work (1956) likened individuals to actors in a theatrical performance. Goffman (1959) emphasized that the first step in social interaction is establishing a 'working consensus' or agreement about the roles each person will play. Like all organisms, individuals tend to seek environments that fulfill their needs. In an organizational context, this includes the pursuit of goals, connectedness, and agency. (Swann, 2009). The identity negotiation processes involve individuals and organizations reaching agreements about 'who is who' in the workplace. Negotiations take place between individuals, representatives of organizations, or even between different organizations. In order for an organization to communicate its expectations and preferred identities, formal contracts, psychological contracts, training, and socialization processes are needed. As the author says, the identity negotiation process is ongoing, and perceivers communicating their desired appraisals and feedback from targets may lead to identity change, but the tendency for targets to align perceivers' appraisals with their self-views is stronger. As Goffman (1959) explained, when targets successfully negotiate situated identities that are somehow similar to their backstage identities, a 'working consensus' is achieved. Moreover, the article highlights that people's performance is best when their chronic or situated identities are supported by their organization. When a person's front stage and backstage performances are far from similar, it can negatively influence their job performance. When qualities or proficiencies needed for a job do not align with their social views or abilities, it can lead to reduced performance.

Butler's concept of gender performativity provides a theoretical framework that allows us to understand how women navigate societal expectations and stereotypes (Butler, 1990). Women may engage in identity concealment to fit into prescribed gender roles and norms, thereby demonstrating the performative nature of gender. Butler's groundbreaking idea of gender performativity argues that gender

is not something intrinsic or biologically determined but is rather constructed through a series of repetitive actions and behaviors. In other words, individuals don't inherently possess a gender identity, instead, they 'do' gender through their actions, expressions, and interactions. These performances of gender create the illusion of a stable and binary gender system Butler asserts that gender is a social construct, shaped by cultural norms, expectations, and historical contexts. The binary division of male and female is not a natural fact but a result of societal practices. Moreover, the author describes that gender identity is not an inherent essence but emerges through the repeated performance of gendered acts, which include how one dresses, speaks, gestures, and interacts. By emphasizing the performative nature of gender, Butler subverts the idea that individuals must conform to traditional gender norms and opens up the possibility for breaking away from rigid categorizations and exploring a more fluid understanding of gender identity. (Butler, 1990).

2.2 Gender Stigma: Impacts on Women's Career Trajectories

Gender stigma in the workplace is a multifaceted issue that significantly impacts women's experiences and career trajectories. Research by Van Laar et al (2019) highlights the importance of understanding how individuals cope with stigma in professional settings. Women often confront gender-based stigmatization, which can manifest through various sources, including physical appearance and age. Coping strategies, such as threat regulation and seeking supportive factors, are crucial for navigating these challenges. However, as revealed by Fox and Quinn (2015) the experience of pregnant women in the workplace also illustrates how gender stigma can lead to unintended exits from the workplace. Stigmatization of pregnant women, influenced by stereotypes about their commitment and competence, can push them towards decisions to leave their jobs, even in the face of legal protections. As Van Laar et al. (2019) mentioned, women often view gender discrimination as a pervasive issue, affecting various aspects of their work lives. They may report feeling undervalued or underestimated due to their gender, leading to reduced confidence and job satisfaction. As shown in Fox and Quinn's study in 2015, pregnant

women often report feeling scrutinized and judged, which can lead to stress and anxiety, resulting in some women leaving their jobs to escape stigmatization.

Sandberg (2015) highlights the persistence of gender stereotypes from childhood into the workplace. She points out that leadership abilities in women are often labeled as "bossy," while the same traits in boys go largely unchallenged. Professional ambition is not consistently seen as a positive trait in women, although generational shifts are being observed. Sandberg (2015) underlines that women often underestimate their own performance, while men tend to overestimate theirs. Furthermore, the way success is attributed differs between genders; men attribute it to innate qualities, while women attribute it to external factors or luck. Sandberg (2015) contends that very few workplaces offer essential support for pursuing a career while raising children, such as flexibility, access to childcare, and parental leave. Additionally, she addresses internal barriers that women create for themselves, including the reluctance to be outspoken or aggressive. She emphasizes the importance of women aspiring to leadership positions and not compromising their career goals for family responsibilities. Powell and Butterfield (2015) also mention the interplay between gender and its connection to top management positions. Their research highlights the way in which individuals' perceptions of their gender and gender identity shape their career journey, in the context of pursuing leadership roles within organizations.

Ladge and Humberd (2011) dive into the concept of the "maternal wall," highlighting the barriers that women face in the workplace due to motherhood. Their study emphasizes the need for further research on gender and work dynamics, focusing on the impact of motherhood on career advancement and interactions with colleagues. According to Budig and England (2001), mothers experience a significant wage penalty in the workforce due to biases in hiring decisions and perceptions of commitment, highlighting the economic consequences of motherhood, and revealing lower wages for mothers compared to women without children.

A study by Smith et al. (2021) examines the perceptions of male managers towards women in the workplace, shedding light on numerous key factors influencing their acceptance of women on equal footing with men. The research underscores that male managers often express a significant preference for deference in interactions between men and women, indicating a tendency to favor male supervisors over female ones. Interestingly, this preference does not necessarily stem from a perception of women being less capable, but rather reflects societal norms that prioritize male authority figures. Another older study of O'leary (1974) started to explore this theme as well, as it delved into how male managers perceive women in the workplace and uncovered key several factors influencing their acceptance of women on equal footing with men. Moreover, the study of Smith et al. (2021) reveals that male managers often cite perceived traits such as women's lack of dependability as factors influencing their negative perceptions of women at work. Their perceptions are often attributed to biological and also personal characteristics, perpetuating stereotypes and biases. The research also suggests that exposure to women in different roles can significantly impact attitudes towards them, with male managers who have less interaction with women often holding more positive views compared to those who regularly interact with women in peer positions. Overall, the study underscores the importance of power dynamics in shaping perceptions of women in the workplace. As long as men continue to evaluate women from positions of superiority, there is a risk that women may continue to be viewed unfavorably, highlighting the importance of interventions to address gender biases and promote equality in professional settings.

The research conducted by Eagly and Carli (2007) sheds light on how societal perceptions of leadership styles can impact women's behaviors in the workplace. This research emphasizes that leadership stereotypes often align with traditionally masculine traits, such as assertiveness and dominance. These stereotypes create a challenging dynamic for women aspiring to leadership roles. Women who exhibit these traits might fear backlash or negative perceptions, leading to identity concealment. This concealment stems from the concern that displaying qualities associated with leadership could lead to being labeled as "bossy," "aggressive," or "unfeminine." The study (Eagly and Carli, 2017) highlights the intricate balance that women must navigate: demonstrating leadership qualities while also adhering

to societal expectations of femininity. This balance often leads to identity concealment strategies, where women may suppress their assertiveness to appear more approachable and likable. This aligns with the broader societal expectation that women should be nurturing and collaborative, rather than assertive and dominant. Furthermore, it underscores how these gendered leadership stereotypes affect women's professional image management. Women might feel compelled to project an image that fits within the acceptable boundaries of leadership expectations, often at the cost of authenticity. This pressure to manage their professional image according to prevailing stereotypes could lead to concealing aspects of their true selves that do not align with these expectations. The paper allows us to understand how deeply ingrained gender stereotypes impact women's behavior and self-presentation strategies in the workplace. It provides a foundation for understanding the challenges women face in balancing their authentic selves with the expectations imposed by these stereotypes. This research supports the narrative that addressing gender stereotypes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment, where women can confidently express their leadership abilities without fear of identity concealment.

The research of Taynor and Deaux (1973) also mentions the existence of gender stereotypes related to adaptive job performance. Taynor and Deaux (1973) found that participants rewarded females more in scenarios where they excelled in emergencies, indicating a challenge to women's competence in crisis situations. Women are also stereotyped as having strong interpersonal skills, being nurturing and attentive, while men are seen as more agentic in relationships. Despite positive stereotypes about women's interpersonal adaptability, they are often perceived as lacking assertiveness and leadership skills necessary for interactions. Moreover, women are stereotyped to display emotions more openly than men. Studies suggest that men are generally believed to possess greater physical self-efficacy and ability compared to women. These findings underline the persistence of gender stereotypes in various dimensions of job performance (DeArmond et al., 2006). In summary, these studies illuminate the pervasive nature of gender stereotypes in shaping perceptions of women's behavior and performance in the workplace. Understanding these stereotypes is essential for challenging and dismantling barriers to women's advancement and promoting a more inclusive environment.

2.3 Strategies in Identity Management

Individuals often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between asserting their unique identities and conforming to societal norms and expectations. At the heart of this balancing act lies the concept of identity management strategies, which serve as indispensable tools for individuals to shape how they are perceived by others while also maintaining a sense of authenticity. In this section, we will explore the multifaceted realm of identity management and the key strategies individuals use with a focus on their professional environments.

Identity Management across marginalized groups in the workplace is another issue that is brought up by the existing literature. In the article 'Identity Management Strategies among Lesbian and gay educators' (Griffin 1991), the author explores the experiences of lesbian and gay educators in their workplace, focusing on identity management strategies. The study delves into the challenges they face, concerning identity concealment and passing, as they navigate professional settings while managing their sexual orientation in accordance with societal norms and workplace expectations. The article reveals that many lesbian and gay educators encounter the need to conceal their sexual orientation in the workplace due to fear of discrimination, prejudice, or potential career repercussions. The study highlights the complexities of identity concealment and the toll it may take on individuals as they attempt to hide a fundamental characteristic of their identity to fit into the heteronormative environment of educational institutions. In the workplace, these strategies are often employed by individuals who belong to marginalized or stigmatized groups. The study suggests that those who belong to such groups may feel the need to adopt passing or covering strategies to fit in, mitigate biases, and advance professionally. These strategies are often influenced by the perception of potential consequences for revealing their true identities. Additionally, organizational norms, cultures, and policies play a significant role in shaping whether individuals feel the need to pass or cover their identities. more specifically, it was found that the strategies that they use are four: Passing requires concealing all information about themselves, presenting

themselves as not gay or lesbian, and avoiding mention or display of their sexual orientation. Covering refers to downplaying certain aspects of oneself. Implicitly Coming out involves cues or hints that might suggest one's identity without explicitly saying it. Lastly, explicitly coming out, involves revealing specific information about one's identity to selected people, in this matter, colleagues or students. In addition to these, challenging or resisting strategies should be duly acknowledged for a complete picture. These strategies involve actively confronting societal norms and workplace expectations, rather than conforming to them. Challenging strategies may include advocating for one's identity rights, openly discussing one's identity, or confronting discriminatory behavior in the workplace. These actions signify a proactive stance against discrimination bias, aiming to create a more inclusive and accepting work environment. While covering and passing focus on adapting to existing norms, challenging strategies emphasize changing those norms to foster acceptance and diversity. Therefore, recognizing the importance of challenging strategies alongside passing and covering for a nuanced understanding of identity management in the workplace.

