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An Exploration of Sexual Discrimination Phenomenon at the Workplace from the Victim's Perspective in the Lived Experience: The Case of Hospitality Industry in the United States

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Abstract

There are numerous companies in the hospitality sector that have struggled with employee motivation, engagement, and consistency. One of the main factors is equality between the employees in terms of sexuality. It is one of the keys to help boost productivity, develop employee commitment and attract more competent talent. However, females are frequently discriminated against in comparison to their male colleagues due to different barriers and limitations. Also, homosexual discrimination is not really mentioned when it comes to gender inequality. Therefore, the primary goal of this research is to explore and comprehend the perspectives of those who have faced sexual discrimination. As a result, the study can help to identify and raise awareness of sexual discrimination in hospitality firms. With that being said, by using a qualitative approach this research paper will obtain the experience from participants throughout gender's bias, social identity theory and the concept of glass ceiling. Furthermore, phenomenological interviews will be conducted through open-ended questions which will support the examination of the issues and understand the victims' perspective of justice. As the findings in the following research, different examples of sexual harassment, verbal and physical violence occurs in the victims' daily life, and most of them are women and homosexuals. Additionally, female and homosexual employees being discriminated against in various contexts such as wage gap, challenges of women in order to achieve success, sexist behaviour from colleagues, supervisors and guests. It is clear that the primary factor contributing to the issue of sexual discrimination is the close relationship between structural policies that have an influence on both men and women in different ways and cultural conceptions of gender which is stereotyping within society. Therefore, in general, hospitality organisations in United States need to educate their firm about gender equality, establish rules to protect their employees from discrimination, and raise awareness within the organisation not just for the company's side, but also the customers' perspective.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background information

Firstly, the main aim of this research paper is to investigate and understand the perspective of individuals who had experienced sexual discrimination. Therefore, the research can define and raise awareness of sexual discrimination in hospitality organisations.

Secondly, the researcher will be focusing on (1) identifying the social identity theory and explain its impact on gender-based inequality and the challenges that individuals need to face in their working environment; (2) analysing the workplace context in terms of different situations that occur in the hotel organisation; (3) investigating on the

participants' experience by phenomenological interview method in order to have a broader understanding and awareness of this controversial phenomenon.

In this case, the United States will be chosen as the destination for this research paper since various explorations of gender barriers cases in the hospitality industry have been found in this country. However, the researcher will be focusing on the destinations where there were special cases and valid information found. As in a study of Agrusa (2002, cited by Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022), employees of a restaurant in New Orleans believed that sexual harassment encountered more often in restaurant industry. From this case, the researcher wants to identify what the possible cause of this phenomenon is, and furthermore the prevention of these issues. Likewise, it is extremely significant to understand clearly the root of the problem in order to raise awareness and educate everyone in their workplace.

1.2 Rationale of study

According to Dashper (2020), in the hospitality industry, there are a lot of organisations that have been struggling with staff motivation, engagement and consistency from the employees' side. Because of this reason, VantageCircle (2021) thinks that equality between the employees in terms of sexuality is one of the keys to help boost productivity, develop employee commitment and attract more competent talent. As in Bobbitt-Zeher's (2011) study, women's experiences at work have been affected by gender inequality. Moreover, because of various obstacles and limits, females are often discriminated against compared to their male colleagues (Adebayo, 2015). However, in general, there are not many authors or researchers investigating about homosexual inequality.

Nevertheless, La Lopa's and Gong's (2020) study, in which they researched about Sexual Harassment of Hospitality Internship in United States. The purpose of exploring victims' perspective by investigating through hospitality interns is to obtain a better approach and accuracy for results and clarification. On the other hand, Ineson et al. (2013) studied problems that cause sexual discrimination and solutions for these issues. Since there are not many papers directly linking these two elements, the author will be connecting the two most important parts of the research together: sexual discrimination and victims' experience. Since the United States has diverse race, sexualities and cultures, the author's main aim is to investigate more cases of victims' experiences in the field of hospitality in terms of sexual discrimination and inequality. Furthermore, this research's potential is to investigate the cases that happened in the hospitality industry in the United States. Throughout that, it also provides a clearer explanation of sexual discrimination's

root based on social identity's impacts, gender bias and inequality. Likewise, this research paper contributes accurate definition and information in order to benefit the readers in identifying the issues, emphasising and acknowledging the possible situations that could occur in the industry. Therefore, the author can raise the readers' awareness about these ongoing issues, and also educate them about respecting and empowering each other in order to create a friendly, healthy and equal work environment.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the phenomenon of sexual discrimination at the workplace from the victims' perspectives of their lived experience: The case of the hospitality industry in the United States.

