

Network Discrimination against LGBTQ Minorities in Taiwan after Same-Sex Marriage Legalization: A Goffmanian Micro-Sociological Approach

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ABSTRACT: In 2019, the government of Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage, the first to do so in Asia. Yet, despite its celebration as a sign of liberal progress, legalization appears at odds with major referendums that show a majority of Taiwan citizens oppose LGBTQ acceptance, following a steady decline in tolerance for LGBTQ people in Taiwan. To explain this, this article adopts a Goffmanian micro-sociological approach to interrogate LGBTQ experiences of stigma and discrimination in their networks. Using narrative and go-along interviews with LGBTQ people in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 2019, this article shows (1) latent forms of discrimination in families and at workplaces, (2) the intensification of discriminatory scrutiny within these spaces in the wake of legalization, (3) mental health consequences, and (4) social enclaves that offer some reprieve from discriminatory pressures. This article identifies a need for greater resource allocation to creating safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ community and anti-discrimination policies to combat the capillary forms of discrimination that have arisen after same-sex marriage legalization.

Keywords: discrimination, stigma, vulnerable populations, LGBTQ, East Asia

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Introduction

On May 24, 2017, Taiwan's top judges ruled that the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples was a violation of the Republic of China Constitution, which guarantees marital equality and freedom, and subsequently demanded that the appropriate laws be revised within two years. Correspondingly, on May 17, 2019, the Taiwan government legalized same-sex marriage, the first to do so in all of Asia. All twenty-seven articles of the bill, titled Act for Implementation of J.Y. Interpretation No. 748, were approved in the Legislative Yuan on the third and final reading with sixty-six votes for, twenty-seven votes against, and twenty abstentions.² The following

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² The vote by party was as follows: Democratic Progressive Party (DPP): fifty-four in favor, one opposed, and thirteen abstentions; Nationalist Party (KMT): seven in favor, twenty-three opposed, and four abstentions; the People First Party (PFP): three opposed; the New People Party (NPP): five in favor. Three other Yuan members abstained.

week, the bill was signed into law on May 22 by President Tsai Ing-Wen and came into effect on May 24.

Legalization was celebrated by local pundits and media outlets as a sign that Taiwan was moving towards progressive, more egalitarian values – the culmination of a decades-long effort to overcome obstacles to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) human rights in Taiwan³.

Yet, just six months earlier in November 2018, a public referendum in Taiwan⁴ showed a majority of voters endorsing the prohibition of LGBTQ-related materials in schools and restricting the legal definition of marriage to heterosexual unions.⁵ Of the ten questions on the ballot, five asked about LGBTQ issues (Table 1). Voters supported a ban on homosexual-related topics in elementary and junior high schools, vetoed a proposal to make the Civil Code marriage regulations inclusion of same-sex couples, and rejected including gender equality education covering LGBTQ identities and rights.

Table 1. Referendum on LGBTQ issues by the Central Election Commission, Republic of China.

Question	Percentage of “Yes” Votes	Result of Referendum
Do you agree the Civil Code regulations should restrict marriage to being between a man and a woman?	38.76%	Adopted
Do you agree that the Ministry of Education and individual schools should not teach homosexual-related topics, as detailed under the Enforcement Rules for the Gender Equity Education Act, in elementary and junior high schools?	35.85%	Adopted
Do you agree to types of unions, other than those stated in the marriage regulations in the Civil Code, to protect the rights of same-sex couples who live permanently together?	32.4%	Adopted
Do you agree that the Civil Code marriage regulations should be used to guarantee the rights of same-sex couples to get married?	17.12%	Vetoed
Do you agree that gender equality education as defined in the Gender Equity Education Act should be taught at all stages of the national curriculum and that such education should cover courses on	17.75%	Vetoed

³ Chen et al 2010; Ho 2018.

⁴ The referendum was first proposed by conservative Christian groups in Taiwan in February 2018 in response to the May 2017 Constitutional Court ruling about same-sex marriage legalization within two years. The referendum proposal was accepted by the Central Election Commission and administered alongside local (county- and municipal-level) elections on November 24, 2018.

⁵ Chung 2018.

This referendum was the latest in a steady pattern of declining tolerance for LGBTQ people in Taiwan from 2012 onwards, triggered by growing numbers of Taiwanese Christian groups which lead organized resistance to LGBTQ rights.⁶ A 2018 survey by the Gender Equality Committee of the Executive Yuan found that the percentage of people who supported same-sex marriage had declined from fifty-nine percent in 2012 to just under thirty-nine percent in 2018. This is a puzzle since Taiwan's marriage rate was 6.29 per 1000 people in 2016,⁷ around the rate analysts would expect to see growing acceptance of same-sex civil unions.⁸

We can thus infer the continued existence of disagreement in Taiwan over the legitimacy of LGBTQ rights concerning marriage, inheritance, and employment – and, by extension, the existence of homophobic social structures, such as workplace prejudice and bullying practices in school settings, which prefigure deleterious mental health issues such as suicide and depression.⁹ For example, the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention found in its 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey that LGBTQ youth are over twice as likely to experience suicide thoughts and over four times as likely to attempt suicide, compared to heterosexual youth.¹⁰

Taiwan in particular and Asia in general are no exception, as mental health problems such as stress, depression, and anxiety remain disproportionately higher among LGBTQ people, whose identities attract ostracization in societies comprised of a majority of heterosexual counterparts.¹¹ Adamczyk and Cheng found in a cross-national study that residents of Confucian societies are less tolerant than Europeans and Americans. They traced lower tolerance in Confucian societies to the cultural value of family connectedness, which fuels negative perceptions of homosexuality as a threat to traditional family structure and lineages.¹²

Legalization of same-sex marriage has been linked to reduced discrimination in the United States, where access to marriage for same-sex partners has increased their individual and joint probabilities of being employed, led to lower discrimination rates in workplaces, and contributed to improved attitudes toward LGBTQ people.¹³ The decoupling of legalization and lower discrimination in Taiwan thus raises a question: why, under the assumed shield of legalization, has discrimination towards LGBTQ people surfaced? Relatedly, how have members of the LGBTQ community responded under such circumstances?

To address these questions, I conducted a series of narrative interviews with self-identified LGBTQ people in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. In what follows, I outline a micro-sociological approach to stigma and discrimination. Where existing sociological research on the movement

⁶ Adamczyk 2017; Yeo and Chu 2018.

⁷ Statista 2016.

⁸ Pettinicchio 2012. Declining marriage rates typically indicate the declining significance of marriage as a social institution. This correlation has been cited to explain more favorable attitudes toward the legalization of gay marriage in countries like the United States.

⁹ Badgett and Frank 2007; Eskridge Jr 2017; Morrison et al 2019. Suicide and depression rates are significantly higher among LGBTQ people than among heterosexuals. See Ahuja et al 2015.

¹⁰ Kann et al 2016.

