Company Project Report

They don't talk about us – An exploration of gendered language shaping

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gendered language has been moving to the forefront of peoples' minds recently. However, there is some adversity concerning the topic, as it is often displayed as something inconvenient or negative. Language plays an important role when it comes to the inclusion of minorities and the discussion around gendered language is an opportunity to create a more inclusive environment for all genders. Previous research concerning this topic has focused mainly on the inclusion of women, neglecting and therefore unintentionally excluding people who identify outside of the gender binary. In essence, this means that there has been a lot of work towards the feminization of language, as opposed to striving for gender neutral language. Moving away from cis- and male-centric language by using gender neutral pronouns or other epicene words will go a long way in contributing to a sense of belongingness, which is a fundamental human need. Furthermore, neutral and inclusive language can help de-stigmatize nonbinary people, reducing stereotypes and allowing them to live their authentic self. Additionally, it has the potential to improving the mental well-being of nonbinary people, therefore increasing the value they can add as employees.

This thesis strived to answer the following research question and introduces three propositions based on these preliminary insights:

Research Question:

An exploration of gendered language shaping inclusion of nonbinary employees

Netnography was used to collect and analyze data to understand how nonbinary employees in the hospitality industry perceive to be included in the language that is currently commonly used.

The findings showed that barriers nonbinary people face include awareness, understanding, and local laws. It also became evident that, while not all employees struggle with inclusion in their workplace, preconceived notions and expectations before coming out have a large impact on the experience. Furthermore, while lack of awareness is a strong facilitator for cis-normative working environments, achieving awareness is merely the first step, not the final goal. The analyzed data also provided evidence that companies use gendered language, therefore excluding nonbinary employees regardless of intent. Lastly, an analysis of descriptors used in the data showed that positive descriptors were mainly used to describe the efforts that were taken by the company after the nonbinary employee came out. However, most of the language used had negative connotations. Here, the focus was not just on the reactions after requesting a change, but also on the predominately negative expectations the nonbinary employees had. This suggested that there is a negative effect of gendered language on the inclusion of non-binary employees.

Next, parallels to the literature review were drawn and the findings were discussed. Afterwards, possible limitations were considered and suggestions for future research were made.

Finally, a solution for the placement company was designed based on the previous theoretical findings and an implementation plan was drawn up. For the solution, an implementation plan based on Schein's conceptual model for managed culture change was designed. An infographic will be distributed on the multi-property communications platform of the company, followed by an internal workshop used to further develop the change. Workshops will be repeated bi-annually. To determine the success of the solution, participants will participate in two surveys.

GLOSSARY

Inclusion	"The degree to which an employee perceives that [they are] an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies [their] needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore et al., 2011)
Diversity	"Any way that people and groups can be differentiated from one another, despite apparent similarities" (O'Donovan, 2017)
Sense of Belonging	Fundamental human need, as individuals long for a place in their group, provided their 'physiological' needs and their needs for safety are gratified (Maslow, 1943)
Sex	A designation assigned at birth, based on medical information (Schwartz et al., 2013)
Gender	A social construct with cultural meanings assigned to biological sexes (Smith et al., 2019)
Cisgender	Humans whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth (Cava, 2016)
Transgender	The sex assigned at birth differs from the gender identity of an individual (Levitt and Ippolito, 2014)
Nonbinary	People whose identity falls outside of the gender binary (Bradford et al., 2018)
Coming Out	The self-affirmation of one's sexuality and/or gender identity and/or any outward disclosures of one's sexuality and/or gender identity (Guittar and Rayburn, 2016)
Gendered Language	Language whose grammar is based on gender (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012; Hord, 2016)
Lingua franca	official language of companies (Samarin, 1987)

ABBREVIATIONS

LYCAR	Launching Your Career
MHP	MHP Hotel AG
HR	Human Resources

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INTRODUCTION

While this paper was written, elections were held in Germany. For this reason, many political parties put up posters (Schaffrinna, 2021). One of them stated, roughly translated, "German instead of gendering". It is supposedly referring to the push to use more gender inclusive language in our society. Furthermore, it implies that using inclusive language is something harmful, and not the correct use of the German language. Meanwhile, the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* is likely to be added to Norwegian dictionaries (Strzyżyńska, 2022). These examples reflect and clearly show that the issue of using inclusive language is a widespread discussion (Hord, 2016). Nonetheless, this paper will focus primarily on the English language because of its widespread global use.

In order to determine the benefit or harm of inclusive language, one has to be aware of what inclusion means. It refers to the perceived integration of an employee into the work group through the satisfaction of needs for uniqueness and belongingness (Shore et al., 2011). Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (1943) states that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need. Language is an important building block on how such inclusion can be achieved (UNESCO, 2011). Therefore, using inclusive language is an important tool for including all gender identities (Gherman, 2012; Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015).

In general, the term nonbinary refers to a human whose gender identity falls outside of the gender binary (Cosgrove, 2021). Including these people in everyday language is crucial because of stigmas, stereotypes, unawareness and of course exclusion they face constantly (Amnesty International, 2014; Beauregard et al., 2021). Despite being a minority, the amount of people that identify as nonbinary is growing, especially among millennials and Gen Z (Greco, 2012). A 2021 study estimated that 11% of the queer adult population in the United states identify as nonbinary (Anders, 2021). In absolute numbers, that is about 1.2 million

Americans. More than half of nonbinary and transgender youths seriously considered suicide in 2019, and almost 1 in 3 attempted it (The Trevor Project, 2019). In addition to potential suicide prevention and mental health benefits, employers can benefit from using gender neutral, inclusive language because mentally healthy and happy employees add more value to the company (Beauregard et al., 2021). Furthermore, surveys have shown that 50% of nonbinary employees have left an employment due to an unwelcoming environment (Totaljobs, 2016).

Gender neutral language is a way of phrasing words that do not explicitly state which gender one is referring to (Erdocia, 2021). Often, this is used to include women in male dominated spaces (Menegatti and Rubini, 2017). Research has shown that masculine language has a tendency to exclude women, if not always intentionally (Gaucher et al., 2011). Therefore, when people refer to gender neutral language, they are often talking about feminizing language, instead of making it truly neutral (Schmenk, 2007). While these efforts are important, truly gender neutral language does not push towards any gender and the gender binary, but aims to include everyone on the gender spectrum (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012). So, even though there is a discussion around gendered language, and efforts have been made to make language more inclusive, there is not actually a lot of research on gender neutral language (Wood and Eagly, 2015).

Based on these observations, the researcher posed the following research question and conceptual framework.

Research Question:

An exploration of gendered language shaping inclusion of nonbinary employees
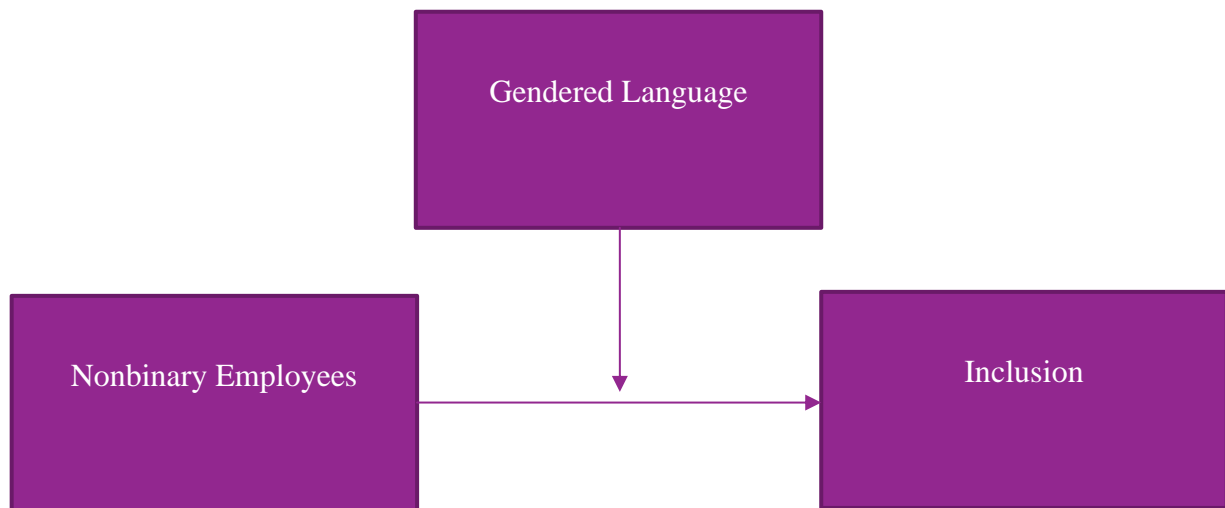
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

In order to answer the research question, qualitative research will be used. The research population will consist of nonbinary employees. The data collection will take place through Netnography, which refers to conducting ethnographic research online. The researcher will first identify a platform for their data collection, lay ethical ground rules and obtain permission and copy the data from the site. The platform will either be a blog, forum, or a chat room. After later collection, the researcher will use the same passive Netnography framework in combination with semiotic critical discourse analysis to cut the data, structuring the information by description, sorting the data accordingly, and critically analyze the findings.

The research will affect nonbinary employees, because it aims to discover if adaptions of currently used language are necessary for the inclusion of nonbinary employees and what these changes could be. Additionally, striving to achieve gender neutral language will also benefit women in the workplace because all genders will be included in the language used. Furthermore, employers will benefit from the fact that using inclusive language will have a positive impact on the mental health of nonbinary employees. It also has the potential to strengthen company communities.

The results of the thesis will not only be shared with the commissioner and research coach, but an infographic will also be made for a clear and accessible oversight of the topic. Additionally,

the insights gained during the research will be applied to an internship company as part of the company project report. Finally, everything will be presented during the final event and therefore shared with students and lecturers of Hotelschool The Hague.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusion

The rapidly growing and shifting diversity in the workforce (Woods, 2016) is driving a change of focus in research and companies alike from diversity management towards a focus on inclusion (O'Donovan, 2015). Romani and Holgersson (2020), argue that the focus of diversity management is placed upon relationship and otherness, rather than differences, stating that instead of comparing what people have in common, value is added by entering into an ethical relationship with someone other, and acknowledging the differences as strengths.