Identity management strategies include a diverse portfolio of techniques and behaviours aimed at shaping and controlling one's self-presentation in social interactions (Goffman, 1959). These strategies are deeply rooted in social psychology and sociology, drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as impression management, social identity theory, and stigma theories. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Goffman, 1963). At their core, identity management strategies reflect individuals' conscious or subconscious efforts to manage the impressions they convey to others, balancing the desire for authenticity with the need for social acceptance and success in various social contexts (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Several identity management strategies have been identified and studied within the realm of social psychology and organizational behaviour; these behaviours encompass a spectrum of behaviours and tactics aimed at influencing how individuals are perceived by others. (Jones & Pittman, 1982)

- a. Impression Management involves the deliberate control and manipulation of one's appearance, behaviours, and verbal expressions to shape the impressions others form about them (Goffman,

1959). This strategy includes various tactics such as self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, and intimidation, all aimed at presenting oneself in a favourable light and achieving specific social goals (Jones & Pittman, 1982)

- b. Social identity management is resolved around the ways individuals align themselves with particular social groups or categories and manage their perceptions associated with those identities. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This strategy involves emphasizing aspects of one's identity that are positively valued within a particular social context while downplaying or concealing elements that may lead to stigma or discrimination (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).
- c. Stigma management strategies are employed by individuals who possess stigmatized identities, such as those related to race, gender, disability or sexual orientation (Goffman, 1963). These strategies involve various tactics such as covering, passing and disclosing, aimed at mitigating the negative effects of stigma on self-esteem, social interactions and opportunities. (Link & Phelan, 2001)

Covering involves downplaying certain aspects of one's identity without completely concealing them. It's a strategy to balance the need to conform to workplace norms while retaining some degree of personal identity. Covering can involve hiding specific characteristics, behaviors, or affiliations that might lead to bias or discrimination. For instance, an individual might avoid discussing their cultural traditions or affiliations to minimize potential biases while still allowing certain aspects of their identity to come through. The concept of covering was introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman. In his 1963 book "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity," (1963) discussed various strategies individuals use to manage their identities in the presence of a stigma. Covering, as he described it, involves downplaying or disguising a known stigma. Goffman's (1963) work primarily focused on individuals with visible or noticeable stigmatized attributes, such as physical disabilities, but the concept has since been expanded to include various aspects of identity. Moreover, Goffman (1959) discussed the concept of passing, as the other strategy individuals use to manage a stigmatized identity. Passing involves presenting oneself as a member of a non-stigmatized or more socially acceptable group while concealing

or downplaying the stigmatized aspect of one's identity. Goffman (1959) explains that passing is a way for individuals to navigate social situations and avoid the negative consequences of stigma.

By passing, they aim to 'pass; as someone who does not possess the stigmatized trait or characteristic, allowing them to avoid social rejection, discrimination, or bias. (Goffman, 1959)

Goffman introduced the concept of passing in 1963, and he referred to the act of presenting oneself as a member of a non-stigmatized or less stigmatized group, concealing aspects of one's true identity that may lead to biases, discrimination, or social exclusion. It involves actively striving to be seen as normal or conforming to the prevailing norms of the dominant group in society. For example, an individual from a marginalized background might choose to adopt the behaviors and communication patterns of the dominant group to avoid discrimination or biases. Clair, Beatty, and Maclean's (2005) research highlights the challenges posed by the need to manage these concealed social identities. The study emphasizes that such concealment can create stress, cognitive load, and a sense of inauthenticity. It also explores how organizational structures, norms, and policies impact the strategies employees adopt. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding the individual experiences of managing concealed identities, especially in relation to their professional advancement, mental well-being, and overall job satisfaction. (Clair et al., 2005) On the other hand, the recent study of Mignault, Kerr and Human (2023) showed that inducing a feeling of authenticity or acting in accord with one's true self, can promote positive affect, life satisfaction, and socially appropriate behavior. Similarly, the study of Van De Bosch and Tari (2018) associates a high level of authenticity (authenticity explained as the degree to which a person's true self aligns with how they act) with higher well-being at work.

The differential use of identity management strategies among women in various occupational contexts as discussed by Ryan et al, (2020) sheds light on how they navigate workplace environments characterized by gender stereotypes and role incongruity. In addition, the study of Wessel et al, 2015) also explored how different verbal gender presentation strategies affect perceptions of fit during job

interviews for traditionally masculine positions. Female applicants were perceived as fitting better when using agentic traits, while male applicants were evaluated less favorably when using communal traits. The findings supported the lack-of-fit model and role congruity theory. Contrary to expectations, emphasizing agentic traits did not lead to decreased perceptions of warmth and likability however, both female and male applicants were evaluated more negatively when they acknowledged their gender, particularly if they also used neutral traits to describe themselves. (Wessel et al.,2015) Additionally, women in STEM (Science, Technology Engineering, Mathematics) occupations face unique challenges due to the underrepresentation of women and the gendered nature of these fields. (Ryan et al.,2020) Despite many women believing they would confront prejudice, empirical evidence suggests that they often refrain from doing so, particularly in high social cost situations. Confrontation behaviors may be perceived as violating gender norms, leading women to hesitate to engage in such behaviors. Power and Butterfield (2015) also explore the effects of gendered norms in workplace dress codes on job satisfaction and professional image. The research sheds light into the significance of dress code policies and how they shape employees' perceptions of their work environment to adhere to gender-biased expectations. According to Smith (2017) dress codes have an important impact on organizational culture and employee behavior, underscoring the importance of understanding how regulations connected with dress code shape workplace dynamics and influence employee interactions. Moreover, women may face backlash for confronting prejudice, being labeled as overreacting complainers. Occupational characteristics, such as social interest profiles, also hold a key role in shaping women's Identity management behaviors. Jobs with higher social interests may be perceived as more congruent with communal traits traditionally associated with women, reducing the need for identity management. Lastly, the Perceived organizational support within the workplaces also influences women's identity management behaviors. According to the study (Ryan et al.,2020) fairness in treatment and perceptions of organizational care contribute to higher. Levels of Perceived Organizational Support.

Individuals tend to self-conceal in public contexts whereas in private contexts they can more fully express themselves because they feel safe to be themselves (Stevens, 2004). In public contexts (e.g.

work) they may self-conceal these same aspects of their identities because of feelings of vulnerability or fear of the consequences of sharing such information (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001). The converse of self-concealment is self-disclosure, which is the act of revealing personal information to others (Miller et al., 1983). Individuals often consider the trade-off between self-concealment and self-disclosure before making the difficult decision of when, and to whom to reveal information (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, self-disclosing personal information can lead to increased intimacy and liking, which would lead to closer social relationships (Collins & Miller 1994).

In social settings, individuals are likely to align their behaviors to those of the people around them using available social norms. (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). When a new employee enters a new corporate environment, they are more likely to try to shape themselves into organizational values. (Hewlin, 2003) in addition, Newheiser et al. (2017) explain that identity concealment which is associated with the workplace, may lead to isolation, emotional distress, and an increased sense of pressure to maintain the concealment, affecting interpersonal relationships negatively. During the socialization process, newcomers observe what is acceptable and what is not, and adapt accordingly., this includes expressing specific emotions, wearing proper attire, expressing agreement with the opinions of a manager, etc. When conflicts happen between personal and organizational values, employees are likely to perceive the need to suppress their own values and pretend to adapt to the organizational values. (Hewlin, 2003). As Yu & Sun (2013) stated, when the person is in the conforming stage, it is easier to build stronger affiliations with others when you 'fit in'.

Gender biases and stereotypes persist in professional environments, shaping the experiences of women and influencing their self-presentation. Stereotypical expectations often lead women to conceal certain aspects of their identity and conform to gendered norms in their respective industries. Drawing upon Goffman's concept of identity concealment, this dissertation also delves into how women engage in passing strategies to manage stigma and present a socially acceptable self in the workplace. The front stage and backstage metaphor will be employed to explore women's strategies in different contexts.

(Newheiser et al. 2017) The article "Out of Sight but Not Out of Mind: Managing Invisible Social Identities in the Workplace" by Clair, Beatty, and Maclean (2005) delves into the intricate dynamics of managing concealed social identities within professional environments. 'invisible identities'. As per the article, are aspects of an individual's identity that are not immediately visible or apparent to others, in this context, in the workplace. These identities are not necessarily physical characteristics but rather pertain to attributes, affiliations, or personal information that an individual may conceal or downplay in a professional setting. The concept of invisible identities is often discussed in the context of intersectionality theory, which was developed by Kimberle Crenshaw. While the primary focus of this study was on the intersection of race and gender, intersectionality theory recognizes that individuals hold multiple social identities, some of which may be visible or acknowledged, while others remain concealed or invisible in various social contexts. (Crenshaw, 2017) While the term 'invisible identities' is not explicitly used by Crenshaw, intersectionality theory is a foundational framework for understanding the concept of identities that are not immediately visible or acknowledged in society. Intersectionality theory helps us understand that people possess a complex combination of identities, including those related to race, gender, sexuality, and more. Focusing on these "invisible" identities, the author (Crenshaw,2017) explores the strategies individuals employ to navigate their hidden aspects while operating within workplace structures. The study (Crenshaw,2017) uncovers the complexities of identity management in the workplace, where individuals often conceal facets of their identities due to societal norms, stereotypes, or perceived repercussions. The authors identify two main strategies: "passing" and "covering." The study explains passing as a strategy in which individuals actively present themselves as belonging to the majority or dominant group, concealing aspects of their true identity that may be stigmatized or lead to biases. Passing is accomplished by aligning one's behavior, appearance, and communication with the norms and expectations of the dominant group.

Moreover, the research of Dozier (2017) sheds light on the experiences of women who defy gender norms, specifically those who identify as masculine women. As the author stated, 'masculine women' are socially recognized as women, but express masculinity through their appearance behavior or

interactional styles, concluding them to face double stigma due to gender nonconformity and sexual orientation. These individuals face intersecting stigmas related to gender nonconformity and perceived sexual orientation. As explained in the article, women used strategies such as modifying clothing, and incorporating feminine behaviors to counteract masculine presence. These women may encounter unique forms of discrimination and stigmatization; they often have to navigate perceptions that challenge traditional notions of femininity, which can lead to isolation. Some find themselves excluded from female-dominated spaces or criticized for not following gender norms. Managing these stigmatized identities can be complex, involving strategies such as modifying appearance and selecting less stigmatizing work settings. While some may experience mistreatment in male-dominated settings, others find positive outcomes, emphasizing the intricate relationship between gender stigma, work environment, and individual experiences. Finally, Keplinger and Smith (2022) provide a comprehensive perspective by examining the sources and consequences of the stigmatization of women in the workplace at multiple levels, their work underscores the need to address gender stigma comprehensively, considering its effects on individuals, organizations, and society to promote gender diversity and equity.