¹¹ Adamczyk and Cheng 2015; Au, 2015; Avila-Saavedra 2009; Garcia and Koerner 2014; Gross 2001; Wilkinson and Kirey 2010.

¹² Adamczyk and Cheng 2015.

¹³ Sansone 2019.

for marriage equality (in Taiwan in particular) has focused on the macro-level, explaining the historical trajectory leading up to the legalization,¹⁴ a micro-sociological approach examines LGBTQ peoples' lived experiences of discrimination and distress after legalization.

I examine the institutional units in which latent forms of discrimination predominantly surface, particularly the family and the workplace; the intensification of discriminatory scrutiny within these units in the wake of legalization; and the consequences for mental health. Finally, I discuss piecemeal communal efforts at constructing social enclaves that offer modest emotional and social sanctuary from discriminatory strains.

LGBTQ discrimination in Taiwan: a Goffmanian approach

A loosely bound but growing body of literature in social psychology and sociology has addressed LGBTQ stigma and discrimination. Scholars have demonstrated that the general intolerance of LGBTQ people in Taiwan is traced to prejudicial forces like stigma and discrimination.¹⁵ Heteronormative stigma is pervasive in East Asia, especially in families and workplaces.¹⁶ In Taiwan, as in other societies in East Asia, cultural traditions valorize offspring as a sign of status and cultural wealth.¹⁷ As such, being lesbian, gay, or transgender is construed as a threat to these traditions, accentuating the stigma that LGBTQ individuals experience.

Heteronormative stigma and discrimination have been associated with reduced quality of life, psychological distress, and increased mortality.¹⁸ So forceful and pervasive is the specter of heteronormativity that LGBTQ individuals are socialized to continuously anticipate rejection and stigma within society, as well as internalize rejection and homophobia, all of which accentuate mental health risks.¹⁹ Indeed, evidence shows that LGBTQ individuals are especially vulnerable to “the daily experience of social stress resultant of LGBTQ-based discrimination.”²⁰

A Goffmanian micro-sociological approach shows the complexities of discrimination as a social phenomenon embedded in the micro-level, especially for minorities with marginalized subjectivities for whom discrimination is lived, emotive, and personal.²¹

One of the most influential American sociologists of the twentieth century, Erving Goffman (1922-1982) pioneered a systematic theoretical approach with which to examine interactions. In contrast to sociological theories of his era that sought to describe social phenomena and interactions deductively based on a priori concepts, Goffman proposed inductively depicting the constitution of social phenomena by micro-level interactions in bounded social spaces. These interactions, he posited, were shaped by norms that people refer to in assessing what others expect of them in different social spaces and how to behave.²²

Goffman stressed the theoretical significance of deconstructing phenomena into lived experiences felt individually and relationally:

¹⁴ Ho 2010; Ho 2018.

¹⁵ Deitch et al 2003; Flint 2013.

¹⁶ Fox et al 2020.

¹⁷ Au 2017a; Bomhoff and Gu 2012; Sung 2001.

¹⁸ Hatzenbuehler et al 2020; Sutter and Perrin 2016.

¹⁹ Hatzenbuehler 2009; Kaniuka et al 2019; Meyer 2013.

²⁰ Sutter and Perrin 2016, 98.

²¹ Collins 2000, Chapter Four.

²² Goffman 1983, 4.

... always in the interaction order, the engrossment and involvement of the participants...is critical... Emotion, mood, cognition, bodily orientation, and muscular effort are intrinsically involved, introducing an inevitable psychobiological element. Ease and uneasiness, unselfconsciousness and wariness are central.²³

What Goffman meant is that how a phenomenon makes people think and feel is what constitutes a phenomenon in the first place, and this is manifested when individual experiences are patterned into social structures that self-replicate themselves. It follows, therefore, that micro-level interactions in the immediate social spaces in which people live are where we most fruitfully observe both the origins and consequences of discrimination as a complex phenomenon.²⁴

Goffman defined stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting”²⁵ and “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance.”²⁶ Stigma (discrimination), therefore, is a negative social relation manifested when LGBTQ individuals fail to attain “a particular norm” of heteronormativity.²⁷ Importantly, Goffman stressed that this kind of negative social relation is not just interpersonal, but intrapersonal -- the relation of the self to the self. These negative relations socialize LGBTQ individuals into viewing themselves as different from what is considered in a given society as “normal” and judging themselves against these heteronormative “standards against which they fall short.”²⁸

Goffman took particular note of the importance of the family and the workplace as “interactional spaces”²⁹ or “behavioural settings”³⁰ that, in socializing individuals into “the sharing of a single set of normative expectations by all participants... [as] a necessary condition for social life,”³¹ serve as incubators for “tribal stigma” which “can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members.”³² Discrimination, for Goffman, was thus rooted in negative “shared cognitive presuppositions”³³ and “perspectives”³⁴ within these institutions that spiralled out to effect conflict between “[non-stigmatized] and stigmatized persons.”³⁵ Randall Collins goes further to identify the emotional valences that underpin this discriminatory conflict as “currents of feeling, a sense of wariness or interest, a palpable change in the atmosphere.”³⁶

The cultural specificities of Taiwan make the family and workplace especially poignant areas where discrimination may arise and exact greater mental toll on LGBTQ members. The

²³ Goffman 1983, 3.

²⁴ See also Fuente and Walsh 2021. Maciejewski et al (2022) most recently vindicate the merits of a Goffmanian micro-sociological approach in their study of grief, finding that the most nuanced consequences of bereavement are generated by attention to the micro-level (and, in their case, that bereavement comprises a form of social disconnection that aggravates the deleterious mental health consequences of loss).

²⁵ Goffman 1986, 2.

²⁶ Goffman 1986, Preface.

²⁷ Goffman 1986, 6.

²⁸ Goffman 1986, 32.

²⁹ Goffman 1983, 2.

³⁰ Goffman 1983, 4.

³¹ Goffman 1986, 127-128.

³² Goffman, 1983, 4.

³³ Goffman 1983, 4.

³⁴ Goffman 1986, 132.

³⁵ Goffman 1986, 138.