Developing into a more inclusive society is not just a shift brought about by generational growth, often, the shift is preceded by a fight for rights or awareness. Discussions concerning the emergency of gender diversity and gender equality, for example, have influenced the perception of the meaning and importance of gender inclusion (Festing et al., 2015). Ultimately, this shift adds value to organizations as it promotes employee engagement and wellbeing (O'Donovan, 2018).

Definitions of inclusion have also evolved and there are many discrepancies between them. Miller (1998) states that inclusion means employees "are allowed to participate and are enabled to contribute fully." In 1999, Hope Pelled et al. define inclusion as "the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system" (Hope Pelled et al., 1999). Later definitions use an increasingly active language, with Roberson (2006) writing that organizational inclusion involves removing obstacles to enable full contributions and participation of employees. Avery, McKay, Wilson, and Tonidandel (2007) state "the extent to which employees believe their organizations engage in efforts to involve all employees in the mission and operation of the organization with respect to their individual talents." Another paper defines inclusion as "when individuals feel a sense of belonging, and inclusive behaviors

such as eliciting and valuing contributions from all employees are part of the daily life in the organization" (Lirio et al., 2008). In the same year, Wasserman et al. (2008) wrote that inclusion means "people of all social identity groups [have] the opportunity to be present, to have their voices heard and appreciated, and to engage in core activities on behalf of the collective." Both Nair and Vohra (2015) and Nishii (2013) agree that inclusion requires active efforts and practices that accept different individuals or groups socially and culturally, and treat them equally.

Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Holcombe Erhart and Singh determined that the two common themes in definitions of inclusion are belonginess and uniqueness, consequently defining inclusion as "the degree to which an employee perceives that [they are] an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies [their] needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (2011). For the purpose of thesis, this is the definition of inclusion that will be used. Based on their observations, Shore et al (2011), created the following 2x2 inclusion framework, in which they propose that feelings of inclusion are created when belongingness and uniqueness work together. Specifically, they argue that "uniqueness will provide opportunities for improved group performance when a unique individual is an accepted member of the group, and the group values the particular unique characteristic" (Shore et al., 2011).

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	**Exclusion** Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.	**Assimilation** Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.
High Value in Uniqueness	**Differentiation** Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/ organization success.	**Inclusion** Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.

Figure 2 Inclusion Framework

Inclusion can only exist when there is diversity within an organization or culture. Diversity refers to any way that people and groups can be differentiated from one another, despite apparent similarities (O'Donovan, 2017). As no two people are exactly alike, diversity is omnipresent in society and, consequentially, organizations. This is context dependent, as differences can only be established in comparison, thus preventing people from being categorized as different in isolation (Moore, 1999). It is important to note that this differentiation is to be used to empower individuals who are different, not to discriminate against. To highlight the values that the differences of individual employees add to the organization, the term uniqueness is used interchangeably with diversity.

According to the Theory of Human Motivation by Maslow (1943), feeling a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need, as individuals long for a place in their group, provided their 'physiological' needs and their needs for safety are gratified. The inclusivity of this theory has been questioned, with some critics claiming that it is gender biased (Cullen and Gotell, 2002). Other research, however, has argued that there is no need for separate development models, making Maslow's theory relevant to both men and women (Coy and Kovacs-Long, 2005).

Taormina and Gao (2013) make note that, given the prevalence of his work in research and theory alike, it should not be disregarded.

By using their status to pursue opportunities to encourage and support their followers to utilize their uniqueness in order to improve work processes, authentic leaders can help their teams recognize the value of individual differences (Boekhorst, 2015). It is crucial that organizations and leaders understand the urgency of inclusion, because diversity without inclusion can be detrimental, because inclusion is an essential precondition of effective diversity management (Mor Barak, 2015). Prause and Mujtaba (2015), stress that despite societal advanced there are still significant challenges when it comes to managing diverse work environments and argue that diversity education can provide modern organizations with a competitive advantage and drive the company towards future with a sustainable workforce. Additionally, fostering an inclusive community will increase engagement and add views and beliefs that will better provide the organization with tools to meet future challenges, encourage innovation from their employees, increase job satisfaction, and lead to a higher quality of care (Puritty et al., 2017; Brimhall and Mor Barak, 2018).

From an individual perspective, it has been shown that the perceived belongingness has a positive relationship with mental health (Anant, 1967). Furthermore, when people perceive an effort that is made, they not only feel like they are part of the group but are more ready to accept individuals who might not be as established in the group as they are, and recognize unique characteristics as added value (Shore et al., 2011). As language has a strong influence on cognition and perception (Thierry, 2016), using specific phrasing can automatically exclude a minority or marginalized group. Research has shown that women are less likely to apply for jobs or job advertisements that are phrased towards men or use exclusive language (Gaucher et al., 2011).

Nonbinary Employees

Understanding the difference between sex and gender is vital for discussing nonbinary identities. Sex is a designation assigned at birth, based on medical information (Schwartz et al., 2013). Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct with cultural meanings assigned to biological sexes (Smith et al., 2019). Humans whose identity align with their assigned sex at birth are cisgender (Cava, 2016). In case that the assigned sex differs from the gender identity of an individual, they fall under the transgender umbrella (Levitt and Ippolito, 2014). Transgender people sometimes identify as the opposite gender than what they were assigned at birth, or as both male and female, as neither, or as in between (Lund, 2012). People whose identity falls outside of the gender binary can use terms like nonbinary, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, or genderqueer (Bradford et al., 2018). *For the purpose of this research, these terms will be used interchangeably*. Just as there are different labels, gender nonconforming people are not required to use specific pronouns, some, for example, might use she/they pronouns or neopronouns like ze/zir (Hekanaho, 2020). It is completely up to the individual person how they label themselves and what pronoun they feel best represents their identity. Some transgender individuals choose to undergo medical treatments such as gender-affirming surgeries to align their physical appearance with their gender identity, but not all do (Safer and Tangpricha, 2019). The self-affirmation of one's sexuality and/or gender identity and/or any outward disclosures of one's sexuality and/or gender identity is commonly referred to as coming out (Guittar and Rayburn, 2016).

Younger generations, such as millennials, who make up most of the workforce, as well as Gen Z, are more likely to identify outside of the gender binary than previous generations (Greco, 2012). This is partially due to the fact that it is more acceptable for people to live as their authentic self in the current society, due to queer activism such as queer social movements since the late 1980s (Haines et al., 2016; Brown, 2015). Transgender people were a driving

force in this (Hekanaho, 2020). While non-binary activism is considered a relatively new phenomenon, its roots can be traced back to early trans activism challenging the norms and binaries of sex, gender, and sexuality, as well as parallels to earlier forms of feminism (Bergman and Barker, 2017). However, despite everything that has been achieved to this day, nonbinary people are still not accepted or even recognized in many parts of the world. In the UK for example, they are not legally able to make changes that would authenticate their identity (Stonewall.org.uk, 2018). Even when there have been changes, such as the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was part of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, they still do not fully extend their protection to trans and nonbinary employees (Poget, 2019).

Proposition 1:

It is assumed that nonbinary employees struggle with inclusion in the workplace.

A lack of understanding and failure to implement policies that account for and are specific to nonbinary employees have been proven by research to be a significant employment barrier for nonbinary people (Ladwig, 2021). This implies that companies generally do not take non-binary individuals into account in their hiring process, further indicating that the company culture is not inclusive when it comes to non-binary gender identities. Furthermore, often the inequalities nonbinary employees face are not overt, but rather invisible and indirect (Boncori et al., 2019). In addition, there has not been enough attention paid to transgender and nonbinary people when it comes to diversity management, legislation, and research, despite the growing efforts for diversity, equality and inclusion (Abe and Oldridge, 2019).

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Proposition 2:

A lack of awareness is facilitating a cis normative working environment,

therefore excluding nonbinary people in the workplace.

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Among the many struggles that transgender people face in a cis normative society, language that is not inclusive adds another barrier impacting their mental and physical wellbeing, as well as limiting their abilities to be their most authentic self (Beauregard et al., 2021). Even in literature which tries to be inclusive and address trans or nonbinary people correctly, there are often mistakes invalidating the identity of the individual (Schwartz et al., 2013). Such oversights, even when not on purpose, often harm the people they are trying to help. Similar things can happen in official language of companies, also known as lingua franca (Samarin, 1987), as using male-centric, cis focused language is a societal norm (Ehrlich, 2003).

Gendered language

When exploring the role and use of gendered language, it is important to understand that, unlike languages such as German and French, whose grammar is based on gender, English is gender neutral (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012; Hord, 2016). Consequently, perceived gender is based on stereotypes (Menegatti and Rubini, 2017). As countries such as the UK are masculine dominated cultures, it can be observed that English is typically male-centric. This often manifests as an exclusion of other gender identities (Bradley, 2020). Gaucher, Friesen, and Kay (2011), for example, provide evidence that the language used in job advertisements sustains gender inequality. Research shows that people who identify as female experience negative consequences of ostracism due to gendered language (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, gender-specific system justification mediates the use of sexist language (Stout and Dasgupta, 2011). Efforts to use inclusive language range from avoiding pronouns, writing he/her, or using a gender-neutral alternative (Hechavarria et al., 2018). Prescriptive grammar ideology plays a

large role here, with the use of the singular "they" being accepted by a majority (Hernandez, 2020; Bradley, 2020). However, attempts and research on gender neutral language often focus on including women, disregarding and therefore excluding transgender individuals that do not identify as male or female (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2014).

Psychologists and linguists believe, as there is no language without gender distinction, gender is possibly fundamental to societal structures and organizations, making gender indispensable for speech communities (Fawcett, 2015). Therefore, although, as stated above, English is a gender-neutral language, gender is still an unavoidable part of it. One example is that men and women are associated with different occupations based on stereotypes (Gastil, 1990). For instance, doctors, managers, or lawyers will often be pictured as men, while a nurse will rarely be perceived as someone's brother. This is despite the fact that, apart from brother, none of the aforementioned words indicate what gender these people identify as or which pronouns they use. Furthermore, stereotyped attributes such as strong, emotional, stubborn or proud also invoke a clear idea of gender without explicitly defining it (Garnham et al., 2012).