Following objectives serve as support to achieve the aim:
1)   To point out the social identity theory's effects and emphasise the challenges that employees face in the hotel industry.
2)   To explore the workplace context in regards to the inequality experience situation.
3)   To investigate the victims' experience and opinions of sexual discrimination in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

2.1.1 The phenomenon of sexual discrimination and the social identity theory

According to Najcevska (2015), discrimination is a complex social phenomenon, in fact, it can be seen clearly through institutions, norms and values. Clearly, as Brondolo et al. (2019) points out, discrimination is a negative way of treating individuals and groups of individuals unequally depending on their characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender and race; for instance, managers making sexist jokes about their colleagues in the workplace. Regarding discrimination in the workplace, a study of Rosette (2006, cited by Colella and King, 2018) showed that the most familiar cases can be normally found is one specific group of people who are treated so much better and favourable than others. Besides, the main reasons for the increasing amount of discrimination phenomenon in work environment are "multilevel and diverse, ranging from the individual level (e.g., stereotyping) to the societal level (e.g., cultural norms)" (Colella and King, 2018 p.2).

There are various ranges of discrimination in the world, however, in this research, it will focus on discrimination in terms of sexualities and genders. Smith and Ingram's

study (2004, cited by Dawson, 2005) defines sexual orientation discrimination as a general area of people making jokes, offensive statements and questions toward individuals who are homosexual. A study of Arabsheibani et al., and Lubensky et al., (2004, cited by Ineson et al., 2013) claims that because of ego defensive behaviour, ignorance, stigmatisation, the prejudice and stereo-typing of LGBT in societies and workplaces, the situations were not changed and improved . As in a study of Hogg (2016, cited by Ineson et al., 2013), this phenomenon in the hospitality industry can be indicated through social identity theory; in this case, it will be seen through knowledge, awareness and behaviour of interactions between LGBT and heterosexual employees in their organisation.

As Tajfel (1978, cited by Leaper, 2011) points out, social identity indicates individuals' characteristics which are formed according to the basis of their particular social group's members. Therefore, social identity theory expresses how it affects individuals' ways of thinking and behaving relating to their surrounding groups as well as outsiders. In conclusion, when individuals believe membership to be essential to their notion in a particular group and have deep emotional connections with the group, social identity becomes the most effective (Leaper, 2011).

Regarding sexual harassment, it is known as one of the ongoing issues needs to be expressed. Dawson (2005, p.46) stated that discrimination also covers sexual harassment, it is describes as an unwelcome sexual "request for favours" and different spoken or physical behaviours of a "sexual nature" represents sexual harassment. La Lopa and Gong (2020) claimed that the term of sexual harassment explains a series of inappropriate actions from a point of sexual aspect, or based on gender which is offensive and humiliating to the victims. In this case, this issue negatively leaves employees either direct or indirect effects, and it also causes a huge impact on individuals' work performance. In conclusion, sexual harassment turns the work place into a stressful, terrifying and toxic environment (Dawson, 2005).

House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2017, cited by La Lopa and Gong, 2020) states that women could easily become an object of being sexually harassed when they are out in public, for example when they are "walking alone, pursuing a career, chasing a dream or earning a college degree". As in a study of Boland (2005), annually, there are ten thousands of women and a few thousands of men report their sexual harassment experience to their organisations and agencies.

2.1.2 Gender bias and gender-based inequality in hospitality industry: The concept of Glass Ceiling and its outcome issues

Regarding the definition of glass ceiling, this phrase was found in the 1970s in the United States (Wirth, 2001). As in Kagan's (2021) exploration, it is a metaphor that explains an invisible barrier preventing a certain person from getting chances for promotions or getting a higher level in an organisation. Meanwhile, according to Clevenger and Singh (2013), "glass ceiling" is also considered as discrimination based on gender, especially toward women and minority racial groups. They have been paid unequally low, and met a lot more difficulties than their counterparts on the way of obtaining promotion opportunities for higher level positions in work hierarchy (Hester, 2007 cited by Clevenger and Singh, 2013).

Gender bias is not just an issue or against human equal rights, it is also a chance of losing the human potential of the world. With that being said, disproving women equal rights means denying half of the world's population an opportunity to fulfil life at its best (The Global Goals, n.d.).

Gender-based inequalities are related to social, political, historical contexts (Said, 2005, cited by Morgan and Pritchard, 2019); and cultural, structural, interactional foundations in terms of gender stereotypes (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Therefore, this has affected the associations between men and women through the differences of history and culture (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019).

Regarding cultural foundations related to gender discrimination, it is said that there are varieties of differences between descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes. According to Burgess and Borgida (1999), descriptive stereotypes refer to beliefs of what a specific gender's characteristic has, whereas, prescriptive stereotypes include beliefs of what a specific gender's characteristic should have. Because of this reason, these issues bring a negative influence to female and male's mindsets and behaviours (Ridgeway and England, 2007; Reskin, 2000; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004, cited by Bobbbitt-Zeher, 2011).