The study of Stead (2017) delves into the strategies women entrepreneurs adopt to navigate the complex interplay between their identities and gender expectations within the entrepreneurial realm. By drawing on sociological and feminist perspectives, the study offers a fresh outlook on belonging portraying it as a continuous and dynamic process influenced by gender and power dynamics rather than a fixed state. Drawing on sociological and feminist perspectives, the study unveils how women engage in practices of legitimacy and identity work to either conform to or challenge normative entrepreneurial ideals. The concept of identity concealment stands out, where women strategically hide aspects of their identity, be it femininity or their entrepreneurial role, in order to align with prevailing norms. Judith Butler (1990) explained that challenging normative ideas involves resisting or questioning established norms, values, or expectations, often in pursuit of social change or personal authenticity. Judith Butler's ideas about challenging normative ideas, particularly related to gender and identity, are extensively discussed in 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity' (1990). In her work, Butler introduces the

concept of gender performativity which is central to the idea of challenging and subverting normative gender norms and expectations. She argues that gender is not something inherent but is formed through repeated performances of gendered actions and behaviors. Erving Goffman (1986) highlights those conforming entails adhering to established norms, values, or expectations within a particular social or organizational context. This practice is driven by a desire to gain acceptance within the entrepreneurial community while simultaneously challenging the gendered assumptions inherent in these norms. The research concludes that women entrepreneurs actively negotiate their identities in response to dynamic power dynamics, accumulating contextual knowledge over time. One of the key strategies that were mentioned were negotiations between private and public tasks, seeking legitimation with both domestic and business spheres to maintain belonging in both realms. (Stead, 2017)

Alternatively, extant research suggests that self-concealment requires cognitive efforts to monitor identity expression across settings (Beals et al., 2009; Cain, 1991; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Mock et al., 2010; Pachankis et al., 2020; Smart & Wegner, 1999). active and effortful concealment of information can be fatiguing in the same way that inhibition can be fatiguing—by consuming mental resources (Wegner, 1994). Furthermore, there may be functional implications resulting from not satisfying belonging motives (DeWall & Bushman, 2011), such as poor performance on challenging intellectual tasks (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2002). Therefore, it holds that understanding the strong motivation to form and maintain social relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) would be beneficial in helping to gather the positive effects of self-disclosure and bringing one's authentic self to work (Baumeister, 1998; Leary et al., 1995; Schlenker, 1980). When self-concealing, people may choose not to express their most creative ideas because they prefer to fit in with other group members and fulfill their belong motives. Larson and Chastain (1990) define self-concealment as actively hiding personal identities or private information perceived as distressing to the self. Concealed information typically has three characteristics: it is private and personal information (e.g. thoughts, feelings, actions, or events), consciously accessible to the individual, and actively kept hidden from others. For example, commonly self-concealed identities include gay or lesbian sexual identities, mental illness, minority religious

beliefs, low socioeconomic status, and disabilities (Ragins, 2008). Self-concealment is not limited by who chooses to censor elements of themselves but is rather common among individuals. The studies of Kahn & Hassling, 2001, and Larson & Chastain, 1990) suggest that those who are self-concealed are less likely to self-disclose or secure attachments (Lopez et al., 2002). When people perceive that what they are choosing to conceal may be revealed, people tend to filter what they say, their conversations, and their behaviors. (Uysal et al., 2010).

2.4 Conclusion: Unveiling the Dynamics of Identity management in professional settings

In conclusion, the exploration of identity concealment as influenced by societal norms, gender biases, and workplace dynamics, offers valuable insights into the multifaceted experiences of women in professional settings, this literature review has synthesized similar works by Erving Goffman (1986, 1959) and Judith Butler (1990), providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the strategies employed by individuals, particularly women, to navigate the complexities of identities within the workplace. Erving Goffman's Stigma theory(1986) has illuminated the concept of identity concealment as a response to stigmatization, highlighting the strategies of 'passing' and 'covering' employed by individuals to manage their identities. These strategies are particularly relevant to women who may face gender-based stigmatization in their careers (Stead, 2017) Moreover, the reviewed research has revealed some of the consequences of identity concealment, including the potential for increased stress, cognitive load, and a sense of inauthenticity (Van Laar et al., (2019). As we move forward, it is clear that addressing gender biases, stereotypes and the need for identity management is important when entering a workplace, as employees sometimes feel that revealing certain aspects of their identity may lead to biases, discrimination, or exclusion. This review contributes to the ongoing discourse on women's experiences in the workplace and provides a foundation for future research in this area. Lastly, creating a workplace where individuals can bring their true selves requires a commitment, but when done effectively, It can lead to a more vibrant, innovative and supportive work environment for everyone (Mignault et al., 2023) In summary, understanding the dynamics of identity concealment is pivotal for

promoting workforce diversity, enhancing individuals' well-being, and facilitating a workplace culture where everyone can bring their authentic selves to work. In the continuation of this thesis, I want to explore whether Cypriot women use identity concealment strategies in their workplace, what are they, and why they use them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Why qualitative research / Why focus groups

In essence, a focus group study involved gathering a specific group of participants multiple times to explore their perceptions and viewpoints on a particular topic. Through these discussions, researchers aim to uncover common trends and patterns in how participants think and feel about the subject. These sessions are meticulously planned to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere where participants feel free to express themselves openly and share their views firstly with one another and with the moderator. Typically, each group comprises 5-10 individuals and is led by an interviewer/ moderator who guides the conversation with questions and threads. The discussions are informal and relaxed, allowing participants to enjoy sharing their thoughts and insights without feeling pressured or judged. (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In their exploration of data collection methods, Harrell and Bradley (2009) underscore the value of employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups. These methods offer researchers a flexible yet systematic approach to gathering qualitative data, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. By utilizing semi-structured interviews, researchers can achieve a balance between the flexibility of open-ended questioning and the stricture necessary for maintaining focus and consistency across interviews. Given that qualitative research emphasizes on understanding subjective experiences, it becomes imperative to select data collection methods that facilitate in-depth exploration and interpretation. Focus groups represent one such method that aligns seamlessly with the goals of qualitative inquiry (Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

To justify the use of focus groups as the chosen data collection method, it's essential to first establish the rationale for employing a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration and interpretation of subjective methods, which prioritize numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative approaches allow for a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena by capturing the complexities and nuances of human behavior and interaction.

The specific methodology was chosen because of its suitability for exploring shared experiences and perceptions related to identity concealment and management in the Cypriot workplace. By conducting focus group discussions and employing thematic analysis, the primary aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing identity concealment and its impact on women individuals and their workplaces. (Harrell and Bradley, 2009).

Focus groups offer a dynamic and interactive platform for gathering data, providing researchers with the opportunity to engage participants in open and nuanced discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2015) the interactive nature of focus groups fosters a collaborative environment where participants can share diverse perspectives, challenge each other's views and ideas, and collectively construct meaning around a particular topic (Morgan, 1997). This collaborative process not only generates rich qualitative data but also captures the complexities and nuances of participants' experiences within a social context.

Moreover, focus groups facilitate the exploration of group norms, shared beliefs, and social dynamics, offering insights into how individuals negotiate meaning within their social environments (Kitzinger, 1994). By observing group interactions, researchers can uncover implicit norms, power dynamics, and social hierarchies that influence participants' perceptions and behaviors (Barbour, 2007). This deeper understanding of social processes enhances the validity and richness of qualitative findings, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay between individuals and their social worlds.

Additionally, focus groups offer flexibility in data collection, allowing researchers to adapt questions and topics based on participants' responses and emergent themes (Stewart et al., 2007). This flexibility enables researchers to explore unexpected avenues of inquiry and delve deeper into topics for interest, enriching the qualitative data collection process.

The research design for this thesis incorporates the utilization of focus group discussions, a method acknowledged for its effectiveness in delving into shared experiences, perceptions, and attitudes among participants. (Krueger & Casey, 2015) This approach offers an interactive and dynamic environment, facilitating in-depth discussions on the nuanced topic of identity concealment among women in the workplace. Focus groups entail dynamic group discussions employed for gathering information from a number of people at the same time. By choosing focus group discussions, the research aims to capture the richness and depth of participants' narratives, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of their experiences. After enough thought, focus group discussions were chosen in order to have complete, in-depth information in order to review conflict information as well (Harrel & Bradley, 2009). Conducting focus group sessions in a comfortable and neutral environment is paramount to encouraging open and candid discussions among participants. Each group will be skillfully moderated to navigate the exploration of various facets related to identity concealment, including identity management, consequences, and coping strategies.

3.2 The participants

In focus groups, the participants are selected because they have common characteristics related to the topic that will be discussed in the focus group.

The recruitment process for this study was conducted with careful consideration to ensure the selection of participants who could offer diverse viewpoints and insights into the experiences of women in the workplace. Employing purposeful sampling, the study aimed to include 21 women currently working in

various sectors in Cyprus, including Technology, Audit, Human resources, Universities (as lecturers), Real Estate, Retail, and Insurance.

To initiate the recruitment process, personalized emails and phone calls were utilized to reach out to potential participants. These communications provided detailed information about the study and its objectives, the nature of participation, and the voluntary nature of involvement (Liamputtong, 2013). Additionally, participants were provided with consent forms (1) outlining the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their insights as research participants and a participant information sheet (2) During the recruitment process, potential participants were screened to assess their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. Screening procedures involved reviewing participants' professional backgrounds, years of experience, and current employment status to ensure alignment with the objectives of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study included:

- a. Identifying as a woman
- b. Having a minimum of five years of professional experience in the same workplace
- c. Currently being employed in one of the specified sectors

These criteria were established to ensure the participants could offer substantial insights into the dynamics of workplace interactions and identify concealment among women with established careers.

Despite concerted efforts to recruit a diverse and representative sample, challenges were faced in coordinating participant availability for focus group discussions, scheduling common dates and time slots that accommodated the availability of all participants proved to be a logical obstacle, extending the recruitment process over a period of 14 days.