Additionally, the abundance of masculine generics in the English language together with a preference towards cis-genderism, which assumes all referred individuals identify as the gender that they were assigned at birth (Ansara and Hegarty, 2014), can often lead to or result in social discrimination (Cosgrove, 2021). In other words, language that is generally perceived as inclusive is exclusive because the words are explicitly gendered. Using "ladies and gentlemen" as a salutation, for example, might seem inclusive to men and women, but fails to acknowledge or address nonbinary people. An alternative gender-neutral greeting to "ladies and gentlemen" could be "welcome" or "honored guests".

Proposition 3:

It is assumed that companies use gendered language.

In their attempts to make language more inclusive, research has focused on including women (Wood and Eagly, 2015). This has led to gender-neutral language being perceived as a feminization of language (Schmenk, 2007). However, purely focusing on including women leads to the exclusion or possible exclusion of other minorities. Instead, gender neutral language should be inclusive of all genders, and able to reference individuals of intermediate gender. Examples of epicene pronouns, which are a way to articulate and describe without referencing gender, are "the student", "a person", or really just "anyone" (Baranowski, 2002).

It is important to note that McKay (1980) argues that recommending the use of a certain language should only be done when the benefits outweigh the costs, facilitate communication, or communication is made more difficult for the costs.

METHODOLOGY

To answer the above-mentioned research question and propositions, qualitative research was conducted because it seeks to develop a deep understanding of a specific topic (Cullum-Swan and Manning, 1994). The data collected is non-numeric, instead providing the researcher with a tool to understand peoples beliefs, behavior, experience, and interactions (Bowler, Jr., 2010). As the researcher tried to understand how nonbinary employees perceive their inclusion through the language used, qualitative research was used because it assists with exploring and understanding how people experience language and inclusion.

Data Collection

Population. As stated in the research question, the main population consisted of people who identify as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, or any other gender identity that falls under the nonbinary umbrella. There will be no differentiation between closeted or openly nonbinary employees. Furthermore, the population must be English speaking. Therefore, the researcher chose to use purposeful sampling, which is a process of consciously selecting a small number of data sources which meet particular, predefined criteria (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sample Size In qualitative research, the sample size cannot be defined a priori as it is exploratory research and the amount of participants required to gain a sufficient understanding of the topic is unquantifiable (Boddy, 2016). Instead, new data was collected until no new (relevant) information was found, thus making further sampling redundant and reaching saturation (Busetto et al., 2020).

Method. The researcher has collected the data through Netnography as described by Kozinets (2002), which means doing ethnographic research online. Ethnographic research refers to clear scientific prospections and descriptions of peoples and cultures within their

customs habits and mutual differences (Shaw, 2020). The reason this data collection method was chosen is because it allows the researcher to investigate how nonbinary employees described their experiences.

Trans- and nonbinary-focused chatrooms, forums and blogs, as well as newspaper articles on the issue were used to find texts that focus on the inclusion on nonbinary employees. In order to investigate the effect gendered language has on them, the focus was placed on language used and the context it is in to determine the weight of the effect.

In order to respect people's identity, the research was done overtly so that the participants gender can be determined by self-report to avoid errors and biases.

The researcher considered that, because of the adversity nonbinary employees face in their day to day lives, there was the possibility that there could be hesitation or negative backlash when approaching the sample group. For this reason, the researcher clearly defined their positionality, exploring the relationship between the researcher and research. In this case, the researcher has strong ties to the queer community. This bias allowed the researcher to have insights into the struggles of queer individuals, therefore enabling the research. However, it also caused subjectivity towards the topic. An argument can be made that, as the research focuses on transgender issues from a cisgender perspective, a certain level of objectivity is retained because there are no personal ties to the research topic, but there is also a risk of overrepresentation of cisgendered researchers on trans-focused research (Galupo, 2017).

To collect the data the researcher will use a passive Netnography framework (Shaw, 2020). Phases one of the framework, initiation, included identifying the platforms that will be investigated and gaining the ethics approval, while phase two refers to copying the relevant data (Kozinets, 2015). Due to the nature and public accessibility of the data sources used, the researcher did not ask for permission to analyze the texts. Sczesny et al. (2015) note that "As

language use is an action performed in a wide range of circumstances, future research should also assess the contiguity between behavior and context." Therefore, the findings included enough context that the situation is as clear as possible. The data was collected online and directly copied into the report.
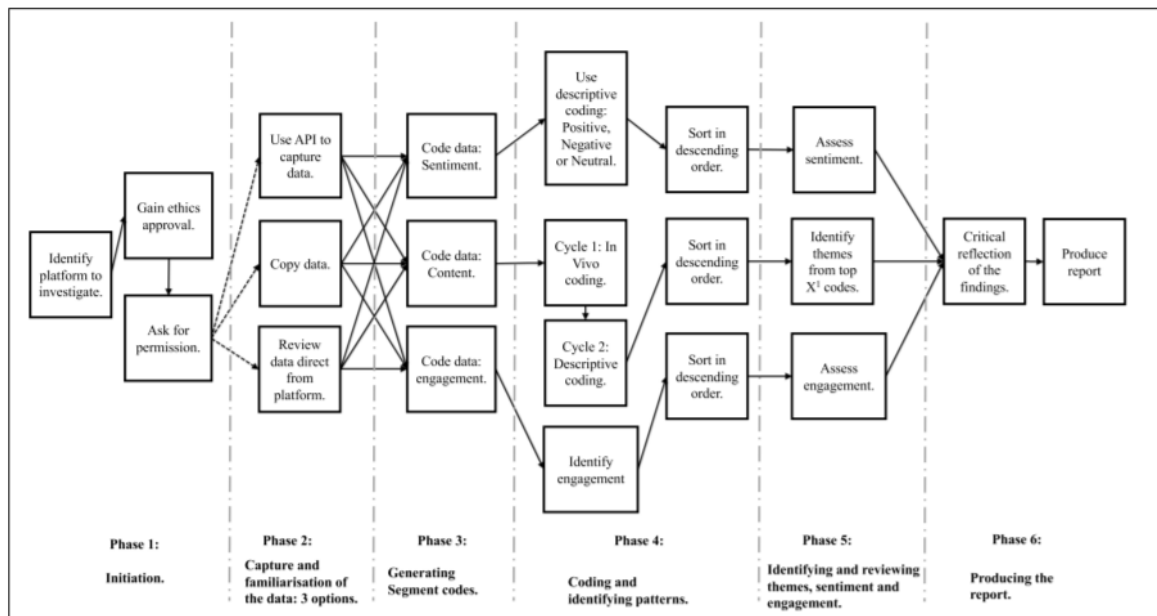
Figure 3 The Passive Netnography Framework

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Phases 3 to 6 of the passive Netnography framework concern the data analysis and interpretation part of the research. The data was coded by sentiment using critical discourse analysis of blog and newspaper articles, more specifically semiotics (Berger, 2013), looking for patterns in the language used to describe the perceived inclusion through currently used language.

The data was coded into positive neutral or negative descriptors (Fawcett, 2015), allowing the researcher to gain on general oversight into the sentiment of the findings. Lastly, the researcher critically reflects on the findings and summarize them in a report.

Ethical Data Management

Concerning ethical data management, it is vital to protect the identity of the people that are contributing their experiences (Richards and Schwartz, 2002). For this purpose, should names be used, they will be changed to initials.

FINDINGS

Proposition 1: It is assumed that nonbinary employees struggle with inclusion in the workplace.

An anonymous post in a nonbinary forum described an experience of being outed at work, stating: *"I had a guy just sir me, a coworker, nice guy. There was a customer at the counter, his head snapped up, **I was outed**. [...] Its getting awkward with the whole sir, maam thing. [...] Its the workplace, **I walk on eggshells here**. [...] I think I had to address it. **I chose not to involve management**"* (Unknown, 2015), going on to say *"They can call me whatever, I don't care at this point, all are true anyway. But **while management says it supports, it does not. It tolerates**"* (Unknown, 2015)**.**

In an article published in Refinery29 (O'Sullivan, 2021), the experiences of the pronoun-changing processes of four nonbinary employees were shared. S. (they/them), explained that their pronouns are now in their email signature, indicating that this was not the norm previously, going on to say: *"People I have worked with outside the organization have **either embraced** my change of pronouns **or avoided** using pronouns altogether"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). They stressed the accepting culture of their workplace by stating: *"I was **lucky** that I work for a progressive organization and because of my role there I've been able to set a good tone for conversations about queer experiences. I would say that most people had at least **a basic understanding of non-binary identity** – I didn't have to explain myself to anyone"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). However, H. (they/them) had a vastly different experience. "I didn't think it would be a big deal to change my pronouns – it's 2021, right? But I was very, very wrong" (O'Sullivan, 2021). After coming out as nonbinary, and requesting that their pronouns be respected, they found that *"all these people who had been working with [them] under the guise of female pronouns seemed to be **unable to make the switch**"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). They note that *"the*

company has a ***very good understanding*** *when covering gender identity and issues but when it comes to practice and implementation,* ***there is a lot to be desired internally"*** (O'Sullivan, 2021). A third interviewee, E. (they/them) states that they *"think companies can be pretty **lazy** when it comes to diversity and inclusion education. They should have at least one workshop every six months. People get lazy"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). Lastly, the fourth report by H.P. (they/he) talked about legal struggles they encountered, forcing a declaration of gender at their but limiting the available choices: *"**My options were limited: 'Mx' wasn't an available title** and while my gender details were not required by my employer on my HR record,* ***they were required*** *to ensure that my payroll information matched what was 'legally' held by HMRC. In essence, **I am still legally my assigned at birth gender**, and to this day, my payslips and P60s etc. use titles and gender markers that **misgender** me"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). Beyond this, however, they *"feel **affirmed** and **acknowledged** as someone that is non-binary within in [their] workplace"* (O'Sullivan, 2021).

In an interview of S.B. (they/them) for the Glassdoor blog (Moore, 2019), the interviewee talked about their decision making progress before coming out. *"When I came out and started to change my pronouns, though, **I didn't do it at the company where I worked at the time**. I'd had several **indications** that **it wouldn't really go over well**, and that it would be **asking a lot** from the leadership team to try and get them on my side"* (Moore, 2019). They openly communicated their pronouns before starting a new job, stating: *"Which was cool because they already knew about my pronouns and they wanted to make sure I was **comfortable**. I actually had a brief conversation with the head of our people and culture team and she asked if I had any questions or if I had anything I wanted to talk about — they made sure that **I knew I could ask**, and they were on my side"* (Moore, 2019).