The second root of sex discrimination is structures, policies and practices in an organisation (Ridgeway and England, 2007 cited by Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Although in some countries, they have made a progress recently, the "numerical dominance" of the women "is not reflected in the role they occupy, either in the leadership of the sector itself or of its educational base" (Baum, 2013; Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, cited by Morgan and Pritchard, 2019, p.38). Besides, in a study of Joy (2000, cited by Adebayo, 2015), it says that men were paid more than women in

their first jobs while women earned lower amounts of salary, so it would be the reason why it is hard for women to catch up with men's income in their careers. Because of that, it could be a possibility to explain the gender wage gap. In fact, women have been taking over a major percentage of the world's hospitality industry.

2.2 Review of existing empirical research

2.2.1 Different experiences of sexual harassment

In La Lopa and Gong's (2020) study, they did a descriptive research to explore the experienced sexual harassment during the students' internship in the United States. As well as Worke et al. (2021) collected information by doing a qualitative study, in order to discover the individual and group opinions about women's sexual harassment experience in Ethiopia. Therefore, by using qualitative method, Worke et al. (2021) conducted interviews from key informer such as supervisors, managers, cashiers and customers in order to increase a deep understanding of women sexual harassment problems in hospitality work environment. In this study, the author explained typical issues such as risk possible factors from customers, victims, organisation, society, peer and policy, which are the potential causes of sexual harassment incidents. Furthermore, Worke et al. (2021) and Sainato (2023) also mentioned various forms of consequences of this problem which are related to work, health and physical health outcomes. Poulston (2008) claimed that these issues can bring negative influence and image to the organisation; low productivity in the work environment; and it is a waste of time and money for training and recruiting new staff in the organisation.

As a result, Center for American Progress discovered that from 2005 to 2015, in the United States, there are more than 14% of the 41,250 sexual harassment cases found mostly in the whole food service and hospitality industry (Meyer, 2017 cited by La Lopa and Gong, 2020). In fact, Langelan (1993, cited by La Lopa and Gong, 2020) illustrated that men have been using their economic power, gender-based platform, level in terms of authority as a tool of making inappropriate sexual access, developing male domination and creating harassment actions in order to get rid women out of male employment.

Regarding discrimination, the target of these issues is not just women or one particular gender, it also involves other communities such as LGBTQ. As in Ineson et al.'s (2013) qualitative research, by collecting answers from 101 students in hospitality during their 12 months internships in different countries. The victims were not just only straight females but also gay males experiencing personal remarks, verbal and sexual abuse (Ineson et al., 2013). Therefore, it is a clear fact that in the hospitality

workplace, people are often stereotyped homosexually which leads to homophobia.

In conclusions, Worke et al. (2021) stated that sexual harassment is not a rare phenomenon in hospitality industry. It is argued that stereotypical expressions and the core notions of gender ideology is the cause of sexual discrimination (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2013). However, since various norms of cultures and societies seriously affect inequality, it is extremely challenging and almost impossible for the government or particular organisation to produce a whole different change in order to bring an equal work environment (Barrett, 2004). Nevertheless, in the future, Ineson et al. (2021) advised to use qualitative methods to develop the cases of different experiences of male employees to give chances for exploring gender differences in terms of discrimination.

2.2.2 Women's challenges and obstacles in terms of female leadership in hospitality industry

Clevenger and Singh (2013) used online questionnaires to find out that in the United States, hospitality owned the third largest amount of workers in 2008, which was the major significant development of the economy. Furthermore they added that in the middle of the last 100 years, women have been making an effort to accomplish positions in the field of management. In the end, Clevenger and Singh (2013) states that women in higher management positions have been still a small percentage among the increasing number of women in hospitality. Because of those reasons, women tend to put more pressure on themselves, and discrimination does not just come from the society, but it also comes from inside women's mindset.

As a result, one of the participants thinks that women are doubting and being hard on their own abilities (Dashper, 2020). Moreover, in the case when women contribute leadership behaviours, they are more likely judged as bossy, bitchy, arrogant and cold (Weyer, 2007; Mavin and Grandy, 2012 and Kelan, 2013 cited by Dashper, 2020). However, Bakker (2007) also stated that women do not only struggle with those difficulties only, but also their personal lives have a huge impact on their career.
On the other hand, a different study of Vikinas and Cartan (1997, cited by Adebayo, 2015), by applying descriptive approach and surveys, behaviours of male and female were examined in this study. It was proved that there was "no significant difference" between them, in terms of management. According to Adebayo (2015), regarding behaviour and attitudes, it is more likely to have an increasing number of similarities between men and women than the differences in management positions. At last, as the observation from their supervisors, it is stated that men and women had an equal effect at work and

there were no dissimilarities between them according to their boss, peers or staff (Vikinas and Cartan, 1997 cited by Adebayo, 2015).