3.3 Demographics

Participant Number	Industry	Current Position	Parent/Non - Parent	Current Location
Participant 1	Real Estate Firm	Office Administrator	Parent	Paphos
Participant 2	Technology Company	Senior IT Officer	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 3	Audit Firm	Audit Senior Manager	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 4	HR Firm	Advisory Manager	Non - Parent	Nicosia
Participant 5	Audit Firm	Audit Manager	Parent	Limassol
Participant 6	University	Lecturer	Non - Parent	Nicosia
Participant 7	Technology Company	Company Owner - CEO	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 8	Insurance Company	Administration Manager/ Secretary	Parent	Paphos
Participant 9	Retail Company	Marketing Manager	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 10	Marketing Agency	Team Leader	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 11	Technology	Marketing Manager		Nicosia
Participant 12	Accounting Firm	Administration Senior Officer	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 13	Public Sector (Ministry)	Accounting Manager	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 14	Technology Company	Customer Service Manager	Parent	Limassol
Participant 15	Audit Firm	HR Manager	Non - Parent	Nicosia
Participant 16	Retail Company	Sales Manager	Parent	Nicosia

Participant 17	Forex Company	Administration Manager	Non – Parent	Limassol
Participant 18	Technology Company	Senior Developer	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 19	Sales and Distribution (Pharmaceutical)	Senior Sales Officer	Non - Parent	Nicosia
Participant 20	Retail Company	Supervisor	Parent	Nicosia
Participant 21	Audit Firm	Secretary	Parent	Nicosia

3.4 The process

As Krueger & Casey (2015) explained, focus groups excel when participants are comfortable and show respect to each other when giving their opinions, without being judged. The focus was chosen to promote self-disclosure between participants, in order to make sure that every participant feels the freedom to express how they think and feel. For some participants, self-disclosure comes naturally, but others feel difficulty in feeling comfort and acquiring trust. In this case, every participant felt open to discussing and expressing their feelings and thoughts; in order to make sure that every participant understood their role in the discussion and also made themselves comfortable to share their experiences, everyone had the chance at the beginning of each focus group to say some things about themselves and get to know each other, while also sharing some demographics about their workplace and their current role. The moderator explained in detail the interviewing process and the themes that were going to be discussed in general terms and explained that it was important for everyone to participate and talk with each other at any stage of the discussion.

3.5 Data collection and analysis

The comprehensive data collection involved the use of audio recordings and note-taking during the focus group discussions, facilitated by the moderator. Guided by a semi-structured interview guide, (3) the moderator facilitated the discussions, ensuring that each participant had the opportunity to express their perspectives and experiences during the interview. The discussions covered a spectrum of topics related to identity management in professional settings, allowing participants to share their insights and personal anecdotes. Following the completion of the focus groups, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to capture the nuances of the participants' contributions. The transcripts were then subjected to thematic analysis, a meticulous process of identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories within the data.

Thematic analysis involved several stages, beginning with familiarization with the data to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. This was followed by the systematic coding of the transcripts, where meaningful segments of text were assigned descriptive labels representing emergent themes through an iterative process of coding and categorization, themes were refined and organized into coherent patterns that captured the essence of the participants' narratives. The identified themes were then reviewed and validated through a process of member checking, where participants were invited to review summaries of the findings to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences. This participatory approach added rigor and credibility to the analysis, enhancing the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. Overall, the data analysis process aimed to unveil the key aspects of women's experiences in concealing elements of their identity in professional settings, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of workplace interactions and gendered expectations.

Ensuring the validity of the findings is crucial in qualitative research, especially in studies exploring subjective experiences and perceptions. One method used to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings is member checking, also known as respondent validation or participant validation (Shenton, 2004). Member checking involved inviting participants to review and provide feedback on summaries

(4) or interpretations of the data collected during the research process (Shenton, 2004). This participatory approach empowers participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the findings, ensuring that their voices are accurately represented in the research outcomes. (Tong et al., 2007)

Basically, after we gather all the information from the focus group discussions, we show the participants a summary of what we understood from what they said. Then, by doing so, we can double-check to make sure that what we learned from the discussions is accurate and truly represents what the participants said. Due to limited time, this specific process was implied to 2 people from each focus group, where they reviewed a small summary of the focus group in that they participated.

3.6 Ethical considerations / Data confidentiality and privacy

Ethical considerations are key in ensuring the integrity and respect for participants' rights throughout the research process. In this study, informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing their voluntary engagement and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without reasoning or consequences. The consent process included providing participants with clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, people involved, potential risks, and benefits. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with their personal information securely stored and only accessible to the research team. To ensure participant privacy, all identifying information is anonymized in the data analysis phase. Participants were assigned unique identifiers, specifically given numbers, ensuring that their responses could not be tracked back to them. Additionally, steps were taken by the moderator to secure the data, such as password-protecting electronic files.

Throughout the study, efforts were taken to mitigate potential risks or discomfort for participants. Specifically, a permissive and non-threatening environment was created during the focus group discussions, where participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives openly. The moderator facilitated respectful and inclusive discussions, encouraging all participants to contribute while ensuring

that no participant's voice dominated the conversation, and everyone had a voice. Sensitivity to participants' emotional well-being was prioritized, with the moderator prepared to address any concerns or sensitive topics that arose during the discussions.

3.7 Limitations

While the findings of this study may offer valuable insights into the experiences of the specific group of participants involved, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations as well. In the conduct of the study, several limitations were encountered that warrant acknowledgment to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research process and its outcomes. Firstly, it is important to note that the desired number of participants has not been met; despite concerted efforts to recruit a diverse range of participants, the actual number fell shorter than desired. These limitations may have impacted the in-depth discussion, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Secondly, the focus groups were conducted online, which introduced certain constraints and considerations. While online platforms offer convenience and accessibility, they may also influence the dynamics of group discussions and participant engagement. It is important to note that technical problems occurred in 2 of the focus groups where cameras or microphones would not work properly which ended in delays. Factors such as these, or distractions from the personal place could have influenced the richness of interactions and the depth of insights. Moreover, it is also important to note that through a face-to-face interaction it is easier to explore the facial expressions and body image of the interviewees.

Furthermore, the study's first aim was to focus on specific professions and industries to gain a deeper understanding of gender dynamics within these contexts. Unfortunately, recruitment efforts encountered challenges in identifying and securing participation from ideal candidates within these targeted sectors.

The complexities of aligning schedules and coordinating participation proved to be a significant barrier, resulting in a narrower participant pool than originally desired.

Despite the limitations identified, efforts were made to maximize the validity of the study through planning, transparent reporting, and reflexivity in analyzing the data. While the findings may offer valuable insights within the context of the participants involved, caution should be exercised in extrapolating conclusions beyond the scope of this study. Future research endeavors may benefit from addressing these limitations by implementing strategies to enhance participant recruitment, and diversity data collection methods, and mitigate the impact of online focus group settings on research outcomes.

The chosen research methodology aligns seamlessly with the research objectives, aiming to achieve a profound understanding of the factors influencing identity concealment and its ramifications for individuals and workplaces in the Cypriot context. Through the immersive exploration facilitated by focus group discussions and thematic analysis, the study aspires to contribute nuances and insights to the ongoing discourse on gender dynamics in professional settings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Themes Identified

Gender dynamics in the workplace are multifaceted and pervasive, influencing various aspects of professional experiences. In this chapter, we delve into the intricate interplay between gender biases, workplace attire norms, emotional expression, and challenges related to motherhood through an analysis of participant narratives, several key themes were identified, highlighting the nuances ways in which gender dynamics exist in professional settings in Cyprus. Throughout the discussion, here are some of the themes that were identified:

- a. **Gender Bias in Meetings:** Participants described instances where their ideas and contributions were undervalued during team meetings, particularly in comparison to their male colleagues. This disparity in the consideration of input based on gender highlights the pervasive nature of gender biases in professional discussions.
- b. **Unwanted Attention and Gender Dynamics:** Participants recounted experiences of unwanted attention from male colleagues, particularly when they were younger. These encounters underscore the discomfort and sense of being singled out based on age and gender, contributing to a broader understanding of workplace dynamics.
- c. **Stigma around Menstruation:** Participants disclosed feeling forced to hide menstrual products due to perceived stigma in the workplace. Comments attributing behavior to menstrual cycles created an uncomfortable environment, highlighting the need to address and dismantle period shaming in professional settings.
- d. **Emotional Expression:** The emotional impact of gender bias was exemplified through participants' accounts of concealing emotions in the workplace. Gender biases against the expression of feelings contribute to a culture where individuals, particularly women, feel pressured to suppress their emotions as a survival strategy.
- e. **Dress Code Pressure:** Participants expressed discomfort with the pressure to adhere to specific dress codes at work, highlighting the challenge of balancing professional appearance with personal comfort and preferences. This theme underscores the broader challenges women face in navigating workplace attire norms.
- f. **Motherhood and challenges:** Participants shared experiences of encountering stereotypes and biases related to their commitment to their careers due to their parental status. Discriminatory practices, such as being passed over for job opportunities, highlighted the impact of motherhood stereotypes on women's professional experiences.

4.2 Findings

Participants consistently conveyed a shared experience where their ideas and contributions often received a tepid response during team meetings. They discerned a recurring pattern wherein suggestions made by male colleagues later in the discussion gained more prominence. This recurrent theme suggested a disparity in how input is considered based on gender, leaving participants with a sense that their contributions are undervalued in comparison to their male counterparts. Through candid reflections and narratives, participants provided valuable insights into nuances and ways in which gender biases manifest in professional settings.

The discussion unfolds with an exploration of workplace attire norms, revealing the subtle yet significant ways in which gendered expectations influence individual choices and experiences. Participants shared their perspectives on dress codes, gender biases, and unwanted attention from male colleagues. Moreover, participants offered their insights as they experience their workplace as working mothers, detailing the difficulties they face in balancing career aspirations and family responsibilities. From encountering stereotypes questioning their commitment to facing discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion, participants elucidated the systemic challenges that working mothers come across in the workplace.

Additionally, the discussion extends to gender dynamics, especially in team meetings, where participants highlighted disparities in the recognition of their ideas and contributions within the team. Through these diverse narratives, this study illuminates the pervasive influence of gender norms and biases on workplace experiences. By unpacking these issues, this dissertation aims to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals in professional settings and advocate for gender equity and inclusivity.

Before diving deeper into the discussion, it's essential to set the stage for the discussions that unfold. The initial phase of the conversation was marked by a friendly and open atmosphere, with participants taking the opportunity to familiarize themselves with each other, following the introduction of the overall theme of the discussion. As the dialogue progressed, participants began to share insights into their respective workplaces, providing context for the subsequent discussions. A recurring theme emerged as participants reflected on the composition of their work environments, with many noting the predominance of male colleagues, despite the weighty topics discussed, the conversation remained calm and engaging throughout. Participants spoke candidly, offering genuine reflections on their experiences while also fostering a supportive environment conducive to open dialogue. Towards the conclusion of the conversation, some individuals expressed a sense of reflection and introspection as they articulated their thoughts and experiences out loud they realized that certain aspects of their workplace dynamics sounded peculiar when vocalized. However, they clarified that those reflections did not typically occupy their thoughts in their everyday lives. Highlighting the significance of the conversation in prompting deeper introspection and awareness of gender dynamics within their professional spheres.