Test, (2018), interviewed G. (they/them) about their coming out experience at work. G. talked about their reasons to come out at work, explaining *"I think people don't realize **how deep it**

can hurt to *not be seen as the person you are*, especially when you're spending 40 hours a week with your coworkers"(Test, 2018). Despite this, they were *"afraid that [their] older coworkers wouldn't understand, and that [their] straight colleagues would be unfamiliar with gender identities. If someone hasn't had exposure to gender identity beyond male or female, the concept can be really confusing. [They were] scared people might say [their] identity was made up or that they would completely ignore [their] new pronouns"* (Test, 2018).

Paterson (they/them) (2019) talked about being *"ready to be demoralized and disappointed"* despite their *"immediate work colleagues never demonstrating any anti-trans attitudes at all".* The author then described the positive experience they had instead: *"However, it was quite the opposite. My boss even offered support by asking about my pronouns and asking if it would be appropriate to send an email around the office to avoid me being misgendered"*(Paterson, 2019).

In some companies, the company culture is supportive, but their ability to include nonbinary employees is limited through legal barriers, such as legal recognition of nonbinary identities. Furthermore, experiences of perceived inclusion and safety to come out vary – one person switched jobs from an environment where they felt they would not be accepted to an employer that emphasized their support from the beginning. The perceived inclusion and effort within the workplace were divided almost equally between positive and negative experiences after coming out. Often, the expectations did not align with the consequences. This indicates that, while not all employees struggle with inclusion in their workplace, preconceived notions and expectations before coming out have a large impact on the experience.

Proposition 2: A lack of awareness is facilitating a cis normative working environment, therefore excluding nonbinary people in the workplace.

*"I had a guy just sir me, a coworker, nice guy. […] I was outed. I present female at work. I spoke one on one to the guy, privately, asked him not to sir me around the customers. Recognized he was **trying to be respectful**. He said **he did not understand**, but would stop calling me sir"* (Unknown, 2015)**.** This experience of a nonbinary person indicates a lack of awareness and understanding at their workplace.

H. explained *"Nonbinary representation is something that could be considered **a** relatively new concept to a lot of people, and I understand that. But I never foresaw how little people would understand"* (O'Sullivan, 2021)*.* They note that their feminine presentation potentially complicates things and requires time and education to achieve understanding and awareness but stress that *"there's been a passing of time and **there's been no education** – despite cries from the LGBTQ+ community at work that more needs to be done"* (O'Sullivan, 2021)*.*

S.B. noted that adapting is not a linear process: *"You're going to have days where it seems really difficult, and you're going to be tasked with people who consistently get it wrong. That **doesn't mean they aren't trying**, though — **some people get scared**"* (Moore, 2019). Therefore, awareness is not the only barrier. Instead, an inclusive work environment needs to be nourished constantly. This is further confirmed by C. (they/them) in their Gay Times article, where they write: "*Despite the progress we've made, awareness is only the beginning of developing a culture of acceptance, it's not the end goal"* (Mallett, 2018)*.* In another article, this time published with Welcome to the Jungle, C. tells the author *"When you're non-binary, you have to come out as 'trans' as an umbrella term and then educate people about being constantly in, as they see it, limbo. On one hand, this can lead people to somewhat downplay the non-binary experience, seeing it as less 'serious' and more of a passing fashion trend or political identity.*

On the other hand, it's sometimes more socially acceptable because it's not as 'serious' and you're seen as 'just queer' instead of totally trans. Either way, there's a grave problem around the perceived legitimacy of being non-binary versus binary trans"(Schwam, 2020). Here, their focus lies on having to educate people, once again indicating a general lack of awareness in their workplace and the consequences of this.

Further underlining the cis normative working environment, S. said: *"Even if it doesn't seem relevant to your workplace. Making sure HR policies and work services are gender neutral or consider non-binary experiences is really important too – things like dress codes, parental leave policies. Having gender neutral loos that are of the same quality as gendered loos and being mindful of using gendered language like 'ladies and gentlemen' when addressing colleagues goes a long way. Just degendering the workplace entirely, as much as that's possible"* (O'Sullivan, 2021).

Experiences also seem to show that there is a willingness to learn, as detailed by G. (Test, 2018). *"I got a lot of replies to my email saying […] "I'll definitely read these links," […]. I'm happy to say that I worked at a progressive and diverse company, so **generally people were really open** to this new thing they'd never heard of before. **People were very receptive to the change"*** (Test, 2018). Just like S.B., G. mentioned that it is a learning process: *"People would sometimes fall back into using my old pronouns. I think the company as a whole has to hold each other accountable, not just a few individuals"* (Test, 2018). Beyond coworkers, G. also noted cis-centric applications within company forms: *"Once I get to the job application, I usually get **stuck on the gender options**. When I only see male or female, I'm not sure what to put. If a company had a form with "How do you identify your gender?" I would feel heard and understood"* (Test, 2018).

According to Paterson (2019), however, it is also possible for nonbinary employees to expect a lack of awareness and catering to a cis normative environment, thus hesitating to ask for change despite being in an accepting environment: "It went... fine? And I use that weird punctuation to illustrate that it went well, but that **I was confused** by the whole thing. […] I surprised myself by becoming very meek at this point, shrinking down and wishing I hadn't said anything, **not wanting to be a bother** and feeling very **embarrassed by the support** I was getting" (Paterson, 2019).

The findings show that creating awareness of nonbinary employees and what that means, as well as understanding how to use inclusive language is often a problem, but not the final goal, which is acceptance and inclusion. However, in order to create an inclusive workplace, awareness and understanding are the first steps. Some people are willing to learn and adapt after being confronted with the issue, but not all nonbinary employees had the same experiences with their coworkers. Furthermore, companies without active efforts to degendering the workplace, for example through dress codes or HR policies are excluding nonbinary employees and demonstrating a lack of awareness.

Proposition 3: It is assumed that companies use gendered language.

In order to determine if workplaces use gendered language, it was looked at what changes were necessary when people came out as nonbinary at work, what made them hesitate, and what changes did not happen.

"The gendered language has been the main change," explained S., going on to say *"In my opinion, workplaces should encourage the whole team to put pronouns in their email signature, Slack bio etc. They should actually educate colleagues about LGBT+ identities. Pay a queer educator to come in and do training!"* (O'Sullivan, 2021).

According to H. there is also an issue of using inclusive language in a performative manner. *"But there are absolutely days where someone will continually use the wrong pronouns in a meeting despite me being sat right there and correcting them. I also have little to no confidence that when I am not present, people are using they/them when speaking about me"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). This implies that gendered language is the norm within their workplace, and that employees favor it.

Sometimes, there are legal barriers that force companies to use gendered language, as H.P. explains. *"I think this is something that is really overlooked: even if an organization wanted to be more inclusive to non-binary employees, they are limited by HMRC's binary requirements"* (O'Sullivan, 2021). He further elaborated *"**I am empowered** to use whatever pronouns I want at my current workplace and happily include those in my email signature and Zoom display name, and my new team is also supportive of my identity. But due to those payroll requirements – something that is out of the hands of my boss, the HR dept and the payroll dept – **I have to just cope with being misgendered** on my payslips etc."* (O'Sullivan, 2021).

C. commented on the impact it has on them when people use their correct pronouns: *"I also have the freedom to include my preference for gender-neutral language in my email signature,*

visible to both colleagues and external partners in industry. When somebody goes to the effort to learn and use my preferred pronouns, they're telling me: 'I respect and recognise who you identify as'" (Mallett, 2018). Although they can communicate their pronouns upfront and directly, they indicate that gendered language is still the norm as people have to learn to use pronouns. In another article, C. noted that there are *"workplaces that were founded on binary thinking,"* going on to point out that *"today we have less formal ways of communicating and companies are updating their systems to include non-binary people, such as making sure HR systems have free text fields so people can enter their expressed gender identity"* (Schwam, 2020). This implies that more modern companies can find it easier to adapt their language to be inclusive, as they are supported by less formal ways of communicating and more flexible systems.

Lastly, G. explains that, while the company was accepting of their pronouns, there was no effort to adapt beyond this. *"**I wish my company tried to normalize pronouns**. It would've been nice to see everyone in the office start introducing themselves with their pronouns, add pronouns to their email signatures, and stop assuming other people's pronouns. It's one thing to **accept** my pronouns and **then just move on**, but it **would be even better to acknowledge** that gender identity is an issue that goes beyond our company"* (Test, 2018). This indicated that the company not only uses gendered language, making no active changes to make their workplace more inclusive. G. talked about the impression this leaves on them: "*I think fostering a culture of inclusion begins with someone's first impression of your company. It starts the moment they visit your website to apply for a job. Is the language gendered on your site? Saying "We employ men and women from around the world" instead of "We employ the greatest humans from around the world" gives me a very different impression of the company. How can I see myself working at your company if **your messaging is already excluding me**?"* (Test, 2018).

Overall, there were no reports of gender-neutral language being used before the coming out of nonbinary employees, though some are empowered to use their pronouns. Often, the use of gender-neutral language or the right pronouns is tolerated without taking active steps to change or encourage change of the lingua franca.

It is insinuated that a lack of education or understanding further promotes the use of gendered language. Additionally, even when companies encourage an inclusive environment, they can be forced to use gendered language on official documentation because of local laws. The findings clearly show that gendered language is almost always the company norm.

DISCUSSION

This thesis explored the effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees. A change of organizational and research focus from diversity management towards aiming for inclusion, is being driven by the rapid growth and shift of inclusion in the workplace (Woods, 2016; O'Donovan, 2015). More people, especially amongst younger generations, identify as a gender outside of the gender binary (Greco, 2012). However, a binary understanding of gender is inseparably ingrained into society, therefore potentially facilitating the exclusion of nonbinary employees in the workplace (Fawcett, 2015). Current research into gender neutral language focuses solely on including women, thus failing to consider employees who do not identify as male or female (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2014). To encourage the use of gender-neutral language and striving towards an inclusive workplace, regardless of gender identities, this research focused on experiences of nonbinary employees to develop an understanding of the current level of perceived exclusion facilitated by gendered language in workplaces.

The findings focused on the experiences of nonbinary employees in their workplace, looking at overall perceived inclusion, possible barriers for the inclusion of nonbinary people, and the current language used in companies.