Overall, Polachek et al. (2015) states, the gender wage gap is around 22% all over the world, the complexity of gender inequalities is not a rare phenomenon in the hospitality industry. Whereas Adebayo (2015) says even though there is no significant difference between male and female in management level, females still have a lot of boundaries and limits in the workplace. However, hospitality organisations ought to develop their internal business systems in order to create a better environment which does not have limits or obstacles for employees, especially female employees.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the theories and their applications in the hospitality industry. Firstly, it has been explored that sexual discrimination just does not happen to only females but also homosexual employees. Secondly, there are mostly results collected from hospitality interns and employees from different countries. Therefore, a lot of arguments and different opinions have been found. Thirdly, a certain percentage of women have been found to be treated unfairly, and many of the obstacles in women's career are explained. Finally, to fulfil the aim of this paper, qualitative is highly recommended to be conducted students' background and perspective from the United States in terms of discrimination in hospitality work environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Aim and objectives

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the phenomenon of sexual discrimination at the workplace from the victims' perspectives of their lived experience: The case of the hospitality industry in the United States.

Following objectives serve as support to achieve the aim:
-        To point out the social identity theory's effects and emphasise the challenges that employees face in the hotel industry.
-        To explore the workplace context in regards to the inequality experience situation.
-        To investigate the victims' experience and opinions of sexual discrimination in the workplace.

3.2 Research design

In order to elaborate and develop the paper according to the aim and objectives, interpretivism is the paradigm that the researcher chooses to apply into this paper since the author is seeking for beliefs, values, understanding and meaning of a social phenomena (sexual discrimination) through human experiences and social activities (Smith and Heshsius, 1986 cited by Hussain et al., 2013). Furthermore, through this paradigm, the researcher can explore participants' perceptions, receive the information, study the descriptions and develop deeper knowledge during observing the cases (Creswell, 2007). According to Schwandt (1994, cited by Hassain et al., 2013), the main purpose of interpretivism is searching for complexity, details and norms in daily life of individuals or social phenomena. Therefore, the research decides that the qualitative approach suits the proposed study the most. Dawson (2009) claims that qualitative research examines individuals' opinions, reactions and experiences through different methods in form of interviews or focus groups. Additionally, this approach tends to fully obtain points of view from participants.

Since the author seeks to examine the issues and understand the victims' perspectives of justice, a phenomenological design will be applied to this study to accomplish the goals of this paper (Creswell, 2007). As Creswell points out, phenomenology is a study of lived experience of individuals. In addition, it significantly includes textural and structural description in order to indicate what and how the participants experience the phenomenon in terms of conditions, situations and context.

First of all, according to Creswell (2007), qualitative approach allows the author to collect primary data from open-ended interviews based on true stories of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon – gender inequality, sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Overall, this approach is not necessarily related to numbers, it is normally described and formed in words (Veal, 2018). In this case, by using a transformative worldview, different problematic elements will be specifically addressed (Creswell, 2014). Indeed, this philosophical worldview gives the participants chances to elevate their perception; address the social issues such as empowerment, inequality and domination (Creswell, 2014).

Second of all, victims' experiences in these incidents from the United States hospitality field will be collected from open-ended interviews based on true stories. With that being said, every single perspective, opinions and experiences will be analysed and investigated by the researcher.

Finally, the methodology of qualitative generates the rich data in order to explore deeper this phenomenon by open-ended interviews. Therefore, it will help people acknowledge how serious the level of this issue has

affected the work environment and the hotel brands' prestige. Furthermore, this approach will provide materials to develop the investigations of solutions for these problems by applying diversity management (Ineson et al., 2013).

3.3 Sampling

According to the aim of the research paper and the choice of qualitative method, this research will be applying non-probability sampling since the research paper was discussing and discovering about natural phenomena (Taderhoost, 2016). Tahderhoost (2016) said that non probability sampling usually occurs with qualitative research, moreover, it focuses more on smaller strategy samples. However, based on the aim, it is challenging to collect information from the participants for investigation since sexual discrimination is a controversial topic. Therefore, the researcher will be using snowball sampling to collect information from the participants. As Yin (2003) stated that snowball sampling is a non-random sampling strategy in which a few instances are used to urge more cases to participate in the research, hence boosting sample size. This method is best suited for tiny groups that are difficult to reach to their own closed nature, such as secret societies and hidden professions. Therefore, it is perfectly suitable for this paper since this method will help encourage the participants to engage with the investigation more. According to Malhotra and Birks (2006) one of the flaws of the snowball sampling method that should be considered is the time consumption. Other than that, to support the usage of this method even further one of its strengths is to estimate rare characteristics which would be very useful in the case of this study (Malhotra and Birks, 2006).