³⁶ Collins 2004, 34.

family in Taiwanese culture is embedded in a traditional networking culture called *guanxi* that valorizes kinship ties as the most significant category of social relations, which one is morally obligated to serve and seek out help from.³⁷ Within this network structure, people are pushed to prioritize the needs of their family above their own, such that their reputation in their networks depends on how well they do so.³⁸ In addition to being a lynchpin in the social fabric of networked interactions, the family is the site of traditional conceptions of lineage that offers esteem to those who succeed in reproducing a nuclear heteronormative family.³⁹ LGBTQ identities are thus taken to represent threats to this established system of values, and by extension, the nuclear family as a bedrock social unit of society, inviting homophobic scrutiny and backlash.⁴⁰

This preoccupation with status in the cultural conception of family is shared with that of the workplace. Though individual workplaces differ in substantive work demands, a sociological account of the workplace reveals a common structural hierarchy that orders interactions within it. Nan Lin argues that the workplace acts as a prism where distinctions by status and rank systematically stratify individuals, affording those of higher status access to greater resources, varieties of resources, and ultimately life chances for upward mobility.⁴¹ Most importantly, this system of status assignment is not sterile of cultural influences. On the contrary, cultural resources and identities that an individual possesses outside the workplace are an important vehicle for social mobility within the workplace.⁴² How much knowledge about the arts, how polite one is, and whether one is LGBTQ are all latent ways for members of a workplace to evaluate the worthiness of their colleagues.⁴³ The sociological significance of workplace status and reputation gains further credence from the fact that it constitutes one of the social spaces where individuals spend the most amount of time in their lifetime. According to Taiwan's Ministry of Labor, Taiwanese reported a mean of 2,021 hours at work in a year, making them the third highest society in terms of number of hours worked in a survey of forty societies.⁴⁴

Homophobic worldviews are thus given voice in the family and the workplace as prominent spaces in the life course, mired in hierarchical considerations of status that leave little tolerance for the deviance from traditional values that LGBTQ identities represent. Both are institutions, furthermore, that invite a Goffmanian micro-sociological focus on space as a lens to examine the subsistence of queer identities within their boundaries.

Writing on queer survival in Hong Kong, for instance, Denise Tang illustrates the “congested spatiality” of the family and the workplace as living and regulatory spaces where personal privacy is difficult to negotiate because of surveillance by conservative others.⁴⁵ Tang writes provocatively about how queer people in the city seek out alternative spaces to experience intimacy, such as gay bars or shopping malls. In a similar vein, Yue and Leung analyze the heteronormativity that pervades Asian metropolises like Singapore and Hong Kong, prefigured by Confucian and family values, and depict a common theme of escapism that motivates queer

³⁷ Bian 2019.

³⁸ Au 2021a; Bian 2018.

³⁹ Gu 2021.

⁴⁰ Adamczyk and Cheng 2015.

⁴¹ Lin 2001.

⁴² Erickson 1996.

⁴³ Cech and Waidzunus 2022; Erel 2010; García and Otto 2019. An improved reputation in the workplace has accordingly been linked to upward mobility and higher wages. See Hadas, 2013.

⁴⁴ Taiwan News 2021.

⁴⁵ Tang 2011, 38.

people to seek out and share information about anonymous non-spaces such as toilets and staircases for sexual intimacy.⁴⁶

In a similar sense, LGBTQ people in Taiwan create social enclaves to alleviate the stress of the everyday discrimination they encounter in their lives. However, these enclaves are not just alternative spaces, but ideological spaces that counter mainstream homophobic and heteronormative ideals, fashioned by spatial design. LGBTQ people's motivations for creating these enclaves, moreover, are not about sexual intimacy, but derive from a Goffmanian interpretation of atmosphere and space. Social interactions transpire within social spaces that, for Goffman, are cultural milieus saturated with symbols, where feelings are not "currents"⁴⁷ but what I call "pools" of emotional energy that congregate in enclaves and offer shelter.⁴⁸ That is to say, LGBTQ enclaves in Taiwan that function as safe spaces which are pools of emotional energy produced through the symbolic as much as physical. That is, they are shared symbolic meanings of non-discrimination and minority acceptance, and physical walls with which to enclose a safe space and demarcate it from the rest of society.⁴⁹

Methodology

This article draws on narrative interviews I conducted in 2019 with thirteen LGBTQ individuals in Kaohsiung, the second largest city in Taiwan. Narrative interviews lend the power of storytelling for data collection, tapping into phenomenological assumptions that humans are "storytelling organisms,"⁵⁰ for whom the act of telling stories is a compelling reflexive activity that draws out breadth and depth of lived experiences.⁵¹

Participants were purposively sampled for their LGBTQ identities. As Mario Small notes, purposive sampling is most suitable for studying minorities who are underrepresented in the general population, even if the final sample is non-random.⁵² Eight participants were men and five were women. Their ages ranged from twenty-four to fifty. Participants were recruited from online forums, and I have provided pseudonyms to hide their identities. The questions I posed to them were guided by themes of discrimination in their everyday lives, their personal feelings in reaction to these experiences, and how they resist the pressures they feel. Interviews were continued until data saturation was reached, when the same themes became recurrent in interviewee responses. All interviewees, on that note, reported experiences of discrimination.

This research study is not representative of the entirety of the Taiwanese public's reaction to discrimination against LGBTQ people, but it is meant to excavate in targeted fashion the nuances of this phenomenon as experienced within a subset of the population. Theorizing ideal research designs for studying gay populations, Small argues that sampling for range is ill-suited for studying LGBTQ experiences, particularly since they themselves comprise a statistical

⁴⁶ Yue and Leung 2017.

⁴⁷ Collins 2004, 34.

⁴⁸ DeNora 2013. Drawing on Goffman to theorize how music is an interactive space that provides comfort to individuals, DeNora delineates this concept of a sanctuary as that which "...may be physical, as in a sanctuary or safe place... [or] temporary shelter by simply changing a topic of conversation, by shifting the lighting in a room." DeNora 2013, 47.

⁴⁹ Fuente and Walsh 2021.

⁵⁰ Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 2.

⁵¹ Mueller, 2019.

⁵² Small, 2009,13.

minority of the general (in this case, Taiwanese) population itself.⁵³ He stresses that sampling for depth is better suited to studying experiences within this subset of population. Though such sampling is limited by being non-random, this qualitative sampling design excels in achieving a theoretically-driven study of experiences in place of a statistically-driven one.⁵⁴ Rather than studying public reactions to same-sex marriage legalization, which would be to study the distribution of a population across different categories of reactions, this article examines the social processes that animate one societally important category of reaction – discrimination – among a theoretically important and unique part of the population affected by it – stigmatized LGBTQ people.

Discrimination within institutions: family and workplace

Experiences of discrimination orbited around two institutional settings: the family and the workplace. These represent two social units that capture the most prominent areas of social life for LGBTQ individuals in Taiwan. They encompass social relationships and exchanges essential for occupational success, money-making activities, and social support, all of which are key to upward mobility.⁵⁵

But just as conformity to social standards yields wide-reaching rewards, deviance from what is acceptable generates sanctions that predispose individuals to discrimination, such as to strip them of potential upward mobility and create a looming threat of downward mobility.

Discrimination in the Family

In Taiwan, as in other Asian societies, family networks are particularly dense, highly transitive, and quick to disseminate information.⁵⁶ The result is that deviance is swiftly known, and sanctions are applied just as swiftly. These qualities of Taiwanese families exacerbate negative social relations and mental health strains from “what is normal.”⁵⁷

Ming-Yu, a twenty-nine-year-old architect, was unabashedly proud of his identity, and discussed same-sex marriage legalization on social media platforms and in-person among his ties. Even still, his commitment to vocalizing his identity waned when it came to his family:

As vocal as I am in championing my [LGBTQ] identity and telling others not to be ashamed of their identities, I am much more hesitant in my family. I have not properly “come out” yet. I have talked about the issue [of LGBTQ persons in Taiwan] with my family in the past, to kind of gauge their reactions. But every time, they don’t really seem open-minded. They say stuff like “gays should just date women,” or “maybe gays are just confused.” So, I hesitate to come out to them.