The experiences that people are describing, centered around their perceived inclusion at work and the language that is used both generally and when referring to them, suggest that there is an effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary people. Based on the context and the sentiment, nonbinary employees tend to feel excluded when gendered language is used. A more thorough analysis can be found in the tables below.

To understand where in the inclusion framework by Shore et al. (2011) the nonbinary employees and their experiences lay, the language they used has been analyzed by sentiment and categorized into three circumstances: before initiating active change, for example coming

out or leaving their organization, and after initiating active change. There is no meaning to the order these descriptors were written into the table.

Before Active Change		
Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
I didn't think it would be a big deal to change my pronouns		*It wouldn't really go over well*
		It would be asking a lot from the leadership team [to get support]
		People don't realize how deep it can hurt to not be seen as the person you are
		Afraid that [colleagues] wouldn't understand [or] be unfamiliar
		The concept can be really confusing
		[Some people get] scared
		Scared
		Ready to be demoralized and disappointed
		Your messaging is already excluding me

Table 1 Categorizing the language used based on descriptors – before active change

After Active Change – In the same company		
Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
Lucky	People [have] either embraced my change of pronouns or avoided using pronouns altogether	I walk on eggshells here
Most people had at least a basic understanding of non-binary identity	He did not understand	While management says it supports, it does not. It tolerates
The company has a very good understanding	People would sometimes fall back	[coworkers seemed] unable to make the switch
[they] feel affirmed and acknowledged [in their identity within work]	I was confused by the whole [support]	There is a lot to be desired internally when it comes to practice and implementation
Offered support by asking about my pronouns	Embarrassed by the support	companies can be [...] lazy [about] diversity and inclusion education
Trying to be respectful	Accept [...] and then just move on	My options were [legally] limited
Doesn't mean they aren't trying	Generally, people were really open	Stuck on the [legal] gender options
Generally people were really open		there's a grave problem around the perceived legitimacy of being non-binary versus binary trans

Positive	Neutral	Negative
People were very receptive to the change		*Not wanting to be a bother*
I am empowered		*I have to just cope with being misgendered on my payslips etc.*
		I wish my company tried to normalize pronouns.
		Would be even better to acknowledge

Table 2 Categorizing the language used based on descriptors – After Active Change – In the same company

After Active Change – Switching Companies		
Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
They [knew] my pronouns and they wanted to make sure I was comfortable		
They made sure that I knew I could ask		
They were on my side		

Table 3 Categorizing the language used based on descriptors – After Active Change – In the same company

The language used shows that most positive descriptors were used when talking about the reactions and efforts organizations and colleagues made after the nonbinary employee came out or switched workplaces to ones that were openly accepting. Neutral descriptors were used when talking about the struggles people had to adapt the language they used, but where

generally trying. From a quantitative standpoint, a majority of the language used had negative connotations. Not all of them talked about their experiences after coming out, the focus was also on the negative expectations the nonbinary employees had. This shows that the dominant use of gendered language negatively influences the perceived inclusion of nonbinary employees. Furthermore, it implies that the effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees is harmful.

In the context of the inclusion framework (Shore et al., 2011), it appears as though most nonbinary employees initially perceive their company culture to place a low value on uniqueness and belongingness, which leads to them feeling excluded. Coming out and therefore initiating active changes within the company culture had mixed effects. Some employees found their organization to strive for inclusion, indicating high value in uniqueness and belongingness, while others found they were still being excluded. The individuals that changed workplaces chose them deliberately with the expectation of being included.

The legal barriers nonbinary employees can face support the assumption that nonbinary employees struggle with inclusion in the workplace, although not for fault of the company culture. However, even if efforts are made within the workplace towards inclusion, they can be thwarted by local laws. These findings highlight the effects of not legally recognizing nonbinary identities in the UK or insufficient protection of nonbinary employees in the US (Stonewall.org.uk, 2018; Valentine, 2016). Being forced to use gendered language in certain setting contributes to social discrimination (Cosgrove, 2021). This indicates that, while companies might be willing to use inclusive language, legal restrictions can prevent them from creating a more inclusive environment.

The willingness of a nonbinary employee to work for a new company where they are accepted over an organization where they do not feel included correlates with Maslow's Theory of

Human Motivation and its emphasis on the importance of feeling a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943). It can be assumed that creating an inclusive company culture not only promotes employee engagement and wellbeing (O'Donovan, 2018), but also reduces employee turnover.

Although inclusion requires active efforts that accept and treat different people equally (Roberson, 2006), suggesting that inclusive company cultures are noticeable, the findings showed that often the expected reactions to coming out as nonbinary in the workplace differed from their actual experiences. This indicates that inclusion efforts are not always recognizable by employees or that ignorance can be perceived as tolerance instead of exclusion. Furthermore, it demonstrates the importance of open communication to create an inclusive workplace.

The goals of nonbinary employees indicated by the findings, which are acceptance and conclusion beyond awareness and tolerance, align with the development of the emphasis on inclusion beyond diversity management (O'Donovan, 2015). With younger generations making up most of the workforce while also being more likely to identify outside of the gender binary (Greco, 2012), it is likely that the inclusion of nonbinary employees will further be emphasized. Within more traditional organizations, however, it is probable that the inclusion of nonbinary employees is rather unknown or prioritized less.

According to McKay (1980), the benefits need to outweigh the costs to recommend the use of a certain language. The findings were inconclusive if this is the case for the organization, however, it can clearly be seen that changing the established cis-normative language used in companies would greatly benefit nonbinary employees. Not only could it increase their sense of belongingness and inclusion, this, in turn could lead to higher employee engagement and increased wellbeing (O'Donovan, 2018). No conclusion could be drawn concerning the

benefits of changing the company language to a gender-neutral standard even without having

an employee openly identify as nonbinary.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite planning with the intent to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of gendered language on nonbinary employees, there were barriers and limitations when conducting the research. As there was no sample frame, it is possible that important data is missing. Not differentiating between identities that fall under the nonbinary umbrella has two main potential consequences. Firstly, there is a possibility that different gender identities perceive the lingua franca as varying degrees of inclusive, for example depending on their preferred pronouns. Someone who uses he/they pronouns might feel more included than a person who uses ze/zir pronouns. Furthermore, because the research focused on people who identify as nonbinary, the perspective of people who identify outside of the gender binary and do not use a nonbinary label might not be represented in the findings.

Another limitation is that, because language is contextual, the data was sorted based on the researcher's perception and understanding of the context and sentiment. It is very possible that another person might interpret the data differently, or that it was intended in another wax than interpreted in this thesis.

The lack of differentiation between countries or cultures, focusing research on English speaking reports from nonbinary employees, creates a wide scope. However, as the research has shown, local laws can greatly impact the use and effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees. Therefore, not having more of a regional focus can be considered a limitation.

Another sampling limitation was the amount of new (relevant) data available. Thus, saturation has been reached despite a small sample size.

Furthermore, the data came from openly nonbinary individuals who discussed their coming out experiences at work as well as the initiatives they took. Therefore, despite the findings

suggesting that companies use gendered language prior to the coming out of the employee, it is difficult to draw a conclusion on the effect of gendered language on closeted nonbinary employees.

While the number of phrases does not correlate with the amount of positive or negative experiences described, it gives an overview of how included or excluded nonbinary employees feel. However, the number of statements might be misleading as there were different amounts of relevant data in every interview.

Lastly, because analyzing data is a subjective process, errors can be made.

This paper has opened up many possibilities for future research. First of all, future research could focus on different countries, cultures, or languages. Another possible approach is looking at the issue from the perspective of different company cultures, their portrayed inclusion in comparison with the perceived inclusion of nonbinary employees and the language that is being used. Furthermore, one could look at the language that organizations are currently using, for example by utilizing language deconstructing platforms or sites of study, as opposed to or as well as exploring the language used by openly nonbinary employees. The existing research could also be expanded upon by gaining insight into the perceived inclusion of nonbinary people who are not out at work, or of employees who identify outside of the gender binary but do not identify as nonbinary. Lastly, one could expand the research on how to achieve gender neutral language instead of striving to feminize language.

CONCLUSION

By exploring the effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees, this paper has added to existing literature on gendered language and inclusion. As current studies concerning gender inclusive language focus largely on including women, they are consequently excluding people whose gender identity lies outside of the gender binary. Therefore, little to no research was done concerning the inclusion of nonbinary employees through the lens of gendered language.

Through its nature, qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of the topic. Netnography allowed the researcher to investigate the descriptions of peoples and cultures within their habits, customs, and mutual differences by looking at online text. The sample was chosen purposefully, through the criteria of people identifying beyond the gender binary and discussing their inclusion at work online in an interview, forum, or blogpost.

Throughout the research, barriers such as a lack of awareness and understanding and limited or no legal recognition or protection have become evident. It was concluded that gendered language is the norm in organizations, with changes towards gender neutral language mostly being driven by nonbinary employees coming out at work. Furthermore, the language used by the nonbinary employees to describe their experiences suggests that the use of gendered language has a negative effect on them, as many doubts were described prior to coming out, with varying results on inclusion after the act.

The insights gained during the writing of this paper highlight possibilities for future research such as narrowing down the population by country or culture or diversifying the research by exploring the effect of gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees in other languages. Other possibilities include focusing the population on nonbinary employees who

are not openly nonbinary, or people whose identity lies outside of the gender binary but who do not identify as nonbinary.

PRACTICAL SOLUTION DESIGN

Beyond the theoretical research of the different concepts and their relations, creating a practical solution for organizations supports necessary changes in order to create a more inclusive workplace regardless of gender identity. As it has been identified that a lack of awareness is facilitating the use of gendered language in organizations, creating awareness is the first step in aiming for a transformation within the organization.

The proposed solution design has been tailored to the researcher's placement company, the Munich Hotel Partners Hotel AG (MHP). The organization is "an independent German hotel investment and hotel management platform with headquarters in Munich" (MHP, 2022). Their slogan "YOU MATTER" does not only apply to guests and partners but is a company philosophy that places value on their employees. As such, the company strives to create an inclusive company culture. In addition to trainings relevant to an employee's job description, an active learning environment is encouraged, with cross trainings and online resources available to interested parties. The company also utilizes a social platform called Hotelkit, which all hotels in their portfolio use for internal communication. Hotelkit is also a tool that can be used for external communication between the hotels or between MHP and its properties.