3.4 Data collection

The data will be collected through phenomenological interviews. In order to achieve collecting the information from the participants in this case, a phenomenological interview is a collection of various perspectives of an on-going issue by one or many people (Bevan, 2014). Furthermore, this method can help elaborate on the descriptive perspective of experience relating to a person, emotion, idea or memories. The researcher will be using open-ended questions to build and develop the context of the information received. In this case, questions about such sensitive topics like inequality and discrimination will be asked. Bevan (2014) stated that in order to achieve a structure of phenomenological interview method, there are three essential domains needed which are contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon and clarifying the phenomenon. Additionally, every of these domains is operated in the phenomenological reduction as a researcher's task. Starting with "contextualization",

this structure indicates experiences or objects of a living world highlighted in a context that is provided through a personal biography (Bevan, 2014). This step allows participants to describe and recall their experience in the form of narrative which is extremely informative. Therefore, in order to investigate an individual's specific background, the author needs to consider the biography and context from the meaning of the experience (Husserl, 1970) . Following by "apprehending the phenomenon", this phase targets the experience which the researcher is keen on. In this phase, the researcher starts to dig in details by asking descriptive questions. Due to the fact that there are a lot of modes of appearing in terms of an individual's experience, the researcher must pay attention to as many experiences as possible (Bevan, 2014). In this case, the researcher should be ready to ask various questions about working context and inequality in particular daily situations and make sure it is descriptive and detailed . Lastly, "clarifying the phenomenon" is a domain which is undertaken by applying imaginative variation. As Bevan (2014) stated that imaginative variation is a factor of data analysis as a pattern of phenomenon reduction in relation to discharge of phenomenon clarification and variant parts. In order to examine a phenomenon actively, imaginative variation point of experiences helps an interview more dynamic (Husserl, 1967). Furthermore, a benefit from using imaginative variation is that it maintains the original context close to the original experience.

Therefore, using phenomenological interview helps the research to focus on the accurate description of thematizing experience of sexual discrimination and gender inequality in a structural way.

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about your experience of being discriminated due to your sexual orientation"
	Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Individuals	Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your daily life at your workplace and when it come to rewards"
	Active Listening	Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how your working environment would change if everyone is treated equally"

Table 1: A format of phenomenological interviewing.

3.5 Data analysis

Due to the fact that the researcher is using qualitative approaches to investigate different perspectives from the victims of gender discrimination, thematic network is a significant analytic tool for emphasising the core features to various approaches. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic analysis seeks to discover an issue's interpretation or the significance of a concept, rather than resolving controversial ideas of a problem. For instance,

this data can be collected through interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses. Furthermore, thematic analysis is a perfect fit for the aim and objectives of this research paper since it is explorations of individuals' perspectives, experiences and opinions of a phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). In order to successfully implement thematic analysis into this research paper, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested linking grounded theory as supporting claims. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is a collection of inductive and iterative methods to recognise theories and concepts in the materials, which are mentioned previously in the research and subsequently integrated into formal theoretical models. With this being said, the context of the data needs to be understood, classified and distributed through transcribing by the researcher. In this case, to provide accurate information and avoid misleading information, using verbatim transcription will help the researcher to deliver the participants' experience. Therefore, to effectively analyse the data, the researcher is suggested to follow these four steps: (1) evaluate verbatim transcripts, (2) discover potential themes, (3) compare and contrast themes, detecting structure among them, and (4) construct theoretical models, continually testing them against evidence (Bernard and Ryan, 1998). Finally, the researcher will be using value coding for constructing and reflecting the qualitative data of participants' attitude, values, beliefs and experience about gender discrimination in the workplace. Additionally, value coding is not just suitable for interview transcripts, but also to take notes that describe behaviours of participants since their statements might not always match with their observed actions and interactions (Saldana, 2013).

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Bernard and Ryan (1998) and Attride-Stirling (2001), using verbatim transcription for thematic analysis provides the exact word by word information from the participants in order to avoid misleading results and the researcher's own interpretation. Because of this reason, the researcher should be applying data triangulation as a research approach to increase the vulnerability of the data. Furthermore, in order to reassure the collected data that it is trustworthy, a member check interview is one of the necessary processes, especially in the case of gender discrimination.

3.7 Limitation

This case study is limited to a certain location in the hospitality industry. Therefore, the generalizability could be limited, more studies need to investigate the different gender's perspective of organisation in the hospitality industry, and the potential solutions to cope with these

problems. Since the methodology for data collection is phenomenological interviews, bias in research can be one of the limitations. For instance, the researcher could unconsciously prefer a certain perspective of the research results and condition rather than being open minded and focus on the multiple sides of participants' meanings and elaborations. In this case of gender discrimination, this limitation can affect the findings of the research through the research design. Furthermore, due to the sensitivity of the topic, the participants' identifications were guaranteed anonymity, so the results could potentially be taken as unreliable. On the other hand, although the participants' identifications were strictly secured, not all of them would be willing to share their stories, since they do not want to recall the issues and they were afraid of jeopardising their careers. Therefore, the researcher needs to reassure that the participants' information will be guaranteed confidentiality. At the same time, the participants should feel comfortable sharing their experience without any pressure from the researcher.