In response to my question of how this made him feel, he responded:

⁵³ Small 2009.

⁵⁴ Luker 2008, Chapter Three.

⁵⁵ Bian 2019; Chua and Wellman 2015; Weng and Xu 2018.

⁵⁶ Lai and Wong 2002; Raymo et al, 2015.

⁵⁷ Goffman 1986, 138.

I would normally... for anyone else, I would be very mad. I would think, “why would you try to silence my identity? Why would you try to take away rights from me? Am I not a person too?” But my parents... are different ... maybe I am a hypocrite, but I am not in a secure position. I am not yet entirely independent. I don’t have my own house, but I hope I am close. I still live with [my parents]. I still have a bit to go for where I want to be in my career. My parents are also old, and I don’t want to worry them. I don’t want to hurt them. They might have a heart attack or become very worried. I do talk about [LGBTQ] issues with them sometimes, and share more open-minded perspectives with them, and hope to change their minds gradually this way.

The apparent contradiction between Ming-Yu’s pride in his sexual identity and his role as a family member speak to a complicated tension anchored in the diversity of roles that he, like others, inevitably occupy. Within his family, Ming-Yu was torn between championing his identity while hiding it, defending his integrity from his parents yet striving to protect them, and distancing himself from their views while maintaining enough emotional proximity to preserve his place in the household.

His comments invoke parallels with Goffman’s theorization that marginalized people are socialized into heteronormative expectations that conflict with their internal desires.⁵⁸ Ming-Yu felt a strain in his relations with his relatives, which refracted into strains he felt within himself. Other participants echoed this dilemma, with one explaining that “the strains from dealing with family are sometimes worse than governmental politics.” John, a twenty-four-year-old social worker, emphasized the permanence of these discriminatory strains in the context of his family relations:

In some ways, not telling my parents is protecting both them *and* myself. It’s traditional for [Taiwanese] people to gossip a lot among family about other family members. If I say something, my other family members might find out, and then they’ll talk about it with my parents. My parents would be harmed in this way. Maybe things are slightly better than decades before.

When I asked him if he thought there has been a shift in generational thinking from his grandparents to parents, he demurred:

I don’t mean *that* big of a change. What I mean is parents can now see more gay people in the media online. I don’t think it will change their fundamental beliefs about gay as bad, though. They may accept it exists, but still think it goes against traditional values of creating progeny and continuing the family line. My parents... and some other younger parents, are okay with others’ kids being gay, but not okay with their own.

Being gay, as John emotionally recounts, was construed by his parents as a threat to the core function of sexual reproduction instrumental to “preserve the family line,” a tradition that valorizes offspring as a sign of cultural wealth.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Goffman 1986, 6, 32.

⁵⁹ Bomhoff and Gu 2012; Sung 2001.

These micro-level experiences of discrimination are part of larger social problems of discrimination and mental health disorders that prevail in the gay community at large.⁶⁰ Isaac, a twenty-one-year-old student at a Kaohsiung university, fleshed out the nuanced, inextricable connections between these sets of experiences:

I am vocal in the [local pro-LGBTQ] movements, but ... I do not want my parents and family to know I am gay. So, I post stuff on my Instagram, like a picture of a rainbow ribbon and essays or writings about my position on it or talk about the referendum or the new legalization. But I hide my Instagram. I make it private. I block all my family and friends who go on. I also go to protests ... but I do not feel so free there. I try to avoid cameras. I try not to go so much. I still go though, I feel I need to support it ... my own people, myself. But I also need to protect myself.

Mirroring Ming-Yu's reflections on his personal experiences of disapproval by his family, Isaac draws attention to the influence that even imagined encounters with and discrimination by his family wields over his political strategizing, as well as the mental strain and polarizing pulls he feels from the expected obligations to his family that clash with obligations to his own person and community per his LGBTQ identity.

Isaac described the emotional toll these tensions exact as "drowning under the weight of the sea," a sense of anxiety echoed by other interviewees who reported similar mental health challenges in terms of self-esteem, a sense of security, happiness, and well-being that result from witnessing familial discrimination against LGBTQ people, even if not directed at them.

Discrimination in the workplace

In addition to the family context, participants identified experiences of discrimination in the workplace. Tan, a thirty-four-year-old office worker, discussed negative social relations that engendered the heteronormative regulation of appearances and behaviors for women at her workplace:

I once heard my co-worker say about another [lesbian] co-worker, who dressed like a [tomboy] with short, styled hair swept up, say, "if you're a woman, why don't you just look like a woman? I can't tell you apart from a man! This is not discrimination, but I don't even know if you're a woman or a man. I don't like that." After hearing that, I did not dare to be so different in my appearance. I never particularly liked wearing shorts, but I did not have the courage to wear shorts for sure after hearing that. I only wear skirts now.

Tan was quick to emphasize that she viewed her colleague's comments as discrimination. Her account harkens to another nuance in how discrimination is enacted and is received in micro-level politics: short of outright rejection or acts of violence, harassment against LGBTQ people in the form of microaggressions is not recognized by heteronormative Taiwanese as discrimination but conceptualized as a matter of personal preference framed as freedom of expression. This, even though microaggressions "communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative

⁶⁰ Valelly 2012.

slights” directed at marginalized LGBTQ people.⁶¹ For example, scholars who research LGBTQ experiences in other institutional settings, like schools, have shown how everyday citizens and authorities often ignore homophobic language when this is not targeted at individual persons.⁶²

Adding to these experiences of micro-aggressive harassment, John, from the vantage point of someone who is accepted as LGBTQ by his workplace colleagues, elaborated on problems of biases:

Ah, yes, the workplace is a complicated place. I am lucky to have accepting colleagues in my workplace ... maybe because I am a social worker, so people in my workplace *have to* be accepting for our jobs, but I know many friends who are not so lucky. If your colleagues are not accepting, there’s a looming fear that you will be outed. [Workers who discriminate against LGBTQ people in the workplace] think it’s personal preference. But you’ll lose out on promotions, job opportunities, people won’t treat or help you well. There are so many problems when you’re gay in the workplace ... personal preference? Think about it – hiring or giving someone a promotion [from the perspective of an employer] are also just preferences.

In a “current of feeling,”⁶³ John, Tan, and Ming-Yu noted a fear of ostracization that made workplace politicizing an immense challenge difficult to navigate. Like John alludes, microaggressions against LGBTQ people, framed as expressions of personal preferences, inform latent biases that deprive them of upward mobility, occupational opportunities, a personal sense of security, and well-being.