Despite the efforts of MHP to facilitate inclusion, there are currently no initiatives that encourage the use of gender-neutral language. Thus, an intervention is necessary. For the solution to successfully bring about change, it must be relevant and tailored to the company (Cummings and Worley, 2014). To create a customized solution, the researcher must evaluate the language currently used in the company. Aspects include to what extend the company uses gendered language and where it is inclusive towards all gender identities. Furthermore, an organizational goal must be defined. Lastly, it is important to consider how open the company is to change.

In order to answer these questions, the researcher has held meetings with their mentor, the Director of MICE Booking Center. Although the lingua franca is German, as it is a company based in Germany, day-to-day operations require the frequent use of English when talking to customers and colleagues. Additionally, MHP mainly operates Marriott hotels, whose lingua franca is English. The solution should provide organizations and employees with the tools and knowledge necessary to create a more inclusive environment for nonbinary employees. Therefore, it was decided that the solution should focus primarily on creating awareness and educating employees on what it means to be nonbinary and have a secondary focus on using English in a gender-neutral way, as well as suggesting best practices. The focus elements that were chosen are based on the insights gained during the theoretical research. In addition, the research has shown that the change has to happen within the members of the community, and that employees struggled to adapt their language even with organizational support, so issues such as making mistakes and misgendering should also be addressed in the solution. The director also suggested that the training should add an element concerning recruiting, as she felt this is an area in which both the company and potential employees could greatly benefit from when gender inclusive language is used from the beginning.

To distribute the knowledge and create awareness beyond MHP, educational resources will also be made available on the communications platform. Additionally, a workshop will be held by the researcher during her remaining time at the company.

Online guidelines on nonbinary inclusion will be used as a benchmark for the development of the infographic and the workshop.

The infographic needs a minimalist design, aligned with company standards to emphasize support and that the organization places value on the change. As it is a condensed version of presenting information with a broader distribution, available to all employees in the hotel

portfolio, text needs to be short and understandable. Use of keywords is encouraged. However, it needs to contain enough information to stand on its own.

The workshop will be more in-depth than the infographic. Beyond creating awareness, its purpose is to offer an in-depth education on nonbinary employees, inclusion, and gendered language. By giving a more through presentation on the concepts and their links, this solution not only aims to increase awareness and understanding but strives to make participants more comfortable with the concepts. Beyond the presentations, the participating employees will practice using gender neutral phrasing, introducing themselves with their pronouns, using gender neutral pronouns such as they/them, and other best practices which the organization intends to implement. Just like the infographic, the design will be aligned with company standards to symbolize the value and support the company places on the change, as stressed by their "YOU MATTER" slogan. This message will also be omnipresent in the workshop design.

As the communications platform is already in use, making it possible to share an informative text or infographic, there should not be additional costs beyond allocating a time and in-house facility for the workshop. If personal gatherings are still limited due to Covid restrictions, the workshop will take place online. This makes the solution feasible.

The implementation plan of the solution was modeled after Schein's conceptual model for managed culture change (Schein, 2010). He based his model on the fundamentals of human change as defined by Kurt Lewin (1947), and refined the basic "Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze" model in his studies (Schein, 2010). Schein names the first stage Unfreeze/Disconfirmation, arguing that any changes that go beyond minor incremental ways can only occur after individuals have experienced sufficient discomfort and anxiety in relation to the issue, but perceiving enough psychological safety to be "able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity" (Schein, 2010). The second stage, Cognitive Restructuring, is the process during which individuals change or restructure their thinking. Lastly, the refreezing takes place. This refers to the reinforcement of the necessity of new behavior. In this stage, individuals internalize their new beliefs and methods, gradually integrating them into their day-to-day operations (Schein, 2010).

Unfreezing/Disconfirmation

The infographic will be posted onto Hotelkit two weeks before the workshop takes place. It will also be sent directly to the participants of the workshop, to ensure the unfreezing process begins. The information presented there will not only give a focused overview but create a sense of urgency by referring to statistics such as the high turnover rate of nonbinary employees and the likelihood of suicide. This sense of urgency also aims to cause discomfort and anxiety in relation to the inclusion of nonbinary employees. As the design aligns with company standards and the infographic emphasizes the importance of the concepts, organizational support is shown and consequently intends to project sufficient psychological safety. Thus, individuals who are scheduled to attend the workshop understand that they can learn something new without losing their identity or integrity.

Cognitive Restructuring

The more detailed workshop on the effect of gendered language on nonbinary employees will not only highlight the most important insights gained but change or restructure their thinking. This will not only increase awareness but go beyond it, one step closer to acceptance and inclusion. Furthermore, practicing the use of gender-neutral language and pronouns and other best practices will help the participants to become more comfortable with the change. Another important element of the workshop will be talking about possible pitfalls and mistakes, such as accidentally misgendering someone.

Refreezing

Lastly, the changes made will have to be reinforced and maintained regularly so that the new beliefs and awareness gets internalized over time. For this purpose, workshops on nonbinary employees and gendered language will be held every half a year. Not only will this keep employees aware of the issue and solutions, but it will allow the organization to expand the workshop with the emergence of new research. Examples of this include investigating the effect of gendered language and the inclusion of nonbinary employees in German speaking countries, and possible best practices. Furthermore, organizing regular workshops will allow them to be held at the organization's properties too.

After coming up with a suggested solution, the researcher met with her placement company's Director of Training and HR Development to discuss the potential, content, and design of the workshop, as well as a primary audience. To help make these choices, the meeting started off with a presentation of the thesis and its findings. This also gave the researcher a chance to practice presenting and gain valuable feedback from an experienced professional. Taking the input from the Director MICE Booking center into consideration, it was decided that the main target group for the workshop should be Human Resources (HR) professionals working for MHP and their hotels and take place during one of the reoccurring HR meetings. This way, they can implement their takeaways in their daily operations and recruiting processes. The company's slogan "YOU MATTER" and the organizational culture it conveys will also be supported through this measure. It was also decided that employees from the Sales and Marketing departments will either be invited or take part in a second workshop for them, to make communication with clients and MHPs online presence more gender neutral.

The final workshop design as seen in App. B was evolved from the ideas and thoughts mentioned above and evaluated during this meeting. In terms of visual design, the company uses different colors for external and internal communication, and as the solution is targeted towards company employees, the employee color will be used. It is a shade of teal. Additionally, the presentation layout will be based on company standards. Permission for this has been obtained.

To grab and hold attention, the workshop itself will meet participants where they are, catering to their fields of interest. For this target audience, the icebreaker will be inspired by job advertisements, and the use of gender-neutral language in them, while asking questions such as: "Do you know what this means? Why you have to do it? Why is it required by law?"

Structurally, it was decided that nonbinary identities will be explained first, then best practices for using gender neutral language can be introduced. There will be space for questions, interactive exercises, and discussion.

In terms of media used, a PowerPoint presentation will provide visual support during the workshop. This has the added advantage of giving participants something to focus on should they feel insecure about or uncomfortable with one of the topics discussed, instead of forcing them to look at a human. When wishing for full attention, however, the Director of Training and HR Development recommends using a backscreen, thus effectively turning off the PowerPoint. This forces people to automatically look at the presenter. She also stressed the use of a flipchart to add an interactive element that creates automatic inclusion and developpes naturals. This is useful for discussions, brainstorming, and exercises.

She recommended planning at least 2-3 minutes per slide, however noted that planning 5 minutes per slide is better because it leaves room for questions, which one should encourage. With a workshop of 30 minutes, this leaves time for 6 slides. 45 minutes allows for 9. Logically, interactive elements may require more than 5 minutes.

EVALUATION

To determine the success of the solution, the level of awareness and understanding must be measured at the beginning of the process and shortly after the workshop. For this purpose, a survey was created which will provide an initial insight into the level of awareness participants have on nonbinary employees and their inclusion in the workplace, as well as their understanding on how to use gender-neutral language. Another survey will be distributed to the participants of the workshop after some time has passed, providing an overview of employee's opinion on the usefulness of the workshop as well as the knowledge gained. This will also allow for the results to be compared. Improved results in perceived understanding and awareness indicate a successful intervention.

The surveys will be anonymous and will also provide insight into the gender identities of the participants as well as their perceived inclusion through the language used. This will help the organization determine best practices and develop an understanding of the current level of perceived inclusion through the used language.

The theoretical contribution of my research has already led to more research, as two students in The Netherlands and Germany respectively are working on papers concerning the inclusion of nonbinary employees (App. C). One student at Hotelschool The Hague has already started writing their LYCAR thesis with a strong focus on the hospitality industry, going a step further by gaining a close insight on an individual perspective, while the other student is working on a paper on the use of gender-neutral language and the inclusion of nonbinary people in German and English. Meetings where the researcher has shared their knowledge were held with both students, and both students will read the LYCAR thesis upon its conclusion. Furthermore, the researcher has already presented the findings of her thesis to two directors at her placement company, thus giving them an in-depth knowledge of the topic. Lastly, the knowledge gained during the course of this thesis will be shared with HR, Recruiting, Sales, and Marketing professionals within the company in the foreseeable future, thus providing these professionals with tools to create a more inclusive working environment.

PROCESS REFLECTION

With gendered language currently being a highly debated topic, understanding what it is and what it means for affected minorities is paramount to not only find suitable solutions, but to create a more inclusive language in an increasingly diverse society. With most research focused on the inclusion of women, the researcher focused her efforts on understanding and sharing the implications of using gendered language on the inclusion of nonbinary employees. Aiming to increase awareness and encourage the use of gender-neutral language, the researcher will share her findings in an educational way.

Possible solutions were discussed with the researcher's mentor and superior in the internship company. The researcher suggested she develop and hold workshop that educates her colleagues on the importance of using gender-neutral language and provides them with tools to use it. Furthermore, as the topic was explored through the lens of nonbinary employees, the workshop should also aim to increase awareness on the issue. To reach people beyond the administrative headquarters, the insights will be shared through the multi-property communication tool in the form of an infographic.

The researcher will also be able to share her findings and solution with her fellow students, as well as her coach and her commissioner through various meetings as well as a mock event where she can hold a presentation on her topic.