3.8 Ethical issues

Since the purpose of researching is to investigate and obtain the information from individuals (Punch, 2005). Therefore, the ethical issues section is significantly necessary to mention in order to ensure and clarify the research proposal (Creswell, 2014). Likewise, the researcher has the responsibilities to secure her participants by gaining the trustworthiness, displaying the complete version of the research, being aware of the impropriety which could affect the organisations, and always being ready to face complicated issues (Israel and Hay, 2006). Nowadays, it is clear that the problems such as personal information, authenticity and validity of the research; also, the researcher's responsibility of protecting the participants' privacy during the process of collecting online information (Israel and Hay, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher should address the ethical issues before collecting the data, the start of the study, during the process of conducting and analysing data and when sharing, reporting and publishing information (Creswell, 2014). After that, the researcher should inform and give instructions about the consent form, then the participants should be aware of the informed consent form and sign them voluntarily (Creswell, 2014).

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will give the extracts of the addressed theories in literature review and emphasise on the essential aspects. In this case, firstly, social identity theory will be explained alongside with the given empirical examples and its common challenging impacts on the

employees' daily working environment in the United States. Secondly, examination of gender inequality in the hospitality workplace context will be expanded with given examples. Finally, the most important objective is to explore and discover the experience of the victims who have been through sexual discrimination in a specific location, especially through the applied research approach, the research will be explaining how the data will be collected and how it will ensure as valuable and credible information.

4.2 To point out the social identity theory's effects and emphasise the challenges that employees face in the hotel industry in the United States.

According to Leaper (2011), social identity refers to an individual's characteristics that developed based on the members of their specific social group. As a result, social identity theory outlines how it influences individuals' ways of thinking and behaving in relation to their immediate surroundings as well as others. Furthermore, Ye et al. (2019) stated that people often pay attention to identifying with a certain group in order to fulfil their need for better control, belonging, self-esteem, and a complete existence. Therefore, it is assumed that the work place environment could be difficult for the employees when they do not find belongingness or affiliation in the organisation or even identity with the organisation. Also, it can affect the customer service performance from the employees. In this case, one of the challenges that employees are facing is sexual discrimination. As Ineson et al. (2013) stated that sexual discrimination is defined as unfair bias against people based on their sexual orientation, such as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people (Elmslie, 2007 cited by Ineson et al., 2013). In the case of conducting the results in an internship program in a hotel in the United States, the trainees were harassed sexually during the program (La Popa and Gong, 2020). However, as Ineson et al. (2013) mentioned, the victims were both female and male, who experienced the abusive actions, offensive sexist jokes and extremely uncomfortable situations in their workplace in the United States. With this being said, it is expected that unfair bias towards certain groups of individuals can negatively affect their self-esteem, feeling of belonging and complete existence in an organisation. Additionally, it is assumed that In order to create a healthy, friendly and respectful workplace environment, it is advised that the hospitality industrial organisations should be looking at these social identity theories in order to ensure the employees' belonging, better control, self-esteem and complete existence. Furthermore, hospitality organisations should establish rules and policies in order to avoid the future toxic workplace gossip which affects the employees' positive social identity. Therefore, it is highly recommended for the researcher to have a structured interview which includes aspects from social identity theories in order to address issues that occur in the workplace and come up with solutions.

4.3 To explore the workplace context in regards to the inequality experience situation.

In the United States, inequality within the workplace environment normally occurs through the context of gender-based inequality such as gender inferiority, gender bias, women workers - men's jobs and prescriptive stereotypes (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2013) and one of the special terms is called the glass ceiling (Clevenger and Singh, 2013). According to Clevenger and Singh (2013), glass ceiling is a phrase that describes when women are having difficulties in order to achieve higher position in the hierarchy or getting paid unfairly low. It is assumed that the glass ceiling also highlights the discrimination is mostly about gender bias, obstacles for women in career and being abused by society's stereotypes. One of the most common examples is the wage gap between male and female in the hospitality industry. As in Krzak's (2022) research, there are 58 percent of males in higher paying positions such as senior manager or significant technical roles than female. Whereas, 54 percent of females are the largest group that covers the amount of lower paid and unskilled jobs such as housekeeping. After Adebayo (2015) collected surveys through a descriptive approach, regarding management level, there is "no significant difference" between male and female leaders. In contrast, it is said that there are more similarities between men and women in terms of management. On the other hand, through the gathered data from Daspher (2020), some individuals think that women tend to question and be hard on themselves. Additionally, in terms of management level, working in male dominated environment makes individuals put more pressure on themselves, trying to force themselves to be better since hospitality is extremely competitive in the United States. For instance, women's leadership behaviours are viewed differently from men because they are usually judged as bossy, bitchy and cold, while for men, they are considered tough, strict and professional. Likewise, these arguments can be assumed that society's stereotype has created conscious and unconscious prejudice for women, and even made them doubt themselves. Therefore, in order for the research to collect valuable information, critical opinions and especially the obstacles that women usually face in the workplaces, it is necessary to have depth-interview with female workers who are in higher management positions in the workplace.

4.4 To investigate the victims' experience and opinions of sexual discrimination in the workplace.

Sexual discrimination is not a rare phenomenon in hospitality industry in the United States, especially when

it also includes sexual harassment. According to Bobbitt-Zeher (2013), sexual harassment is displayed through verbal and non-verbal behaviour. For example, one of the participants experienced her sales agent describing women as incompetent through his behaviour of hanging a sign that says "no girls allowed" in 1200 Club (dollar volume in terms of salary). Furthermore, he claimed that none of the female workers will ever reach 1500 Club because they are way "stupid". It is assumed that employers (especially males) express their opinions about their female subordinates' traits in an extremely negative view such as dumb, incompetent or overly emotional in any job area. It is even more disturbing and extremely unfair when employers consider pregnant women as threats of physical attractiveness. In Bobbitt-Zeher's (2013) case, a bar owner told a participant that her being pregnant is not attractive, and the guests did not want women in pregnant conditions around them. Additionally, in some situations, employers will fire their service staff when they become pregnant since it is considered as a threat of physical attractiveness.

On the other hand, sexual discrimination is not just about women being verbally and physically abused, but also includes homosexual harassment such as cases of customers making fun of gay employees or homophobic customers being rude and offensive to homosexual employees. For instance, as in a study of Ineson et al. (2013), there is a witnessed case between a male customer and a gay employee. The employee accidentally delivered a wrong drink order to the guest, who started to abuse the employee verbally by referring to him as "gay twat". It is claimed that the incident created distressed and threatening feelings for the employee. However, the incident was reported to the bar manager who was being understanding and showed empathy toward the employee. Therefore, the manager said that they would remove the customer from the bar if this guest continued the abusive attitude.

In contrast, not every manager will be empathic and understanding to the employees, it is claimed that in some cases the incidents will be ignored or the issues will not be taken seriously. For example, in this case of sexual harassment in the US club (Sainato, 2023), it is found that 34 percent of women who used to work in the restaurant industry lost their jobs due to the sexual harassment. According to Sainato (2023), in Los Serranos Golf Club in Chino Hills, California, there were four young female employees who just started to work, and they immediately experienced sexual harassment from the senior chef. For instance, one of the employees called Ariana Tan went through different types of harassment from the chef such as sexually inappropriate comments nonstop about her and her female colleagues. Afterwards, Tan reported the issues to the human resource department, but the team

was not taking any action at all and she felt terribly desperate since no one listened to herself and her colleagues. Furthermore, the job in the club was her main income, she could not do anything else but induce the trauma, go to work and keep up with the negative workplace environment. In order to collect this sensitive information from the victims' perspective, it is expected that most of the sexual discrimination experiences are normally shared by the victims openly through a comfortable and safe depth-interview environment created by the research. Likewise, it is advised that the information becomes valuable only if there is certain proof from reliable sources.

4.5 Conclusion

First of all, the existing workplace environment and culture is one of the key factors that can bring the employees their belongingness, influence their behaviour and mindsets. Therefore, the workplace environment is one of the major aspects that could decide if the workplace has actual challenges or advantages for the employees. Second of all, there are various forms of gender inequality in the workplace context and the highlighted one is the glass ceiling, which mostly represents the discrimination towards women in the hospitality industry and how unfair they are treated. Last but not least, the investigation of different disturbing harassment cases in the United States proves that sexual discrimination phenomenon is an ongoing issue which needs to be noticed since it is not happening to only women only, it can happen with anyone.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Throughout the research, the author recognised that the main cause of sexual discrimination phenomenon is based on a strong connection between cultural ideas about gender in other word stereotyping within an organisation and structural policy which has impacts on women and men in various ways. Firstly, after implementing phenomenological interviews to collect the data from hospitality organisations in the United States, social identity in organisational context was discussed. It is noticed that the workplace environment has a huge impact on employees' identification in the team such as being in a team having different mindsets can create gossip in the workplace, which can influence individuals negatively such as ruining the employees' reputation, violation of their privacy, taking away the staff members' social identity by making them feel excluded by their team and supervisor. With that being said, it is extremely important for every company to focus on their employees' social identity value, so they can create a healthy and