4.2.1 Gender Bias in Meetings

The findings unveiled a pattern wherein three participants felt their ideas and contributions were undervalued during team meetings, particularly in comparison to their male counterparts. While participants shared instances of gender bias in meetings, not all experiences were identical. However, the prevalence of such biases underscores the pervasive nature of gender inequality in professional settings. The phenomenon revealed a recurring theme where suggestions made by male colleagues later in the discussion gained more prominence, creating a sense of disparity in the consideration of input based on gender. Participants across various industries and positions highlighted disparities in how their ideas were valued based on gender. While some experiences were more overt, others were subtle but equally meaningful for this research.

Participant 3 who works in an Audit firm shared:

'In team meetings, I have noticed a pattern where I'll present an idea, and it seems to get a lukewarm response. But then, a male colleague will suggest something similar later in the discussion, and suddenly, it gains a lot more traction. It's like my input is not given the same consideration until it's echoed by a male voice. That's been a recurring experience for me, and it's disheartening because it feels like my contributions are undervalued.'

Participant 5, who also works in an Audit firm also completed: 'I experienced a similar situation before. When we had a big project 2 or 3 years ago when I was a Senior, not a Manager, I was part of a 5 people team and I was the only woman during that time. We had a very difficult situation with our client, and I suggested to give him a call in order to arrange a meeting and discuss the issue. My manager suggested that it was better for a man to take this task and meet with our client'

Participant 1, who works in a Real Estate Firm highlighted the psychological toll of this phenomenon, expressing her thoughts in the same theme:

'It's not just about the ideas; it's about the emotional toll it takes. You start questioning the validity of your thoughts, wondering if it's not the idea but your gender that's causing the lack of enthusiasm.'

Participant 1 reflects on the emotional toll of gender bias in the workplace, highlighting the feeling of being undervalued that goes beyond mere recognition of ideas. Her questioning of whether gender influences the reception of her contributions underscores the pervasive nature of bias. This also explains the importance of addressing biases to foster an inclusive environment where all contributions are valued.

One of the key findings of Eagly and Carli's (2017) work is the presence of biases that influence how individuals evaluate the contributions of men and women in group discussions or team meetings. During the discussion, the previous participants highlighted the impact of gender stereotypes on the assessment of leadership and input in group settings. Participant 11, who works in a technology company added to this thought:

'I have never felt that my thoughts are undervalued but I experienced it through another colleague. I believe that it was because of her younger age. We were sitting in the board room waiting for the meeting to start, and then our boss, who is a man walked in and told her to bring coffee.'

Then, Participant 3 asked, 'Was she a secretary?' and the participant continued 'No, she was just a younger member of the Marketing team we were in. So, she stood up and I could see that she felt weird with the request. Then she came back, and the meeting started. We were all sharing our thoughts and ideas about a new project and the young girl shared a new idea that she had for our social media campaign. Immediately our boss stopped her, and he told her 'I believe that we should follow another person's ideas who is an older member of the company'. To be honest, no one backed up to say that her idea was good. she did not say anything else during the meeting, I could see that she felt that she did not belong to the team.'

Participants 3 and 5 both work in audit firms and hold managerial positions, shared similar experiences of feeling undervalued in team meetings compared to their male colleagues. Participant number 3 highlighted instances where her suggestions were overlooked or received less attention until echoed by a male colleague. Participant 5, explained that her idea was better to get implemented by a man and not her, although she suggested it. It is also very important to highlight the question of Participant 1, which implies that even without realizing it, she suggests that such behavior would be justified toward a secretary, but not toward others, indicating an implicit hierarchy of professions that goes unquestioned,

throughout the discussion. The discussion also falls into the idea of O'Leary's study (1974) which overall explores that women are often socialized to conform to traditional gender roles, valuing affiliative and nurturing qualities. Women's self-esteem and behavior are influenced by societal norms and expectations. Moreover, the study suggests that women may hesitate to engage in behaviors associated with male traits due to a lower sense of self-worth compared to men. (O'Leary, 1974). Understanding and addressing gender bias in meetings is crucial for creating inclusive work environments where all voices are heard and valued, regardless of gender. This theme sets the stage for discussing broader gender dynamics in the workplace, particularly regarding interactions between colleagues.

4.2.2 Unwanted Attention – Gender Dynamics

Participants also recounted experiences of unwanted attention from male colleagues, particularly when they were younger. Instances included inquiries about their whereabouts and companions when out at night. More specifically, participants shared experiences of unwanted attention from male co-workers, particularly during their younger years. While not all participants shared experiences of unwanted attention, it was a significant issue for some. These encounters highlighted gender dynamics that contributed to discomfort and a sense of being singled out based on age and gender. (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990) More specifically, Participant 2, working in another Technology Company recounted feeling uncomfortable with the attention she received from male colleagues:

‘My workplace is mostly filled with men. When I was younger, I noticed a pattern of men trying to give me attention to things because I was a woman. For example, when they saw me out at night in the city where I live, they always asked me where I was going and with whom, and they always highlighted the change in my outfit and makeup when I was at work and when I was out. It made me feel weird because I was so much younger. It's a weird thing to say to a colleague who is 20 years younger than you.’

With this insight, she explained how they remark on changes in her appearance when she was outside of work, which made her feel uneasy, especially given the age difference. This sentiment was echoed by other participants who also experienced similar unwanted attention, more specifically, Participant 3, who works in an Audit firm, chimed in, saying:

‘I am a smoker and when I joined the company they told me that we had a specific spot where we could smoke so we did not smoke inside. Every time I went to smoke, it felt really weird because it was crowded with mostly men, and they were always looking at me weirdly. This could be because we had a noticeable age difference and I was also new in the company. They would ask me questions and sometimes they would get really personal, I stopped going there. This unwarranted attention often made me second-guess my own professionalism. It’s like being young and a woman automatically equates to being perceived as less serious or competent.’

Participant 2 reflects on the impact of unwanted attention from male coworkers, highlighting how it led to self-doubt and a questioning of her professionalism. This experience sheds light on the broader issue of workplace discomfort stemming from age and gender dynamics. The accounts shared underscored the importance of addressing and dismantling gender norms that can negatively affect perceptions of professionalism.

It’s important to mention that while these experiences were common among some participants, not all individuals may have encountered such situations. On the other hand, it is crucial to share that while not all participants shared similar experiences, discussing this theme can feel very personal and difficult. During the conversation, it was evident that some participants felt uncomfortable and chose not to engage in discussing their experiences in this regard.

The accounts of unwanted attention from male colleagues, especially when participants were younger, contribute to a broader understanding of workplace discomfort rooted in age and gender dynamics. The

experiences shared, such as inquiries about personal whereabouts and appearance-related comments, underscore the need for addressing and dismantling these problematic gender norms that can adversely impact the perception of professionalism. (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990)

Participant 2 and Participant 3, both shared experiences of unwanted attention from male colleagues, particularly when they were younger. They described instances where their male colleagues made comments about their appearance or behavior, which made them feel uncomfortable.

Recognition and address of unwanted attention are key for creating a safe and respectful workplace environment where all employees feel comfortable and valued. This theme segues into discussing the broader issue of workplace discomfort rooted in gender dynamics, particularly as it relates to perceptions of professionalism.

4.2.3 Stigma around Menstruation

Participants disclosed feeling compelled to hide personal aspects, specifically menstrual products, due to perceived stigma. Instances were cited where comments about a female colleague's behavior were wrongly attributed to her menstrual cycle. Participant 3 first expressed this thought (Audit Firm employee):

'Even if I don't need to, I always hide my period stuff when I go to the bathroom. I once heard a colleague say to another woman colleague who was not feeling well, "Oh, you are on your period again, that is why you are acting weird"' and it made me feel worse. We learned from a young age that when we go to the bathroom, we need to hide our pads, in our pockets, or on our shoulders so people would not see them, I don't really know the reason, but it is maybe because men believe that our mood changes.'

The revelation that participants feel compelled to hide menstrual products due to perceived stigma suggests a workplace culture perpetuating period shaming. The associated negative comments and attributions of behavior to menstrual cycles create an uncomfortable environment, making it challenging for individuals to openly discuss women's health without fear or judgment. On the other hand, while men have the right to discuss women's health specifically the menstrual cycle, a woman feels the need to hide her products when going to the bathroom or hide her pain during her menstrual cycle. This pervasive period of stigma created a negative and uncomfortable workplace environment.

Participant 4, working in an HR firm, reflected on the broader implications, stating:

'This culture of period shaming not only affects how I navigate the workplace but also perpetuates an environment where discussing women's health is stigmatized and dismissed'.

Participant 3, an Audit firm employee, then shared:

'When I am on my period, I prefer to use my work-from-home days, to feel more comfortable and to avoid comments like "You look tired" or "You look sick".'

The disclosure that participants felt compelled to hide menstrual products due to perceived stigma suggested a workplace culture perpetuating period shaming (McHugh, 2020).

Participants 3 and 4 both discussed the stigma surrounding menstruation in the workplace. They shared experiences of feeling compelled to hide menstrual products and recounted instances where comments or behaviors were wrongly attributed to their menstrual cycles. The stigma around Menstruation leads to discussions about emotional expression and its challenges, that bring individuals to face in navigating societal expectations regarding gendered behaviors and norms.

4.2.4 Emotional Expression

The emotional impact of gender bias is further exemplified through the account of a participant who, after becoming visibly upset during a meeting, felt compelled to hide emotions to align with gendered expectations in the workplace. This suggests a gender bias against the expression of feelings, contributing to a culture where individuals, particularly women, feel pressured to conceal their emotions as a survival strategy. (Eagly and Carli, 2017) Participant 5, a Manager in an Audit firm, shared a personal story of becoming emotionally upset during a meeting, leading to visible discomfort from her male manager. This experience influenced the participant to consciously hide emotions, suggesting a gender bias around the expression of feelings in the workplace. More specifically, she said:

‘Once I was so upset at a meeting that I started crying. I was younger at that time, and my male manager got embarrassed for me; I saw it on his face. He later moved on to tell me that if I wanted to move forward, I needed to keep my straight face and not show emotion. I try to hide my feelings as much as possible from that day; I never show discomfort or stress, and I am a very stressful person in my personal life. I feel like sometimes, I keep this stress and I keep it with me throughout the day when I leave work and go home. When I am extremely anxious about a project, I find myself thinking about it many times, mostly when I go to sleep.