David, a thirty-year-old accountant, illuminated the reality of these multi-faceted forms of deprivation in the workplace following his own forced coming out:

For sure, there is a bias against LGBTQ people in the workplace. I have always been working with mostly older people in my workplace, but not that much older, who I thought were ... discriminatory against gays. They always asked what women I liked, talked about breasts of celebrities ... stuff like that. Then I ... was walking in a mall at night, and I’m normally very careful ... I was holding hands with my boyfriend and a colleague from work saw us. I was surprised but didn’t think much of it. Afterwards, things got awkward at work. I *know* that person told others. Many workers ... avoided me. My boss gave me more work on projects that I did not really like and was not open to discussing what projects I could take on, like before. And when I talked to co-workers, they did not want my help. I was irritated one time and kept pushing [one older co-worker] about why he didn’t want help on a project. I knew I could help and that he needed help. He eventually said, “I just don’t want *your* help.”

Shaken by his experience, David eventually left his job for another at a different company, and even considered leaving Kaohsiung for some time for, as he said, “things to settle down.” His vivid account illustrates the social ostracization and material deprivation of occupational opportunities that microaggressions in the workplace can inflict when someone is “outed” by co-

⁶¹ Sue 2010, 196-197.

⁶² Atkinson and DePalma 2008; McCabe et al, 2012; Wilkinson and Pearson, 2009.

⁶³ Collins 2004, 34.

workers. Indeed, social ostracization surfaced against David through the refusal to work with him within his networks, but because no formalized punishment aimed at his sexuality occurred, the ostracization and the resultant devastating occupational consequences were permitted to continue.

These experiences form a vicious cycle, in which reality (social ostracization) and fear (from bias and harassment) recursively legitimate one another to ultimately show the prevalence, power, and control of microaggressions against LGBTQ people in their workplaces and the discrimination that lurks thinly beneath the surface.⁶⁴ The capricious social position that LGBTQ Taiwanese occupy in their workplaces empower Ming-Yu's and Isaac's accounts about the challenges that hiding their identities presented for political strategizing, as interviewees said they hesitated to display even minor signs of their sexual identity, such as publicly holding hands with their partners, "let alone mobilizing or demonstrating in public, where everyone could see you," according to David.

Caught between self-expression and self-censorship, LGBTQ people remain ever vigilant of their disenfranchised status. Their cognizance of the variegated forms of discrimination that confront them daily are a type of fatalism, one that Tan aptly captures in a succinct reflection, "I [often] ask, why me? I didn't *choose* to be gay." Grounded in anxieties about backlash across multiple arenas in the workplace like Goffman's "emotion, mood, cognition," the fact of being strained created a new type of fatalistic strain that exacerbated existing strains.⁶⁵ That is, LGBTQ men and women felt despondent about the fact that they had to feel such stress for just existing in everyday social spaces that were not stressful for their heterosexual counterparts. These strains, in turn, prefigure how same-sex marriage legalization has added to pre-existing experiences of discrimination within the family and workplace.

Discrimination after legalization: a double-edged sword

Same-sex marriage legalization in Taiwan represented, according to Tan, "a sign of hope for the future." It was a powerful overturning of government policies that had allocated stigma and esteem based on sexual orientation, and it provided newfound symbolic acceptance, a shift in cultural values that LGBTQ members could look to for empowerment and legitimation of personal identity.⁶⁶

But same-sex marriage legalization is not a panacea for social acceptance. Interviewees noted that it evoked a new set of "negative social relations" when individuals were confronted again with their failures to realize "a particular [heterosexual] norm," resulting in strains for LGBTQ people.⁶⁷

Stirring the public consciousness about LGBTQ issues, legalization shined a spotlight on LGBTQ identities as a subject of discussion in both public and private spheres. The visibility of LGBTQ issues that followed legalization evoked discussions among family members and in the workplace that imposed new pressure on LGBTQ people to hide their identities. Joanna, a thirty-one-year-old consultant, described this pressure:

⁶⁴ Goffman 1986, 4.

⁶⁵ Goffman 1983, 3.

⁶⁶ Goffman 1963; Ng 2013.

⁶⁷ Goffman 1986, 6.

I was thinking about how to come out for a long time and thought [same-sex marriage legalization] would help give me an opportunity [to do so] ... but after the news came out, my family started talking about it and they grew very disgusted by it. I think the news portrayed legalization very badly ... it just didn't help my parents understand the humanity behind LGBTQ identity ... it didn't show the real life behind it ... how we're just people and what our lives are actually like.

This quote showcases how legalization, in participants' experiences, stripped away their power and agency to control the discussion and narrative about LGBTQ issues in their relationships with important others. Indeed, news accounts of legalization disrupted, rather than enabled, LGBTQ individuals' ability to represent themselves and ultimately their ability to "come out."

Social psychological research has documented how family members adjust more favorably to the sexual identities of LGBTQ family members when these conversations are determined by the latter.⁶⁸ Participant accounts in this study add nuance to this picture by showing how legalization in Taiwan has skewed the adjustment process by priming family members to a politicized conceptualization of LGBTQ identities, shifting the public narrative about gayness away from the personal struggles that matter to LGBTQ individuals themselves (i.e. feelings of acceptance and safety) to more abstract and less humanized matters of politics (i.e. legal blockades, national identity, and protests). Thus, it has foreclosed a limited but indispensable source of autonomy for LGBTQ people to navigate and cope with tensions about censoring their identities and deciding how to express their identities in public – something desperately needed in Taiwan families anchored in traditional values which stigmatize LGBTQ identities.⁶⁹

In the workplace, legalization triggered what Tan called an "awareness" of LGBTQ identities in ways that aggravated bias and harassment:

LGBTQ issues were not an important topic in my workplace to begin with. But after the legalization, people became more aware of it. They talked about it. And they talked about people. They started guessing who was gay. Maybe they felt like it before, but legalization became such a hot topic that people started making more apparent guesses. Some of my co-workers thought this one co-worker was gay and wondered if he went to the protests about legalization. They talked about gay life more, like what gay people like to do, like gay sex, what's a bottom and top, what websites or apps we use. They wondered these things about [this co-worker] and started going through his social media and paid more attention to him. Like everything he did after was a sign that he might be gay.

Highlighting the scrutiny that legalization intensified, Tan's emotive account powerfully draws attention to the social strains that legalization imposed in institutional settings at an individual level. Legalization systematically cast LGBTQ identities into the workplace, but in ways that encouraged latent anti-LGBTQ biases to flare up. In the wake of legalization, workers began witch-hunts seeking to identify, diagnose, and out hitherto purposely invisible LGBTQ individuals.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Heatherington and Lavner, 2008; Gates 2015.

⁶⁹ Schope 2002.

⁷⁰ Rumens 2007.

Like other such social actions, this process started out for the perpetrators as a “side involvement ... undertaken in an abstracted fashion without threatening or confusing simultaneous maintenance of a main involvement,” but quickly became for the victimized a “main involvement,” a kind of interaction that absorbed “attention and interest, visibly forming the principal current determinant of their action.”⁷¹ In feeling like they had to maneuver their lives around these heteronormative witch-hunts for LGBTQ individuals, my interviewees described how they socialized themselves into relations of domination resulting from a hierarchy in which they occupied “the role of the stigmatized.”⁷²

What resulted were greater strains as LGBTQ people felt a perpetual sense of “watchedness” by others as well as pressure to censor their identities and moderate their behavior online and in-person. This burden to censor their identities in response to being watched was exacerbated by the fact that online social networking data implicitly reveals private information about sexual orientations.⁷³ These negative social relations of discrimination arising from legalization echo research documenting the social aftershock that broad legal changes incur for individual and community relations, most recently and famously when Donald Trump’s successful presidential campaign in the United States, mired in racially discriminatory attitudes, subsequently gave rise to increased incidences of racial violence.⁷⁴

In Taiwan, same-sex marriage legalization did not necessarily empower LGBTQ individuals in the workplace; it instead evoked anti-gay biases because of the very political visibility it brought to LGBTQ individuals, who are now a much more visible target of the staunch, traditional anti-gay values that loom large in society.⁷⁵ And although the apparent witch-hunts for gays in the workplace that ensued from legalization were not directly associated with formalized punishments, interviewees emphasized that, like David’s social rejection by his co-workers, being the target of suspicion (and most of all, being “outed”) had severe occupational consequences that were indirectly invoked when ostracized by one’s networks.

As David put it:

After I was found out and my coworkers stopped wanting to work with me, I suffered a loss in autonomy and opportunities. I was not as free as I wanted to be in selecting projects and clients to work with. I wanted to work with a big bank client so that I could possibly move into that industry later on, but I got assigned by my boss to teams with smaller businesses instead. This kind of discrimination is not illegal under the law, but it is still problematic to me. It affected my career path and the quality of my work.

Furthermore, legalization inflamed fears among conservatives, who pushed conspiracy theories about the repercussions of LGBTQ acceptance. Among the different types of false reports and conspiracy theories spread online, the most prominent included claims disseminated by Christian groups that same-sex marriage would cause Taiwan’s population to drastically plummet.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Goffman 1963, 43.

⁷² Goffman 1986, 5.

⁷³ See Jernigan and Mistree 2009.

⁷⁴ Giroux, 2017. United States hate crime statistics for 2017 as report by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation showed an increase of almost twenty percent following Donald Trump’s electoral victory. This is likely an underreported figure. See Federal Bureau of Investigation 2017; Lopez, 2017.

⁷⁵ Dworkin and Yi 2003.

⁷⁶ Flitton 2018.

Church leaders fanned the flames of gay stigma, drawing on informational and tactical resources from conservative religious groups in Hong Kong and the United States.⁷⁷ Conservatives also argued that same-sex marriage legalization was a strong-armed effort organized by and which would ultimately only benefit HIV-positive homosexual men who intended to flock to Taiwan, marry a Taiwanese man to gain access to the public health care system, and eventually overburden taxpayers.⁷⁸ These claims circulated so widely that Taiwan's National Health Insurance Administration was forced to respond and debunk these claims, noting that the cost of HIV/AIDS treatment in Taiwan was lower than claimed by these groups and clarifying that foreign spouses are not entitled to free health care after marriage.⁷⁹

Evan, a twenty-five-year-old man who worked in a salon and whose parents did not know about his identity, noted:

My parents use Facebook as much as young people do. Maybe even more ... so they saw a lot of the [false news] posts. When legalization came about, I was very happy. But they were not. We discussed it and ... they referenced [the false news posts], saying something like “maybe [the Christian and conservative groups] were right ... maybe they are taking away things”... on top of the usual traditional stuff like, “oh it is not normal, how will Taiwan's population grow in the future.”

Evident in Evan's account are the linkages between fears informed by conservative conspiracy theories and familial traditions that valorize progeny as cultural wealth, with legalization standing as the lynchpin between the two. “[Conservative groups and my family] think,” Evan added, “that legalization today, [more] tomorrow.” Thus, legalization paradoxically lent voice to pockets of conservative discrimination and anger, tenuously linked to narratives that claimed LGBTQ individuals sought to pursue elitism above equality.

Even macro- or meso-level events such as the circulation of news filter down to the micro-level, where they affect social relations and exert strains. Given that, as Joanna noted, “not enough dialogue” has been conducted in the public sphere to offer what she called “human portraits of LGBTQ lives,” conservative narratives about alleged LGBTQ aims and same-sex marriage legalization dominated the public sphere.

Resisting discrimination: the formation of social enclaves

Amidst a sociopolitical landscape of anti-gay sentiment that pervades the important spheres of family and workplace, LGBTQ individuals cope with resultant strains by organizing and participating in two types of spaces, small business outlets and community centers, which provide support and help individuals claim their own identities. These spaces make real a sense of psychological and physical liberation from the heteronormative demands of mainstream society.⁸⁰

Small Businesses

⁷⁷ Cole 2017; Huang 2017, 117-118.

⁷⁸ Steger 2018.

⁷⁹ Politics Center 政治中心 2017.

⁸⁰ Fuente and Walsh 2021.

These are most commonly cafes which are designed, run, and maintained by LGBTQ individuals. John described the security he felt in these spaces:

We know that they are [LGBTQ], so we know that they will not discriminate us. They put up rainbow flags in the front. Here, we can *connect with other people*, get to know people who are LGBTQ, and especially for younger people, this is important, who might not know that there are so many of us and who might not have many friends, since the only other popular thing that we do are using [gay] apps.

In John's and others' experiences, these cafes, which carry spatial (rainbow flags) and social (management by LGBTQ individuals) markers, provide the acceptance that is essential for dissolving the tension they feel in other spaces. As interviewees recounted, the most popular means of locating and networking with LGBTQ individuals for romantic purposes (gay dating apps) are not a particularly useful tool for platonic forms of networking that are necessary for general emotional support. Afforded the freedom to be known as LGBTQ, publicly display affection, and speak unguardedly on any subject without the mannerisms that censor their identities in their families and at their workplaces, these cafes function as spaces for connecting with others and emulating a microcosm of what life would be like in a society without gay prejudice, and in which all individuals felt "normal."

During our discussion, John offered to take me to one of these establishments, Beautiful Dream, his favorite, which was located on a major Kaohsiung street. There I could ask questions about LGBTQ identities and individuals' connections while in these spaces. My go-along interview with John helped me to recognize aspects of human experience otherwise hidden to me and to my interviewees, for, by virtue of the immediacy with which John was reflecting and I engaging, our conversation unearthed how space informs aspects of personal biography.⁸¹ John generously introduced me to individuals entering and leaving the restaurant and would comment on the nuances of gay relationships that these individuals evoked, something otherwise lost in interviews that occur isolated in a room.

Sitting down, John eagerly asked, "the flag up front, did you see that?" I nodded. I casually noted another flag pinned on the wall at the back. He beamed. "This shop is run by Miss Green," John said, gesturing to a large man with painted nails who was working at the register. Brandishing smoky eye-shadow and red lipstick, Miss Green looked up and walked over to greet us. John explained that they had known each other for years.

Two men entered hand-in-hand and sat just behind us. John waved and smiled. He remarked, "I know them. They're my friends. I met them here." Though the restaurant was small enough for conversations to be overheard, John explained customers had no concerns that, as in other spaces, information about personal identities would be revealed. He explained:

I think this space is beautiful because it makes me feel... not alone. Even supposedly pro-LGBTQ spaces that are run by non-LGBTQ cannot make me feel this way. This is a space for us, by us. We know we are safe. We know we are loved. And we can be ourselves here. We can talk about guys. We can talk about anything,

⁸¹ See Kusenbach 2003.

it doesn't have to be an LGBTQ-related issue, but [LGBTQ] others will understand us better. They won't think anything we talk about is just another 'gay' thing.

John alluded to the strain he felt with non-LGBTQ people in Taiwan who tend to interpret (suspected or actual) LGBTQ individuals' actions in terms of stereotypes. Resonating with media and workplace research that shows how gay tokenism⁸² results from gay-heterosexual friendships,⁸³ my interview accounts suggest that the same tokenism can be isolating. Even well-meaning support for LGBTQ identities insofar as they are assumed to provide "amusement" can also result in Othering, as peoples' rich, multifaceted personalities are reduced to solitary qualities fetishized in isolation like objects.⁸⁴ In contrast, in LGBTQ-run spaces, these qualities are not reduced, but enriched and permitted expression.

John concluded, "[Beautiful Dream] is what Taiwan could be." This enclave, a rare and cherished source of social support and survival for LGBTQ individuals in Kaohsiung, was a microcosm of what an egalitarian society stripped of discrimination, bias, and harassment – a utopia – could be. Here, they were and could be "normal."

This LGBTQ space, which was "for [LGBTQ], by [LGBTQ]," according to Miss Green, served as a cultural enclave where customers felt comfortable enough for interactions of play organized around displays of homosexual affection, which would otherwise be an act of social suicide in alternate, non-LGBTQ spaces. Evoking the "bodily orientation and muscular effort"⁸⁵ in "environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence,"⁸⁶ these acts of play recreated an interactive order with a kind of "easiness" that provided a "social consensus"⁸⁷ that was enough to alleviate distress. In clear defiance of heteronormative social standards of gender roles, the jests between LGBTQ individuals in the space were protected, sustained, and encouraged by the co-presence of fellow LGBTQ people, that included both patrons (men holding hands) and management (Miss Green). Miss Green noted that, although none appeared the night I visited, the café was open to all LGBTQ people, including women. LGBTQ people sought out new spaces in search of sanctuary not for sexual intimacy, but for emotional support from the distress of everyday discrimination in the family and workplace that they could not easily escape – they created out of small businesses like Beautiful Dream a hybrid cultural and living space in which they could recast standards of appearance and gender roles into their own terms.⁸⁸

Ethnographic fieldwork on communities and networks demonstrates that social psychological solidarity is gleaned from the physical co-presence of members of a group and is essential to the social survival of resistant identities whose positionalities are marginalized and located outside of the majority.⁸⁹

Community centers

⁸² Where the affection for a friend derives from a fetish for a status characteristic such as race, class, or sexual identity.

⁸³ Avila-Saavedra 2009; Rumens 2007.

⁸⁴ Grove and Zwi 2006.

⁸⁵ Goffman 1983, 3.

⁸⁶ Goffman 1983, 2.

⁸⁷ Goffman 1983, 5.

⁸⁸ Tang 2011, 20, 113.

⁸⁹ Au 2017b.

Pro-LGBTQ community centers, like pro-LGBTQ cafes, restaurants, and other businesses, are also enclaves of social support. LGBTQ individuals use these spaces to build new ties with peers and maintain existing ones, which they use to procure variegated forms of social support that they cannot obtain anywhere else.⁹⁰ Amy, a thirty-one-year-old woman who did not disclose her occupation, explained:

The lesbian community is much smaller in Taiwan [than the gay community]. So even within the LGBTQ community, there are fewer of us. Many of the gay [dating] apps are predominantly used by gay men. So, I come here to meet people... I've gotten [benefits] from this. The [community center] organizes networking events for us to meet at, where we can meet other lesbians.

Networking events include film screenings, group counseling meetings, and social outings, among others. The content of an event did not matter, interviewees emphasized, so much as the networking that went on behind it. Community centers, like small businesses, offered a unique space that permitted LGBTQ people to reclaim a sense of agency by permitting them to be themselves. In addition, in offering services and cultural media tailored to queer people, community centers provided visibility and legitimacy to LGBTQ identities.⁹¹ This is a reprieve from the everyday heteronormative expectations they face from their families and in their workplaces, expectations that gained volume after same-sex marriage legalization. Amy discussed how when she “got into a fight [with my parents] and needed emotional support, my friend, who later became my girlfriend, was there to comfort me and let me stay at her place for a while.”

Resources exchanged are not merely emotional, but instrumental as well, and include food, shelter, money, and small favors.⁹² Community centers also offer instrumental support by regularly distributing information on pro-LGBTQ small businesses (like Beautiful Dream), sexual health clinics, and safe sex counselling. The rich social support that centers provide, particularly to fellow LGBTQ individuals who accompany others seeking mental health support, is indispensable to improving treatment participation and health outcomes.

Chris, a twenty-four-year-old waiter who was part of the same community center as Amy, described his personal feelings:

I did not feel comfortable seeking counseling or an HIV test before I joined [this center]. I was so scared that people would think I have HIV and judge me for it, even if I didn't have [HIV]. I felt so alone for counseling and clinics. But having someone with me made me feel better. I felt more [empowered] to go and free to care for my body.

The theoretical connection between LGBTQ in-group support and a greater sense of safety and well-being holds true in the exchange of another important form of support: job acquisition. My interviewees elucidated the occupational benefits of networking they gained from community center networks, when fellow LGBTQ members introduced others to contacts for potential job

⁹⁰ Desmond 2012; Plickert, Cote, and Wellman 2007; Stack 1974.

⁹¹ Tang 2011, 116.

⁹² Lin 2000.

openings.⁹³ They shared their impressions about the political and social attitudes of employers and workplace cultures. In doing so they were more sensitive to micro-aggressive forms of discrimination because they were more likely to have experienced it themselves.⁹⁴ In this manner, recommendations among members of the LGBTQ community provide a filter to the job networking process by distinguishing unsafe workplaces from safe ones.