efficient working environment. Secondly, after exploring the challenges within the workplace context, in this case of the hospitality industry in the United States, gender-based inequality in hospitality is the main contribution that explains gender inferiority, gender bias, prescriptive stereotype and the most highlighted barrier called glass ceiling. One of the main problems was verbal harassment which was a cause of the stereotyping and negative workplace context. It is surrounded by people making assumptions about how women are. Likewise, the assumptions lead to disturbing comments and mindsets about female or homosexual employees, later on affect the actions and physical discrimination behaviours. Also, being surrounded by negative energy in the workplace can reduce their engagement to the job, motivation and confidence to perform. Finally, after the examining the victims' disturbing experience with sexual harassment, the research found that not only women who are only facing the challenges in terms of equality, but also the homosexual employees. Likewise, being insulted by their guests due to their sexual orientation at work is one of the major issues which needs to be prevented everywhere in the world and especially in the hospitality working environment. However, it is recognised that employees' voice is small within the company, human resources and the organisation was being quite ignorant, not paying attention and listening to the victims. Therefore, they felt helpless and devastated, which leads to poor work performance, demotivated staff, and disengagement with the firm.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the concept "stereotype" since it is the major cause of all of the gender discrimination towards women and homosexuals in the United States' hospitality industry. It is proved that the differences between women and men is small, however, due to the internal factors from the organisation and external factors from society together with the United States government, it creates huge differences in the perception of women and men's work performance especially about the wage gap. From this, it affects the ideas of people about women in the workplace, which leads to toxic behaviour, insulting comments and thoughts of women who would never achieve success in terms of management positions in the hospitality industry. Moreover, while discovering the individuals' unfortunate experience, this research paper emphasises the importance of society's attitude towards homosexual employees, which is one of the main reasons for sexual discrimination. There was no law to protect lesbian women and gay men due to the ignorance of the company, even though the manager was trying to help and be understanding toward the situation. Additionally, this research also contributes to hospitality industries needing to look more into the evaluation and examination of their subordinates' practice and performance rather than their

genders. From this, the organisation can reduce barriers in other word glass ceiling, come up with anti-discrimination regulations and gender equality empowerment.

In the future research, the author could improve the study by finding cases that have more association with the behaviours in the service areas through examination of the teamwork level, service performance and communication between the staff members. Furthermore, the findings of this study should incentivise further research in the area of how different hospitality organisations solve the issues based on their own policies and rules within the firm. Therefore, there will be a wider range of solutions toward discrimination in the workplace and it is important to find different research bases in order to improve the critical point of view.

[1] Regarding the definitions, sexual discrimination is a phrase which describes a deed of unfair treatment toward individuals due to their sexual orientation; for example, lesbian, gay men, bisexual and transgender (Elmslie, 2007 cited by Ineson et al., 2013).

[2] For instance, in the United Kingdom, homosexuals are not accepted to be in masculine profession in terms of employment, such as the military.

[3] Furthermore, in 1996, Croteau shows us on his paper, after studied on the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual people at their workplace, he found there are combinations of five types of typical materials: (1) the pervasive scale of discrimination in the work environment; (2) formal and informal types of discrimination; (3) fear of discrimination; (4) fluctuation of the employees' honesty about sexual orientation; (5) and the connection between employees being opened and keeping secret of their sexual orientation.

[4] Additionally, people normally focus on identifying with a certain group to meet their demand for better control, belonging, self-esteem and a whole life (Pratt, 1998; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Ashforth and Mael, 1989 cited by Ye et al., 2019). However, once these four basic demands are not provided by a social group, participants will be losing their identification. Moreover, the reduced identification normally brings significant negative results, and it creates an environment that makes the employees feel separated from the group and unmotivated (Pratt, 1998; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Ashforth and Mael, 1989 cited by Ye et al., 2019).

[5] Apart from this, harassment can happen to both males and females. However, according to Boland

(2005), it is an extremely major problem of employment discrimination and struggled mostly by women.

[6] In a study of Bobbitt-Zeher (2011), it is documented that discrimination happens in various forms, such as hiring process (Gorman, 2005), wages (Meitzen, 1986), promotions (Olson and Becker, 1983), work evaluation (America Bar Association) and sexual harassment (Welsh, 1999).

[7] In the studies of Pryor et al. (1993) and Sainato (2023), it is proved on surveys that most of the sexual harassment perpetrators are males and major amount of victims are females. As well as in Lu and Kleiner's study in 2001, they stated that mostly, men tended to have discriminatory actions against women.

[8] In addition, Reminton and Kitterlin-Lynch (2017) found different challenges women are facing in terms of leadership, such as, work-life balance, support and mentoring structure from the organisation, however, a need for a wider range of samples in terms of female leaders in the hospitality industry is recommended.

[9] In this case, the researcher will start to encourage the participants to share their general experience of being discriminated against due to their gender or sexual orientation.

[10] Through this way, the researcher will be able to recognise how individuals interpret their feelings toward the experiences through the way they describe certain activities or events (Bevan, 2014).

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