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Appendix A – Data Management

File Upload Notification

N   noreply <noreply@hotelschool.nl>
     To ● Nicole Kinzelmann

Dear Nicole Kinzelmann,

This is an automatic delivery message to notify you that a new file has been uploaded.

Name : Nicole Kinzelmann
Student Number : 791828
Email : 791828@hotelschool.nl
LYCar Coach : Dr Brannon
Research Number : 2021-347

We kindly request you to forward this email to your LYCar coach as evidence that your data files have been uploaded securely.
Thank You.

FW: File Upload Notification

Nicole Kinzelmann
To ● Brannon, DW, Dr.

Dear Dr Brannon,

Below you will find the File Upload Notification.

The conducted data files, which consist of screenshots of websites have been safely stored with the Hotelschool The Hague Research Centre.

Looking forward to handing in soon!

Sincerely,

Raven

-----Original Message-----
From: noreply <noreply@hotelschool.nl>
Sent: Friday, 18 February 2022 19:09
To: Nicole Kinzelmann <791828@hotelschool.nl>
Subject: File Upload Notification

Dear Nicole Kinzelmann,

This is an automatic delivery message to notify you that a new file has been uploaded.

Name : Nicole Kinzelmann
Student Number : 791828
Email : 791828@hotelschool.nl
LYCar Coach : Dr Brannon
Research Number : 2021-347

We kindly request you to forward this email to your LYCar coach as evidence that your data files have been uploaded securely.
Thank You.

Appendix B – Workshop Design

Welcome Slide – introductory, title, short overview of contents

2 Min

Icebreaker – Job title taken from MHP website
- Meets participants where they are
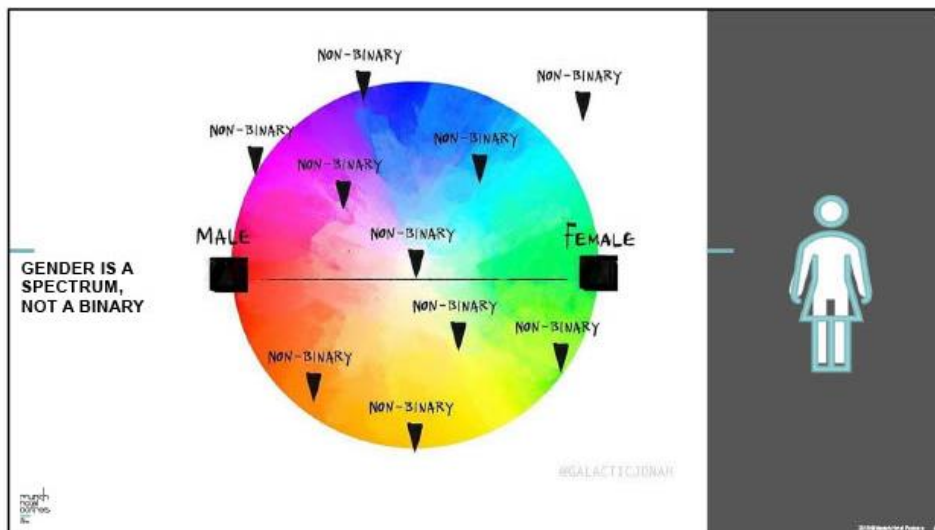- Subtle emphasis of M/F/D by making it larger than everything else

5 min
ASK: Why do we have to put that there?
Then:
We know what the M & F stand for – Male and Female – but what about the D?
🔲 Gather suggestions ask multiple people

5 min
Mention gender vs sex 🔲 Transgender = People identify differently than their sex assigned at birth. Mention Cisgender = People identify with their sex assigned at birth
Gender is on a spectrum
- Male, Female = gender binary
- Nonbinary = **Umbrella Term** for identifying outside of the gender binary

THE NON-BINARY
UMBRELLA

5 min
- Umbrella Term (Mention Nonbinary Flag)
    - Many other terms and labels
    - Which do the participants know? ☐ USE FLIPCHART
→ On PPT: Examples of labels that fall under the nonbinary umbrella (in case not many get collected on the flipchart).
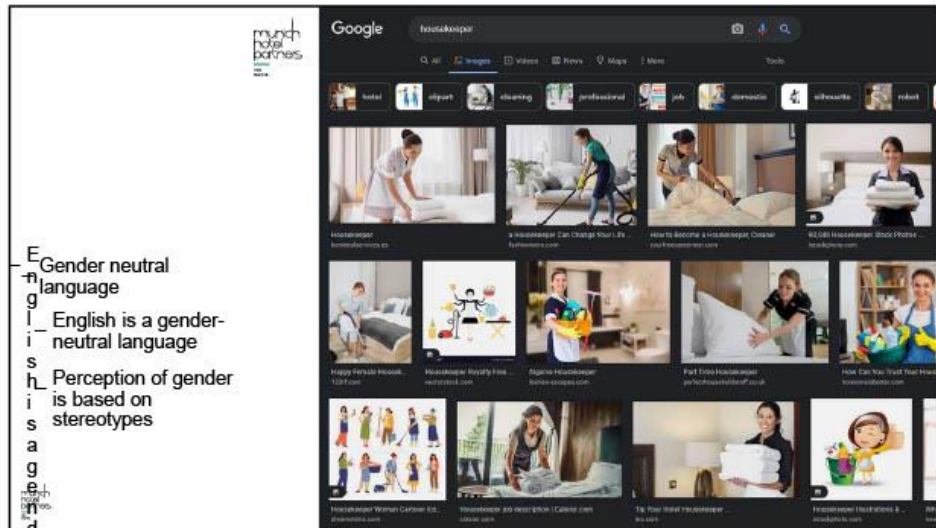
- Identity and one's understanding of identity can change over time, as people get to know themselves and have access to information such as terminology, medical support, and research.

3 min
A person's gender identity does not have to align with their self-expression and presentation, there is not one right way to be nonbinary.
Leave room for questions

5 min

English is a gender-neutral language

Perception of gender is based on stereotypes

→ Example googling housekeeper

→ **How do we reduce stereotypes? What can we do better?** (Discussion)

5 min

Give participants time to discuss possible obstacles in pairs, then collect thoughts on Flipchart.

→ What can we do to include non-binary employees?

→ Bridge gender neutral language

5 min exercise
Show slide, then blackout ppt. Introduce myself, using my pronouns.
Have them practice in pairs, then whoever is comfortable can introduce themselves to the whole group.
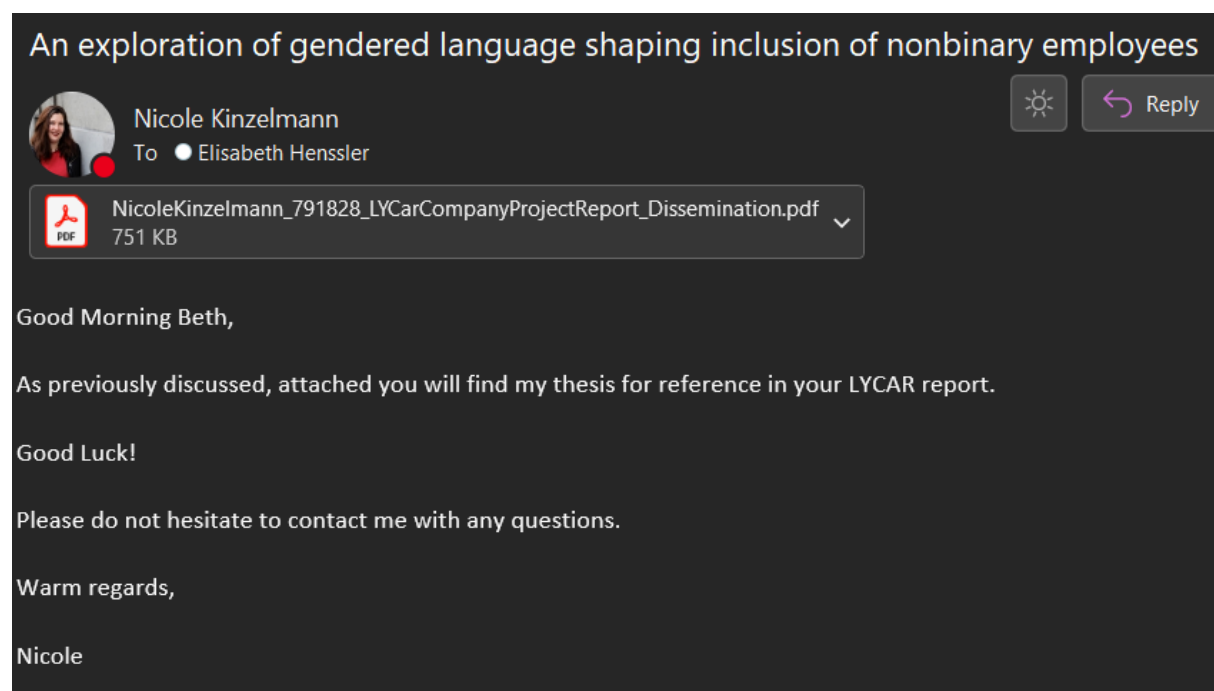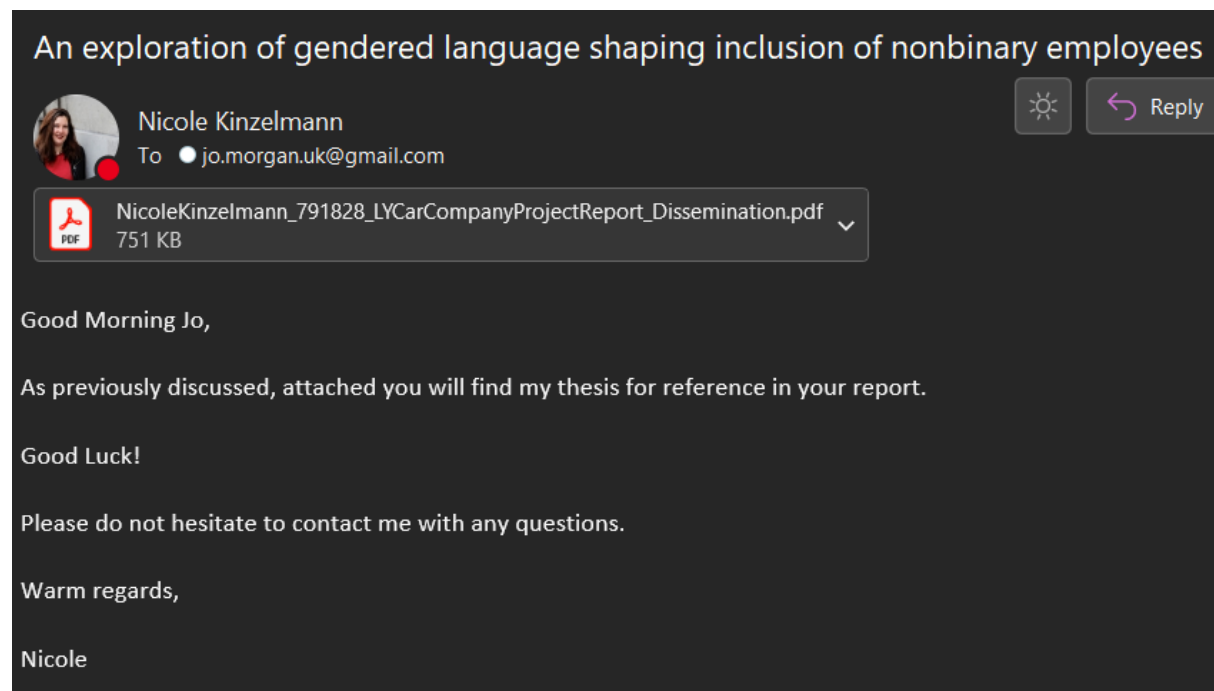Remind them that it is okay to make mistakes.