Conclusion

LGBTQ rights have been a contentious subject in Taiwan for over a decade. Ming-Sho Ho traces the genealogy of the marriage equality movement in Taiwan to 2006, when Hsiao Mei Qin, a Democratic Progressive Party lawmaker, strove to legalize marriage and child adoption for same-sex couples, but failed to garner sufficient support among lawmakers to make it to the legislative agenda.⁹⁵ From 2006 onward, he asserts, homophobic conservatism and liberal sentiments have been locked in constant struggle, with Christian-led anti-gay movements and equality activists holding demonstrations regularly every year. Liberal sentiments gradually achieved political momentum that culminated in the 2019 same-sex marriage legalization by capitalizing on a series of political reforms from 2006 onward, including electoral reforms in 2008 that halved the number of lawmakers and the 2014 Sunflower Movement, which energized more liberal-thinking youth to participate in politics.⁹⁶

Legalization of same-sex marriage represents a cornerstone shift towards more egalitarian values in Taiwan. However, there exists a need to parse out a more nuanced picture of legalization's immediate after-effects. I have shown the growing pains of large-scale, long-term political mobilization for prominent issues like LGBTQ equality,⁹⁷ interrogating identity-specific challenges that remain at work, and the social repercussions of legal changes in terms of the micro-level politics that LGBTQ people must navigate, particularly in their families and at their workplaces.

Using a Goffmanian micro-sociological approach, I have documented the forms and effects of anti-LGBTQ discrimination that still exist in Taiwan. This shows the currents of feeling about such discrimination that are demonstrated by signals of intolerance and tension (such as threats of social and occupational ostracization) within families and at work. In response, LGBTQ individuals may self-censor their identities and suffer emotional distress, a loss of social support, and stalled upward mobility.

Although legalization of same-sex marriage may be thought of as a measure to alleviate these pressures, intolerance against LGBTQ people has been inflamed by the newfound visibility they have gained in the wake of legalization. Upon legalization, for instance, my interviewees reported experiencing greater scrutiny from heterosexuals, who feared – and misunderstood – an amorphous kind of disruption to the status quo that greater LGBTQ rights presented. This is consistent with survey experiments on anti-discrimination policies that show that discourses

⁹³ Granovetter 1995; Marin 2011.

⁹⁴ McCabe et al 2012.

⁹⁵ Ho 2018.

⁹⁶ A poll by Taiwan ThinkTank in 2016 revealed that 78.9 percent of people under the age of thirty supported marriage equality, but this percentage decreased as age increased, to a low of approximately seventeen percent for people over seventy.

⁹⁷ Ho 2018.

about LGBTQ rights to equality are negatively correlated with support for anti-discrimination policy.⁹⁸

Taken together, these tensions exert a pacifying chill on people's abilities to negotiate their identities at their workplaces and within their families. Indeed, despite optimism about same-sex marriage legalization in Taiwan, this article uncovers pockets of conservatism on the micro-level that can emerge as a result – a theoretically significant counterpoint to a growing body of interdisciplinary literature that documents LGBTQ political mobilization for legal rights, but without sufficient attention to the discriminatory strains it invokes at the micro-level.

Though an important limitation of this study is its statistical generalizability, my findings are theoretically informative of the variegated experiences and sources of distress that LGBTQ people in Taiwan have experienced in the wake of same-sex marriage legalization. In this manner, this article helps make sense of and fleshes out the interpretive processes behind what recent survey studies show to be some deleterious effects of same-sex marriage legalization on the mental health of LGBTQ people. For instance, the rate of poor mental health significantly increased among Taiwanese LGBTQ men, women, and transgender individuals from about twenty-five percent in 2016 to forty-five percent in 2018, a crucial twenty-three-month period of public debates and referendums on same-sex marriage legalization.⁹⁹ During the same period, thoughts about suicide increased from sixteen percent to twenty-six percent among homosexuals and from eleven percent to twenty-three percent among bisexuals in Taiwan.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, interviewees in my study reported finding sanctuary or asylum in social enclaves “run by [and] for” LGBTQ compatriots, according to the manager of Beautiful Dream, namely small business outlets and community centers. The power of these enclaves is in the physical and symbolic shelter they offer, providing small services, emotional support, and job information, among other things – all of which emulate a micro-cosmic egalitarian society that allows LGBTQ people to feel normalized, safe, and free.

The entwinement of elements of both personal and cultural space in these enclaves, emulating a utopia where people can feel normal, offers theoretical inspiration for future studies of LGBTQ people and the search for similar enclaves in other metropolises. Given that LGBTQ people have no legal protections from discrimination because of sexual orientation as well as no marriage rights in most Asian states, there exists a need for alternative spaces that allow the pursuit of sexual intimacy and offer pools of emotional energy to shield against the stress of discrimination.¹⁰¹

Though same-sex marriage has been linked to better mental health and safe spaces exist in greater number and enjoy superior visibility in countries like the United States, where they have legal frameworks explicitly protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination, preliminary empirical work shows the persistence of discrimination and anti-LGBTQ attitudes even after same-sex marriage legalization. In the United States, for instance, nearly forty percent of people still believe businesses should be able to discriminate against LGBTQ people.¹⁰² The dynamics of network discrimination and enclaves identified in the present study are thus theoretically salient for both Euro-American and Asian contexts, especially in an age of digitalization, where

⁹⁸ Adam and Cooper 2017.

⁹⁹ Chen et al 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Lin et al 2019.

¹⁰¹ Tang 2011; Yue and Leung 2017.

¹⁰² Kaufman and Compton 2021.

scholars continue to disentangle the effects of social media as a vehicle for discrimination, social support, and group formation.¹⁰³

In closing, I suggest several opportunities for policy reform. First, more resources are needed to create safe spaces for LGBTQ people in Taiwan. In his book *Safe is not Enough*, Michael Sadowski describes the increase in the number of safe spaces on university campuses and businesses such as cafes in the United States, and the health benefits these provide for reducing stigma, lowering suicide rates, and fostering community.¹⁰⁴ The social and health benefits of such safe spaces also “encourage free speech by... embodying the ideal of civility into university spaces to remove the stigma that prevents minorities from speaking about their lived experiences and contributing to ongoing dialogue.”¹⁰⁵

Second, more thorough anti-discrimination policies are needed to combat the capillary forms of discrimination that arise for LGBTQ individuals. This includes incorporating sexual orientation into affirmative training in workplace policies, as well as discussions of homophobic and heteronormative beliefs, both of which have been identified as capable of lowering homophobia.¹⁰⁶ Addressing homophobic beliefs in the workplace is important, given that much of the discrimination that occurs in workplaces are such that they fall beneath the radar of overt anti-discrimination laws, such as when colleagues use gay slurs or derogatory references to sexual orientation.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰³ Yue and Lim 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Sadowski 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Au 2021b, 110.

¹⁰⁶ Rock, Carlson, and McGeorge, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Nelson et al, 2019.

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