’Participant number 6, who works at a University as a Lecturer, delved into the psychological toll, saying:

‘Hiding your emotions becomes a survival strategy, but it also means suppressing a part of yourself.’ Throughout the discussion, it seemed like hiding this part of a woman's identity feels like a constant negotiation between authenticity and conforming to gendered expectations.’

Participant 5 completed:

‘I feel like for this part, we are expected to act like men. If we take into consideration that women express their emotions more than men, I feel like it’s a thing that we are expected to learn from our male colleagues or managers if we need to develop as professionals.’

The psychological toll of hiding emotions was highlighted and conforming to gendered expectations (Eagly and Carli, 2017). Participant’s 5 experiences of feeling compelled to hide emotions after becoming upset during a meeting shed light on the gender bias against the expression of feelings in the workplace. This aligns with existing research (Eagly and Carli, 2017) on how societal norms and gendered expectations shape emotional expression in professional settings. Participant 5’s insight into feeling expected to emulate male emotional norms for professional development further highlights the influence of gender biases on workplace behavior and advancement opportunities (Eagly and Carli, 2017). This suggests a need for greater awareness and acceptance of diverse emotional expressions in professional environments to foster inclusivity and support individual well-being.

Participant 6’s perspective adds depth to the discussion by emphasizing the psychological toll of concealing emotions in the workplace. She highlights how hiding emotions becomes a survival strategy but also entails suppressing a part of oneself. This insight underscores the internal conflict individuals face when they feel compelled to conform to gendered expectations of emotional expression, sacrificing authenticity in the process. By acknowledging the emotional cost of this conformity, Participant 6 draws attention to the complex interplay between personal identity and societal norms within professional settings (Eagly and Carli, 2017). Additionally, the discussion around concealing emotions resonates with Goffman’s concept of frontstage and backstage behavior, where individuals present a different persona in public (Frontstage) compared to their true selves in private (backstage) (Goffman, 1959). Participant 6’s experience exemplifies the backstage struggle of maintaining emotional composure while navigating the frontstage demands of professionalism in the workplace. (Goffman, 1959) The Emotional Expression

theme sets the stage for discussing dress code pressure and how societal expectations around appearance intersect with gender norms and professional identity.

4.2.5 Dress Code Pressure

Participant number 7, described as a company owner, shared a strategic approach to providing additional resources for employees to purchase specific outfits for meetings, addressing biases related to appearance (Johnson & Murphy, 2017). This practice was motivated by the founder's recognition that personal appearance, particularly attire perceived as more traditionally feminine, could impact professional judgments. This practice aimed to ensure equitable consideration of opinions by mitigating potential biases associated with personal appearance (Johnson & Murphy, 2017). As she said:

‘As an owner of a company, I give my employees extra money when I get them on board to go buy a specific outfit for a meeting. When I first started my company, I realized that when I went to a meeting with a client and I was wearing my clothes, which are mostly pants and non-womanly clothes, I would get comments like I was not professional enough. I do this to prevent comments and to make sure that every opinion gets heard equally’.

Participant number 8, who works at an Insurance Company as a Secretary then dove into the discussion and shared:

‘I get it. It's a strategic move. By investing in how we present ourselves, we are pushing back against the ingrained biases that judge competence based on appearance., I have to go buy clothes specifically for the office—clothes I would not wear daily. I hate wearing skirts and heels, but it is the only thing acceptable at the office, especially when I have a meeting. If I don't have a meeting, I might wear something more casual.’

Participant 6 the completed:

‘As an instructor at the university, I got comments from colleagues that I wear clothes to feel closer to the students because I always wear more casual clothes, never high heels, or fancy dresses. The reason I dress like that is because I want to feel like myself. I always got comments on my clothes, even from colleagues, that I am trying to be closer to my students by wearing nonprofessional clothes, described as more ‘rock’, I heard these comments at the beginning of my career but not as much now.’

Participants expressed a consistent sentiment of feeling compelled to adhere to certain dress codes at work, highlighting a discomfort with the expectation to conform to specific attire (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Powell and Butterfield’s (2015) work on challenges women face in navigating workplace attire norms resonated with participant’s experiences. Participant 5 candidly shared:

‘I always feel like I need to be dressed a certain way at work, I do not feel comfortable, I hate wearing high heels, and especially if I have to meet with a client, I feel like I am forced to wear something I don’t like’.

The last participant emphasized the pressure to adhere to certain dress codes at work, despite feeling uncomfortable with such expectations. Her reflection highlights the ongoing challenge faced by women in balancing professional appearance with personal comfort and preferences as identified by Power & Butterfield, 2015. This observation unveils a challenge where professional expectations clash with personal comfort and preferences, particularly for women navigating workplace attire norms. (Power & Butterfield, 2015). In response to the coordinator’s follow-up question probing about personal preferences in attire, the last participant provided a poignant insight into the external pressures women face in aligning their style with perceived professional norms. Participants’ acknowledgment that their

wardrobe primarily consists of clothes purchased specifically for their job highlights the extent to which individuals may feel compelled to tailor their appearance to meet workplace expectations.

Furthermore, additional participants responded to similar questions with nods or laughter to the question ‘Would you have these preferences in your personal life?’ indicating a shared sentiment of discomfort with their work clothes and a desire for a different approach in style in their personal lives. This collective response underscores the widespread challenge of reconciling professional attire requirements with individual comfort and personal expression. Participant 9, who is a Marketeer at a Retail Company, then lastly shared:

‘I never thought much about it until now, but yeah! Most of my clothes are chosen with work in mind, and specifically, what I have to do that day for example a meeting with a client, it’s like I’ve morphed into this corporate version of myself and now I realize that this is now exactly who I am’.

Participant number 10, who works at another Marketing firm, added a layer to the discussion by sharing a different perspective on workplace attire preferences. She stated:

‘I do not feel like I am forced to wear something I do not like, but all the other women are getting comments from men that they look good and things like ‘You are going to get the deal or close the job’ when they choose maybe a shorter skirt or a more revealing top. I choose not to wear these things that are far away from my liking because I am allowed to wear whatever I feel comfortable in at my workplace.’

This participant’s decision to prioritize personal comfort over societal expectations within the workplace highlights the diverse ways individuals navigate and challenge gendered norms associated with professional appearance. On the other hand, Participant Number 4 said:

‘I work in a very small office, and we do not even go to the office very much. I feel comfortable wearing anything I want, but we are asked to wear more professional clothes when we have a face-to-face meeting. Another colleague of mine got a comment that they need to wear more professional clothes when they come to the office. I know that she did not like the comment, and I see that she went to buy clothes the day after just for the office’.

Participants 5, 8, 9 and 10 expressed discomforts with the pressure to adhere to specific dress codes at work. They highlighted the challenge of balancing professional appearance with personal comfort and preferences, participant 7, took a proactive approach to address biases related to appearance by implementing a standardized dress code for all employees. This contrasts with the experiences of Participant 2 who felt constrained by existing dress code expectations.

Participant 7’s statement regarding implementing a standardized dress code for all employees, consisting of black pants and a white shirt, highlights a top-down approach to uniformity in workplace attire. This approach indicated an organizational emphasis on consistency and professionalism in appearance, potentially aimed at mitigating biases or judgments based on the individual’s choices. The decision to standardize attire aligns with literature suggesting that clear and specific dress codes can help establish a professional environment and mitigate potential biases related to appearance (Smith 2017). On the other hand, Participant 5’s description of the general work dress code, which includes high heels, pants, or a long skirt and preferably a shirt, as she explained, reflects a more traditional and potentially gendered expectation of professional attire. This observation resonates with research highlighting the persistence of gendered norms in workplace dress codes, where women are often expected to adhere to more formal and potentially uncomfortable attire compared to their male counterparts (Power & Butterfield, 2015). The contrast between these two perspectives underscores the variability in workplace dress codes and the impact they can have on employees’ comfort and sense of identity while standardized dress codes may promote consistency and professionalism, they can also perpetuate gendered expectations and limit

individual expression. Organizations must consider the implications of their dress code policies on employee well-being and inclusivity, striving to strike a balance between professionalism and individual comfort (Martin & Bhatti, 2018).

By taking into account the two perspectives, we understand the variability in workplace dress codes and the impact they can have on employees' comfort and sense of identity. While standardized dress codes may promote consistency and professionalism, they can also perpetuate gendered expectations and limit individual expression.

While experiences varied, participants shared a common struggle in balancing professional expectations with personal preferences, particularly regarding attire, expressing discomfort with the pressure to conform to specific dress codes at work, highlighting the tension between professional appearance and personal comfort. Addressing dress code pressure is crucial for fostering a workplace culture that values individual expression and inclusivity, rather than enforcing rigid gender norms. This theme connects to the next one, about motherhood, as they both explain the challenges face in balancing their professional and personal identities within the workplace.

4.2.6 Motherhood and Challenges

Participant 7 expressed the challenge of hiding her identity as a mother in the workplace due to stereotypes associating motherhood with decreased job commitment (Ladge & Humberd, 2011). The study delves into how societal stereotypes portray mothers as being less committed to their jobs compared to non-parents or fathers. These stereotypes often suggest that mother prioritize their family responsibilities over their professional tasks, leading to, as the participant explained, may lead to assumptions about their commitment to their work. Specifically, she shared:

‘I try to hide that I am a mother, sometimes people think that when women are mothers, they stop caring about their job quality and only care about family. I got this comment from a male colleague’.

This underscores the impact of motherhood stereotypes on women’s professional experiences (Ladge & Humberd, 2011). Participant 8, completed:

‘I don’t understand what you mean by that. It is a blessing to be a mother. Being a mother and working simultaneously expresses dedication and multitasking skills.’

Participant number 9, who works at a Retail company as a Marketeer, shared a distressing experience during a job interview, highlighting the impact of motherhood on hiring decisions (Budig & England, 2001):

‘I have been in a similar situation before. A few months ago, I went to an interview for a job I always wanted. the job required me to visit some cafes and bars in the evenings – above my working hours, which was something I did not mind doing, having already seen the job description I was prepared. I attended the meeting, and the interviewer asked me if I was a mother. I said no but I wanted to. After I told him that I wanted to become a mother, their tone changed. They tried to explain that often mothers do not want to leave in the evening and that often they refuse to visit the stores off working hours. Later I heard from a friend that they hired a man for this position due to this reason; that a man would be more flexible to work off working hours and visit shops.’