AFTER another 5 min open discussion:
What can be implemented in our daily operations now that will create a more inclusive working environment?
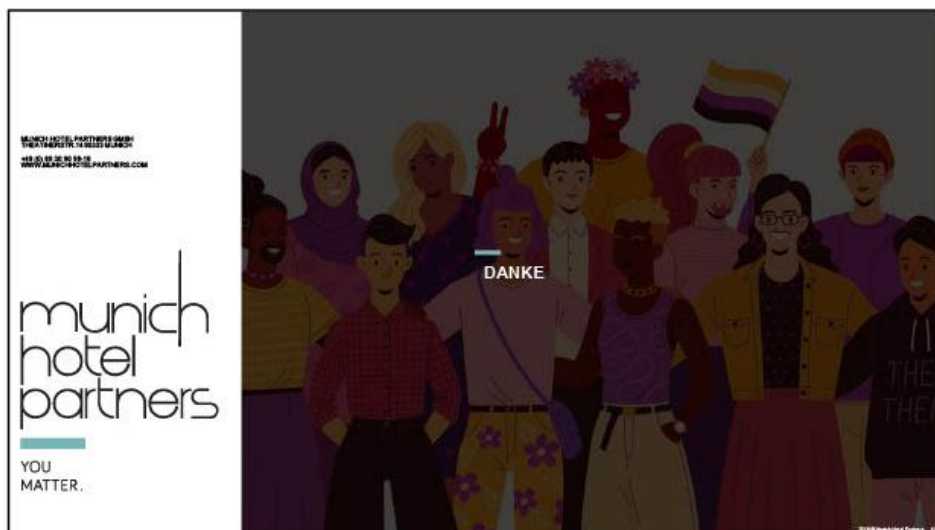
End – Leave room for questions, emphasize that people can also approach me after the workshop if they have more questions.

Appendix C – Proof of Dissemination

Appendix D – Client Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form Company Project/Research
(EVALUATION FORM OF ALL CLIENTS AND ON ALL DELIVERABLES IS COMPULSORY, FORMAT IS NOT)

HOTELSCHOOL THE HAGUE *Hospitality Business School*

Name of student:	Nicole	Student number:	
Name of company/organisation:	Dr. Walsh	Department:	LYCar Track 2
Name of company tutor/research commissioner:		Position of company tutor/commissioner (if applicable):	Research commissioner
Project and/or Deliverable: (please specify)	Research report: Organisations, language and non-binary employees.		

During the first (unofficial) evaluation the set-up for the project and end deliverable(s) is discussed. For this final evaluation the project has been delivered by the student and is thus evaluated. This is taken into consideration for the final assessment of the student.

CATEGORY 1: EXPERTISE/KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
	In-depth use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows excellent thinking capacity of the student (taking into account all significant factors and looking from all different perspectives).	Use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows mostly intellectual depth (taking into account significant factors and looking from different perspectives).	No or incorrect use of literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable lacks intellectual depth.	See holistic comment below

CATEGORY 2: KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION/SOLVING PROBLEMS

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
	The theories and models are skillfully applied and the student can translate this in a unique solution and implementation. The student can relate situations to concepts that results into a solution that adds great value to the company's overall strategy. The research contributes to solving a problem.	The student uses theory and models and shows understanding of the issues at hand. The solution is realistic and implementable for the company. The solution is/can be implemented and evaluated.	Mentioning theory and models, but not using them in the correct way. The student cannot convince of the possibilities to implement and evaluate. It is not solving the problem.	See holistic comment below.... Between GOOD and Excellent. Well done.

CATEGORY 3: INFORMED JUDGEMENTS

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
	The research process is done and explained in an excellent way. All statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the students and/or referencing. The analysis is very substantial.	The research process is done and explained well. Most statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the student and/or referencing. The analysis is substantial.	Weak problem analysis, research question not clear enough. Data collection and/or methodology is insufficient. Weak analysis, use of data from one dimension and not backed up.	See holistic comment below

CATEGORY 4: COMMUNICATION AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
	Excellent ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to all stakeholders involved. The deliverable adds great value to the main stakeholders. Initial and creative channels have been actively used to share outputs and knowledge.	Good ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to stakeholders. The deliverable adds value to the company. Existing channels have been used to share knowledge	The deliverable could have been better delivered to the stakeholders. The deliverable could have added more value, if better delivered. No active communication of outputs and knowledge.	See holistic comment below

CATEGORY 5: INTERCULTURAL HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP

Please see the evaluation details, below:

Overall: a good piece of research that explores 'language and the inclusion of non-binary identifying persons in the workplace'.

A powerful topic in a time when identities are still subdued.

Structurally, not sure why we see survey outcome punctuating the introduction.

Literature is advanced/advances the arguments... the literature would benefit from more synthesis/building in of **órganisational** context/evolution of language and inclusion/exclusion in the **workplace**, tying to gender more, i.e. tracing the body of knowledge on normative patriachal/feminism in the org through structure, culture and language (linguistic social capital) and now....

Method: One wonders if a platform or site of study that explores/deconstructs language (tacit or explicit organisational language) would be a interesting avenue for further research, i.e. deconstructing organisational language, as well as (or opposed to) exploring the situated language of "out" non-binary employees.

i.e. language of organisations.

This said, this is a fine piece that [1] contributes to the body of the knowledge, and [2] opens up possibilities for more netnographic research.

Well done for providing voice for those who are often left unheard.

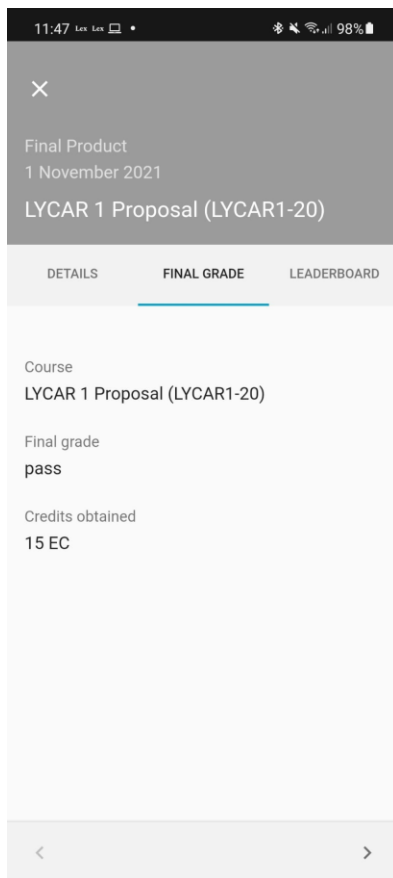| Comments on evaluation:	I appreciate the feedback, and will try my best to incorporate it
DATE & STUDENT'S SIGNATURE:	**COMPANY SUPERVISOR'S/RESEARCH COMMISSIONER'S SIGNATURE:**
20/12/21	

THE COMPLETED FORMS (ON ALL DELIVERABLES AND PERFORMANCE) NEED TO BE EMAILED TO THE LYCAR COACH AND PUT IN THE APPENDICES OF THE CAREER PORTFOLIO

Appendix E – Approval of Proposal

Appendix F – Proof of Wordcount
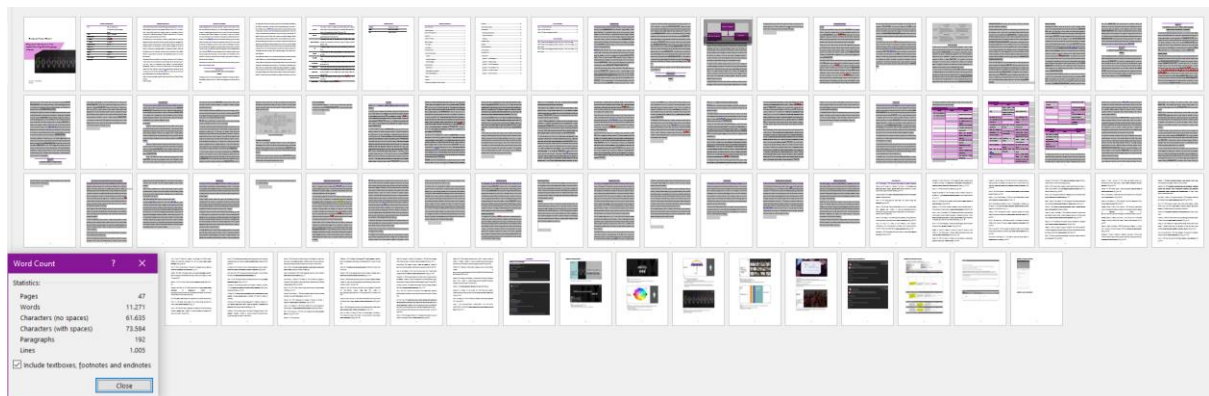
Words Main Report: 11.271, Words in Figures: 213, Total Wordcount: **11.484 Words**