This aligns with the research indicating that mothers face discrimination in the workplace, affecting hiring decisions and perceptions of commitment (Budig & England, 2001). The participant’s endeavors to conceal her identity as a mother is not merely personal choices; rather, it is a coping mechanism

deployed in response to the harsh realities of workplace stereotypes. The comment from a male colleague, and the interviewer insinuating a potential decline in their commitment to job quality due to motherhood, serves as a stark reminder of the deep-seated biases that persist within professional settings (Ladge & Humberd, 2011) this underscores the profound impact of motherhood stereotypes on women's professional experiences, necessitating a critical examination of these biases to foster a workplace culture that embrace the diverse roles women play both at home and in their careers. Addressing biases related to motherhood is essential for creating a workplace culture that values diversity and supports employees in navigating their professional and personal roles. This theme completes the cycle by looping back to discussions about gender biases and the broader challenges faced by women in professional settings.

4.3 Discussion and Conclusion

These comprehensive findings underline the nuanced challenges of gender dynamics within the workplace. The narratives collectively emphasize the critical need for fostering a workplace environment that is inclusive, gender-equitable, and free from discriminatory practices. These insights deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between gender dynamics and workplace attire. The narratives collectively underscore the need for workplaces to reevaluate dress codes and expectations, ensuring that employees feel empowered to express their authentic selves without facing undue commentary or pressure. The discussion on attire becomes a microcosm of the broader challenges women face in navigating professional spaces where personal identity intersects with gendered expectations. Addressing these nuances issues is pivotal for fostering a workplace culture that respects individual choices and promotes a sense of inclusivity and authenticity.

Drawing upon Goffman's theory, participants' narratives illuminate how individuals strategically manage their self-presentation in the workplace, navigating the tension between their authentic selves and societal expectations (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, Butler's concept of performativity offers insight into how gendered norms shape individuals' performances of identity within professional settings,

influencing their experiences of discrimination and bias (Butler, 1990). Integrating these theoretical frameworks enriches our understanding of the complex interplay between gender dynamics, personal identity, and workplace practices, highlighting the importance of challenging normative expectations and fostering environments where individuals feel empowered to express their true selves.

Participants 2,3,4,7,8 and 10 share commonalities in their experiences related to motherhood. They expressed encountering stereotypes and biases related to their commitment to their careers due to their parental status. Each participant recounted instances where their dedication to their job was questioned or undermined because of their role as a mother. Additionally, they all mentioned experiencing discriminatory practices, such as being passed over for job opportunities or promotions, based on assumptions about their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Despite holding different positions within their organizations, these participants articulated common experiences of navigating workplace dynamics shaped by gender and parental roles.

The literature review in alignment with the empirical findings highlights the relevance and applicability of existing theoretical frameworks and allows us to understand the complexities of gender dynamics within the workplace. Goffman's Self-presentation theory and Butler's performativity concept provided valuable lenses which allowed to interpret participants' narratives regarding the experiences they shared with gender expectations and biases (Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1990). These theoretical frameworks elucidated how individuals strategically navigate their identities in their professional environment, shedding light on the internal and external pressures they face in conforming to societal norms.

Moreover, the participants' narratives align closely with prior research on gender biases and discrimination in the workplace. Participants' accounts of feeling undervalued in meetings, unwanted attention from male colleagues – especially when they were younger -, and stereotypes linked with motherhood, resonate with findings from existing studies (Eagly and Carli, 2017).

These shared experiences underscore the persistent nature of gender inequalities and biases within the organizational environment, emphasizing the need for interventions to promote gender equality and inclusivity.

While there is significant alignment between the literature review and the empirical findings, certain nuances and unique contributions were identified from the participants' narratives. The discussion on dress code pressure revealed the multifaceted ways in which individuals negotiate their professional identities and personal preferences in the workplace, extending beyond traditional gender norms (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Participants' experiences highlighted the tension between adhering to professional expectations and asserting their authenticity, offering key insights into the complexities of workplace attire norms. The concept of front-stage and back-stage behavior, as shared by Goffman (1959), provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. Participants' narratives offer glimpses into both their front-stage performances and back-stage struggles. While they comply with dress code expectations to fill their professional roles, internally, they may experience conflicts between conforming to external standards and expressing their personal preferences, underscoring the intricate interplay between identity and societal expectations within the workplace as the professional tries to strike a balance between professionalism and authenticity. By acknowledging the dualities of front-stage and back-stage behavior, we are able to understand the nuances of ways in which individuals navigate the complexities of workplace attire norms. Similarly, the discussion on stigma around menstruation highlights the ways in which individuals manage their public and private selves in the workplace. Participants' accounts reveal how societal taboos surrounding menstruation change their behaviors and interactions, dividing them between their front-stage and back-stage experiences. While individuals may conceal their menstrual products and suppress any signs of discomfort during working hours, they may privately navigate feelings of shame or embarrassment associated with these matters, due to their experiences and the comments they get from their colleagues, especially males. (Goffman, 1959).

Additionally, the narratives surrounding motherhood and its challenges in the workplace provided firsthand accounts of the discriminatory practices and stereotypes faced by working mothers, complementing existing research on this topic (Ladge & Humberd, 2011; Budig & England, 2001).

Building upon this study and its findings, future research endeavors could explore several avenues to deepen the understanding of gender dynamics and identity management in the workplace. Firstly, it is important to investigate organizational interventions aimed at mitigating gender biases and promoting inclusivity could offer valuable insights into effective strategies for fostering gender equality in diverse workplace settings is very important to understand how a woman's workplace experiences changes, when she feels safe and heard within the professional setting. Furthermore, examining the intersectionality of gender with other dimensions of identity, and more specifically, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of individuals in the workplace.

Concluding, the comprehensive examination of gender dynamics and identity management within the workplace offers valuable insights into the interplay between individuals' experiences, societal norms, and organizational practices. by drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Goffman's concept of front-stage and back-stage (1959) and Butler's (1990) performativity, and insights from the empirical research, we managed to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding gendered expectations, professional identity, and workplace culture. The narratives shared by participants underscore the pervasive dress code pressure, stigma, and stereotypes. While the literature review provided a key foundation for understanding these dynamics, the empirical findings offer real-time perspectives that enrich our understanding and provide context-specific experiences. it is important for organizations to recognize and address these issues to foster an inclusive and equal workplace where all individuals feel valued, heard, respected, and empowered to express their authentic selves. By implementing supportive policies, flexible work, and promoting awareness and empathy, diversified environments and well-being organizations will be created. Future research should continue to explore

the intersections of gender, identity, and workplace dynamics, further deepening our understanding of this matter.

Elena Christou

5. References

- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20-39.
- Barbour, R. S. (2007). *Doing focus groups*. Sage.
- Baumeister, R. F. (2010). The self. *Advanced social psychology: The state of the science*, 139-175.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Baumeister, R. F., Twenge, J. M., & Nuss, C. K. (2002). Effects of social exclusion on cognitive processes: Anticipated aloneness reduces intelligent thought. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 817–827. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.4.817>
- Beals, K. P., Peplau, L. A., & Gable, S. L. (2009). Stigma management and well-being: The role of perceived social support, emotional processing, and suppression. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 35(7), 867-879.
- Budig, M. J., & England, P. (2001). The wage penalty for motherhood. *American Sociological Review*, 66(2), 204-225.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Chrobot-Mason, D., Button, S. B., & DiClementi, J. D. (2001). Sexual identity management strategies: An exploration of antecedents and consequences. *Sex roles*, 45, 321-336.
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 55, 591-621.
- Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & Maclean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(1), 78-95.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (2017). *On intersectionality: Essential writings*. The New Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

- DeArmond, S., Tye, M., Chen, P. Y., Krauss, A., Apryl Rogers, D., & Sintek, E. (2006). Age and gender stereotypes: New challenges in a changing workplace and workforce. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(9), 2184-2214.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- DeWall, C. N., & Bushman, B. J. (2011). Social acceptance and rejection: The sweet and the bitter. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 256–260.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411411417545>
- Dozier, R. (2017). Female masculinity at work: Managing stigma on the job. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 41(2), 197-209.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business Press.
- Erving Goffman, the presentation of self in everyday life (1956). *Doubleday Anchor Books*.
- Fox, A. B., & Quinn, D. M. (2015). Pregnant women at work: The role of stigma in predicting women's intended exit from the workforce. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(2), 226-242.
- Goffman E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the management of a spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster (Original work published 1963).
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Griffin, P. (1991). Identity management strategies among lesbian and gay educators. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 4(3), 189-202.
- Harrell, M. C., & Bradley, M. (2009). Data collection methods: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
- Hewlin, P. F. (2003). And the award for best actor goes to...: Facades of conformity in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, 28(4), 633-642.

- Holman, E. G., Ogolsky, B. G., & Oswald, R. F. (2022). Concealment of a sexual minority identity in the workplace: The role of workplace climate and identity centrality. *Journal of homosexuality*, 69(9), 1467-1484.
- Johnson, K. R., & Murphy, K. R. (2017). The role of appearance in the biasing of job-related judgments. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 90(1), 13-32.
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol. 1, pp. 231-262). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kahn, J. H., & Hessling, R. M. (2001). Measuring the tendency to conceal versus disclose psychological distress. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 20(1), 41-65.
- Keplinger, K., & Smith, A. (2022). Stigmatization of women in the workplace: Sources of stigma and its consequences at the individual, organizational and societal level. In *Diversity in action* (pp. 23-38). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 16(1), 103-121.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Sage publications.
- Ladge, J. J., & Humberd, B. K. (2011). The maternal wall and beyond: New directions for research on gender and work. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(3), 431-447.
- Larson, D. G., & Chastain, R. L. (1990). Self-concealment: Conceptualization, measurement, and health implications. *Journal of Social and Clinical psychology*, 9(4), 439-455.
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34-47.
- Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 68(3), 518.
- Liamputtong, P. (2013). *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences*. Springer.
- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 363-385.

- Major, B., & Gramzow, R. H. (1999). Abortion as stigma: cognitive and emotional implications of concealment. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 77(4), 735.
- McHugh, M. C. (2020). Menstrual shame: Exploring the role of 'menstrual moaning'. *The Palgrave handbook of critical menstruation studies*, 409-422.
- Mignault, M. C., Kerr, L. G., & Human, L. J. (2023). Just be yourself? Effects of an authenticity manipulation on expressive accuracy in first impressions. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 14(5), 562-571.
- Miller, L. C., Berg, J. H., & Archer, R. L. (1983). Openers: Individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44(6), 1234.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (Vol. 16). Sage Publications.
- Newheiser, A. K., Barreto, M., & Tiemersma, J. (2017). People like me don't belong here: Identity concealment is associated with negative workplace experiences. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(2), 341-358.
- O'Leary, V. E. (1974). Some attitudinal barriers to occupational aspirations in women. *Psychological bulletin*, 81(11), 809.
- Pachankis, J. E., Mahon, C. P., Jackson, S. D., Fetzner, B. K., & Bränström, R. (2020). Sexual orientation concealment and mental health: A conceptual and meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(10), 831.
- Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (2015). Gender, gender identity, and aspirations to top management. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 30(6), 408-428.
- Power, J. L., & Butterfield, L. D. (2015). Gendered norms in workplace dress codes: Effects on job satisfaction and professional image. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(2), 121-132.
- Ragins, B. R. (2008). Disclosure disconnects: Antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(1), 194-215.
- Ryan, A. M., King, D. D., Elizondo, F., & Wadlington, P. (2020). Social identity management strategies of women in STEM fields. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 93(2), 245-272.
- Sandberg, S. (2015). *Lean in-women, work and the will to lead*.

- Schlenker, B. R. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Brooks/Cole.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63-75.
- Smart, L., & Wegner, D. M. (1999). Covering up what can't be seen: concealable stigma and mental control. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 77(3), 474.
- Smith, A. B. (2017). The impact of dress code policies on organizational culture and employee behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 142(1), 75-86.
- Smith, J. E., von Rueden, C. R., van Vugt, M., Fichtel, C., & Kappeler, P. M. (2021). An evolutionary explanation for the female leadership paradox. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 9, 676805.
- Stead, V. (2017). Belonging and women entrepreneurs: Women's navigation of gendered assumptions in entrepreneurial practice. *International Small Business Journal*, 35(1), 61-77.
- Stevens, R. A. (2004). Understanding gay identity development within the college environment. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(2), 185-206.
- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus groups: Theory and practice* (Vol. 20). Sage publications
- Swann Jr, W. B., Johnson, R. E., & Bosson, J. K. (2009). Identity negotiation at work. *Research in organizational behavior*, 29, 81-109.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall.
- Taynor, J., & Deaux, K. (1973). Gender stereotypes and social judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26(1), 142-154.
- Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349-357.
- Uysal, A., Lee Lin, H., & Raymond Knee, C. (2010). The role of need satisfaction in self-concealment and well-being. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 36(2), 187-199

Van den Bosch, R., & Taris, T. (2018). Authenticity at work: Its relations with worker motivation and well-being. *Frontiers in communication, 3*, 21.

Van Laar, C., Meeussen, L., Veldman, J., Van Grootel, S., Sterk, N., & Jacobs, C. (2019). Coping with stigma in the workplace: Understanding the role of threat regulation, supportive factors, and potential hidden costs. *Frontiers in psychology, 10*, 1879.

Wegner, D. M. (1994). Ironic processes of mental control. *Psychological Review, 101*, 34–52.

Wessel, J. L., Hagiwara, N., Ryan, A. M., & Kermond, C. M. (2015). Should women applicants “man up” for traditionally masculine fields? Effectiveness of two verbal identity management strategies. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 39*(2), 243-255.

Yu, R., & Sun, S. (2013). To conform or not to conform: spontaneous conformity diminishes the sensitivity to monetary outcomes. *PloS one, 8*(5), e64530.

Elena Christou

6. Appendices

(1) Confidentiality and Consent Form for Research Population

Title of Research: Identity Management by Women in the Cypriot Workplace

Researcher: (Researcher's Name)

Supervisor: (Supervisor's Name)

Contact Details: (Researcher's email address and Phone Number).

Date and time: Saturday, the 13th of January 2024 at 10:00 (Via Teams)

Dear (Participant's Name)

You are invited to participate in my research, which aims to explore the identity management strategies that women use in the Cypriot Workplace. Your participation is valuable for achieving the goals of the study.

Conditions of Participation:

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity: All information you provide will be strictly confidential. The data will be analyzed, used for research purposes, and in 6 months after the completion of the study, will be destroyed.

Demographics:

Name and Surname:

Current Location:

Current Job Industry:

Current Job Position:

Are you a parent? :

Consent:

I Consent to participate in the research and understand the terms and conditions of participation.

I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary.
- I can withdraw at any time without any consequences.
- Discussions will be tape-recorded.
- the data I will provide will be kept confidential and used only for the study in an anonymized manner.
- I commit to upholding the confidentiality of the discussions and the anonymity of other participants.

Name and Surname:

Email address:

Signature:

Date:

Please make sure that you have a working microphone and camera on the device you will use to participate and a good internet connection. You will receive an invitation for the meeting in the next hours to join the online meeting.

Elena Christou

(2) Participant Information Sheet

Researcher's Name:

Contact email:

Contact Phone:

Study Description:

We are conducting a research study focusing on the experiences of Cypriot working women across various industries in Cyprus. The primary aim of this study is to explore how women present themselves at work and the factors affecting their behaviors and experiences. We are seeking to better understand how women manage and embody their gender identities, along with other significant identities, while at work and to explore the factors shaping different identity management strategies, as well as their consequences. The study is done for the purposes of the completion of the Master's degree in Human Resource Management at the University of Cyprus. The research is supervised by Dr. (supervisor's name)

Discussion Process:

The study will involve a series of focus group discussions with participants from different industries, to gather insights, experiences, and opinions on the topics being studied. These discussions will be conducted in a group setting and will be facilitated by the researcher. You will discuss with other women regarding your everyday experiences at work and how you interact with others, how you dress, behave, and overall, how you choose to express yourself.

Participant eligibility: we are looking for participants who meet the following criteria.

- At least 5 years of experience in the same industry

- Must work in audit/accounting firms, the Technology industry, or University as an instructor.
- Identify as a woman.

Duration:

Each focus group session is expected to last for about 1,5 hours and will be held online in December 2023 to January 2024. More specific details will be agreed with participants.

Your participation will contribute to valuable research, while you get the chance to share your insights and experiences on these topics. Participation will be a learning experience and a chance to engage and meet with other professionals.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no anticipated physical risks associated with participating in this discussion. Some participants may find it emotionally challenging to discuss personal experiences, so please consider your comfort level before deciding to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

All focus group discussions will be recorded. We will ensure your anonymity during the discussions. All data collected will be anonymized, and no personally identifiable information will be disclosed in the final research report. Please remember to respect the confidentiality of the other participants as well. You will not be asked about where you work (Name of Company) during the study.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in these discussions is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and may withdraw at any time without providing a reason. If you decide to participate, you may skip any questions that you are uncomfortable answering.

Consent: If you decide to participate in the focus group discussion, we will ask you to provide written consent to participate in the study.

If you wish to participate in the study, please send an email to (researcher's email address), including your first and last name, and your phone number so you can get contacted by the researcher.

If you have any more questions or need further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher: (Researcher's name) at (Researcher's email address) or (Researcher's Phone number).

Thank you for considering participation in this research. Your insights are valuable to our work.

(3) Interview Guide

Good morning and thank you all for participating in this focus group discussion. I am very excited to have this discussion with you and I am sure that in the end it will help us all to think about some things deeper. I would like to start our meeting with an introduction. Please share your name, job position, and something that you enjoy doing outside of work.

Our goal today is to have an honest and interesting discussion. There are no right or wrong answers, and every response contributes a little to the completion of this research. Please feel comfortable, and express anything you think about the topics. There is no specific order for you to follow in order to speak. You can jump in at any point in the conversation. Throughout the discussion, I want you to think about your workplace as a whole. When we refer to ways of expression. Consider various aspects of your daily professional life such as how you dress, speak or generally express yourselves, even what you decide to discuss with colleagues.

Work culture:

I would like to start the discussion about the culture in your organization In relation to gender and roles.

How do you experience this as a woman?

Is the organization you work a place that allows anyone to present themselves as they wish, without pressure?

Do you believe that your workplace is male-dominated?

As women, do you think that there are specific cultural expectations or norms in your work environment?

How do you think gender roles as perceived in your workplace?

Existing in my workplace as a woman

How do you feel as a woman in your workplace during working hours? Are there any moments or aspects that stand out and make your experience unique?

Do you think that in your professional environment, you experience things differently just because you are a woman?

As women in the organizations you work for, what do you pay most attention to regarding how you present yourselves at work and why?

Including your appearance (clothes) are there any other aspects that you take care of more seriously in your workplace? Such as hiding your political preferences, parental status, or sexuality?

What drives you to choose your final office outfit?

Generally, does your office appearance consist of clothes that you would wear in your everyday life?

What influences your choices? Why do you make these specific choices? Do you think there would be a different reaction if your appearance was not what you chose at the end?

Differences in private life vs the workplace (frontstage – backstage)

How aware are you of the distinction between personal and professional life, especially regarding your external appearance and overall way of expression and identity? Can you share some thoughts on this topic and how these two parts of your life differ?

What distinguishes the more personal part of your life from the more professional part regarding your external appearance and general way of expression and behavior?

What differentiates the professional from the personal environment that makes you behave differently?

Do you think that if you presented yourself at work as you present it in your personal life, there would be differences in how you are treated?

Decision – Making in Identity Management

How do you believe that gender and social roles affect your decision to reveal or hide parts of your identity at work? Can you provide some examples and discuss them?

Can you share an experience about how you decide to reveal or hide aspects of your identity in the workplace? Are there specific situations or moments that lead you to make these decisions?

Describe an incident in your professional life where you felt the need to hide parts of your identity as a woman. What factors influenced your decision?

Are there specific concerns expectations or experiences that lead you to make such a decision?

How do you think the decision to reveal or hide parts of your identity has affected the overall work environment and interactions with colleagues? Have you noticed changes in individuals or situations that have behaved accordingly?

As we come to an end, I would like to ask if there is anything you would like to add or highlight, or something that impressed you from the discussion,

Thank you for your time and for sharing your valuable thoughts and experiences. It was truly a very interesting discussion and I appreciate your time and honesty.

It is clear that every one of you has a unique and significant contribution to the understanding of the subject and the completion of this research. I wish you all the best and thank you again for your contribution.

(4) Discussion Summary

I confirm that:

During the discussion, all the participants were respectful and agreed to share their experiences openly.

some of the things discussed:

Participants consistently conveyed that their ideas and contributions went unnoticed during team meetings, while similar suggestions made by male colleagues were more accepted. For example, one participant noted that in team meetings they suggested something and it gained attention only when it was echoed by a man. Participants also recounted experiences of unwanted attention from male colleagues, especially in their younger ages, as another participant mentioned, it was mostly about their appearance in and out of the office. Moreover, participants also discussed that they feel that they need to hide their personal staff, apart from one participant who said that they feel okay to do so because it is a natural personal need. Overall, the discussion was honest and the participants felt safe to express the problems they face in their workplace.

Name:

Signature: