

## **“Only in My Dreams Could Happen”- A Greek Gay Man’s Experience of Intimate Relationships in a Country that Has Just Passed a Same-Sex Union Law; a Qualitative Study Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated how a Greek gay man experienced his homosexuality over the course of his life, while living in Greece. Research has shown that sexuality does not play an important role in variables such as intimacy, and love (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Wagner, Remien & Carballo-Dieguez, 2000). Social and cultural parameters however affect sexuality acceptance and psychological wellbeing (Bader, 2009; Wight, LeBlanc & Lee Badgett, 2013). In the Greek society many gay men over the years chose to conceal their sexual identity out of fear of harassment (Veremis et al, 2013). Greece however has just passed a new same-sex union law aiming at giving equal rights to homosexual couples. This study based on a single interview case, aimed at interpreting the participant’s reality under the premises of Interpretative phenomenological analysis. The participant, a 42 year old gay man, participated in an one hour semi-structured interview. Four themes emerged as a result of the transcript analysis; the need to be normal; time as a construct in his life; the importance of micro and macro environment; dealing with feelings and emotions. The participant’s need for safety and comfort, the emotional implication from lack of it, as well as his positive emotions as a result of intimacy, love and wide acceptance have emerged from the analysis of the theme “dealing with feelings and emotions”. The findings of the analysis are supported by existing literature. The nature of this qualitative study has helped the researcher to give voice to the participant and to analyze his experiences and concerns from a psychological perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

**Keywords:** Only in My Dreams Could Happen a Greek Gay Man’s Experience of Intimate Relationships in a Country that Has Just Passed a Same-Sex Union Law a Qualitative Study Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

### **Introduction**

#### **Love and Intimacy**

The need for love and intimacy is one of the biggest concerns of human life (Horney, 1967; Maslow, Frager & Cox, 1970; Sternberg, 1986; Giddens, 2013). Human beings are seeking relationships and bonding since the day they are born; they identify with caregivers, and they develop their sexuality in early childhood (Belsky, Steinberg & Draper, 1991). During adolescence people explore their sexuality and most people conclude on how they want to identify themselves sexually (Giddens, 2013). As sexual awareness develops humans are seeking emotional and physical satisfaction through intimacy (Jamieson & Jamieson, 1998). The psychologist, Robert Sternberg (1986) developed the theory of “triangular love” with intimacy, passion, and commitment being its three components. His theory describes intimacy as a state where the partners feel connected, and close to each other aiming at continuous relationship growth. Passion refers to the physical attraction and sexual desire, and commitment refers to a mutual and logical decision for the two partners to be true to each other.

Research has shown is that there are many important parameters that affect intimate relationships. Things such gender roles, attachment style, family support, society norms, culture and religion are important parameters. (Bowlby, 1982; Smith and Mackie, 2007). Gender may affect perception and experience of intimate relationships (Brody& Hall, 2008). Moreover, micro and macro environments set standards and have expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 2009).

#### **Homosexuality, Intimacy and Society**

Sternberg's theory was initially developed for heterosexual partners however research has shown that sexuality doesn't play an important role in variables such as intimacy, and love (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Wagner, Remien & Carballo-Diequez, 2000). Flowers et al (1997) concluded that within the context of romantic relationships gay men thought of commitment, trust and love as more important as their own health.

Very often, social, cultural and religion restrictions present sexuality as something shameful and forbidden having as a result compromising and confusion and repression (Bader, 2009). Peer and family pressure can create stressful situations when it comes to sexuality; many times gay men feel pressure and they are negatively criticized (Bader, 2009). They are forced to keep their sexual identity secret and they lack support from friends and family; as a result they don't have equal opportunities to openly express feelings and desires (Rostosky, et al, 2004). Gay men interviewed in a small town in the north of England talked about their experiences as adolescents realizing their homosexuality, characterized by statements such as "defined by difference", "self-reflection and inner conflict", "alienation and isolation", "living a lie", "telling others", and "wholeness and integrity" (Flowers & Buston, 2001). Lack of family support brings out feelings of anger, emotional pain, and guilt which in turn affect forming of intimate and committed relationships (Rostosky, et al, 2004). This might be one of the reasons that gay couples' relationships differ as far as attitudes and practices goes (Adam, 2006). Many gay men in order to avoid hurtful family encounters are likely to try to engage in emotionless and meaningless sexual encounters avoiding this way exposure to possible intimacy and commitment (Green & Mitchell, 2002). Spoiled identity also comes as a result of social stigmatization, and many times gay men are trying to engage in heterosexual relationships in order to avoid this stigmatization (Goffman, 1963).

### **Support and acceptance**

Peer support and strong friendships help men develop coping strategies and allow them to normalize feelings of the situation they encounter (Blair and Holmberg, 2008). As difficult as the process might be is equally liberating, allowing gay men to be true to themselves and to the important people in their lives (Brown, Ramirez, & Schniering, 2013). In turn, they tend to allow themselves to embrace their sexuality and to allow themselves to experience intimacy if they chose to do so (Giddens, 2013). Some men choose long term commitment and marriage when allowed by law.

Social support may have a tremendous influence in many different psychological factors (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Resent research has shown that social networks are an integral part in emotional support. Continuous and open communication among members helps them to deal with feelings of loneliness and despair (Berger, & Mallon, 2015). In addition wide acceptance and legalization of same sex marriages can have positive psychological affects to the members of gay community; a recent study showed that married gay couples have shown diminished psychological distress when compared with couples not in any type of legal unions. (Wight, LeBlanc & Lee Badgett, 2013).

### **Homosexuality in Greek Reality**

The feeling of belonging is vital to happiness in many different collectivistic societies; family bonds, friendship, and social acceptance affect self esteem and life satisfaction (Shaffer, 2008). Greece is one of these societies; tradition; strong family values, intertwining between culture and religion, are some of the core characteristics of the Greek reality. Greece is also a rather conservative society and the homosexuality hadn't been a topic discussed openly. The "Citizen's Defense of Greece" reports, that individuals identifying as gay/lesbian are often being harassed in their work environment by coworkers and supervisors. As a result they often choose to conceal their sexual identity out of fear of being ridiculed or even excluded from future advancement. Similarly, they report many bullying incidents towards homosexual students in schools as the school system in Greece does not provide adequate support and education in the subject of homosexuality (*Veremis et al, 2013*).

In general, the subject of intimate relationships in the gay community has been a taboo for a long time in Greece. Many straight men and women discuss how they experience love however very rarely guy men have the chance to discuss love, intimacy and commitment. Long term commitment in gay couples was not supported by social construct and legislation on same sex unions didn't exist. However, Greece, on December of 2015, passed a new law officially recognizing same-sex unions. The new law gives almost all marriage rights to gay couples other than the adoption of children. It gives to all partners equal rights in areas such as social security, medical insurance, labour-law related issues as well as in inheritance taxation (Yiannarou, 2015).

### **Aim and Objectives of this study**

While investigating the subject the researcher of this paper has found that there is no similar research done in Greece so far. There are several articles examining LGBT issues from a social construct but none of them focus on how individuals interpret the experience being a gay man in an intimate relationship in Greece. Research on gay intimate relationships has been conducted at other parts of the world but the social construct and culture is not similar to the one in Greece. The lack of research leaves a gap which the researcher of this paper will attempt to explore by giving a participant a chance to actively engage, to express thoughts and feelings on the subject.

The aim of this study was to give a Greek gay man the chance to discuss his experience and the understanding of his experiences. Based on the premise of idiography the researcher of this paper focused not on universal phenomenon but rather on a particular individual's experience (Smith and Osborne, 2003). The objectives were to generate a rich and detailed report on this person's lived experience, views and hopes without biases or direction and to try to understand how or whether social context and legislation affect his experiences.

### **Method**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used for this study as the main goal of IPA is to explore individuals' experiences through their own point of reference, their own interpretation of situations, of objects and important others of their lives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The aim of IPA is to give voice to participants and to analyze their experiences and concerns from a psychological perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). IPA draws on phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, 2003). As Crotty (1996) indicates, phenomenology depicts what the participants have experienced and it is of highest importance for the researcher, to gain full understanding of the phenomenon through the participants' point of reference. IPA draws on concepts such as social comparison, use of metaphors use linguistic choice (Smith 2004). As Brocki & Wearden (2006) note, people have an active role in the way they interpret situations in their own life; reality is rather subjective and it's formulated based on individual experiences; IPA aims at exploring this subjective reality, and the perception of each participant (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Eatough & Smith, 2006). It is a dynamic process, where researchers should try to remove biases in order to understand, interpret and reflect on the world view of participants (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997; Finlay, 2009; Flowers & Buston, 2001). As Flowers & Buston (2001) explain the researcher should focus on presenting "articulate expressions" representative of themes emerging.

IPA was a suitable approach in this study since it aimed at exploring insights; it did not seek for an objective reality but rather to examine in depth reasons behind beliefs and behaviours (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Turner and Coyle 2000). As IPA is idiographic, and is concerned with the detail examination of each case in its uniqueness, it was an appropriate method for a single participant study (Smith, 2004). In addition as Smith and Osborne (2003) discuss, IPA is the most appropriate qualitative research method in order to investigate a subject that is rather untouched and there is not a large pre-existing literature on the subject as it was with this study.

### **Design**

The researcher conducted a single semi-structured interview with a Greek gay man. Reflecting on IPA premises, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to be the expert in his life (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The interview was audio-recorder using a password protected device and at later time transcribed verbatim by hand. A sample of the transcript is available at the appendix section of the study (Appendix III). The questions that were used were open-ended and non-directive (Appendix II). The interview was conducted in the English Language. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the data.

### **Participant**

The participant was a 42 years old gay man. It was important for him to be called by his real name rather than using a pseudonym, however in order to abide by ethical rules and guidance his name has been altered and he is referred to as "Akis". Akis used to work at a high profile position in the public sector, but 6 years ago he quit that job and since then he works as a therapist in Greece. He is currently in a long term homosexual relationship with his partner of 13 years. The participant is a personal acquaintance of the researcher.

## Procedure

Ethical guidelines as laid out by the British Psychological Society and the University of Derby were followed. The researcher has submitted for approval an ethics form, including the questions that were used for the interview (Appendix I). The participant was initially approached verbally by the researcher. He was informed of the purpose of the study and he was given the list of questions to be discussed shall he would choose to participate in the study. As he agreed, he received detailed information on ethical considerations, on anonymity and confidentiality, his right to withdraw and the right to have access to the final report. He was asked to sign a consent form and a two- hour time interval was booked for the interview in order to ensure time aplenty for the participant to ask questions, and feel at ease and not rushed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

## Material

The questions that were asked include both general questions but also personal relationship questions. An interview schedule with some possible themes for discussion was developed based on the researcher's reading of literature; however the interview schedule was just a basis for the interview and it didn't intend to be prescriptive and limiting (Willig, 2001). The questions discussed were open-ended and in certain cases prompts were included. Some of the questions the researcher asked were; "When did you begin to be aware of your own sexuality", "Where do you find support", "How do you personally define intimate relationships", "How do you feel about the new law on same sex unions in Greece? This was a face-to face interview that has given the researcher the opportunity to practice active listening, to focus on body language, expression of emotion and tone of voice. An audio recording devise was used to record the interview. Pen and paper was used for the transcription and analysis of the interview.

## Analytic Strategy

Data analysis followed IPA guidelines and processes as per Smith at al. (1997). The researcher listened to the interview multiples times and after the verbatim transcription of it, she read and re-read the text, making notes. The researcher tried to grasp the essence of the participant's words by engaging in an interpretative relationship with the data (Smith and Osborne, 2003). Reflecting on emotions, identifying possible presumptions and judgments were important element of the analysis. This way judgments were removed, and identification of themes and possible connection between these themes were possible (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005; Smith and Osborne, 2003; Willig, 2001). The goal for the researcher was not to categorize data but to comprehend using her own "interpretative resources (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith, 2004). According to the philosophy of double hermeneutics a researcher needs to dive in the world of the interviewee and to decode the meaning that he has given to his experiences as individual meanings are a key component to lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher whilst coded the interview transcript depicted phrases and linguistic elements, noted different remarks and reflected on emotions and feelings. Many different themes emerged, and while seeking relationship among them, cluster themes were created (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

## Analysis

During the third stage of the analysis, the researcher established connections between 28 different preliminary themes and clustered them appropriately. Four clusters have emerged and a descriptive label was assigned to them aiming at conveying the essence of the themes within the cluster (Smith, 2004). A summary table was produced depicting each higher order theme and the subthemes under it. A quote example is presented alongside each theme together with the page number one could find it. The *Summary Table* bellow, presents these emerged themes: the need to be normal; time as a construct in his life; dealing with feelings and emotions; the importance of micro and macro environment.

## Summary Table

Cluster & Themes	Quote Example	Page number
The need to be Normal		
Being true to himself	"You can call me by my real name"	1
Acceptance	"People will think of it as the color of their hair"	19
Being whole	"It's a mini universe where I can be whole "	17
Sexuality	"I am quite safe to say I am a homosexual man"	3

Times as a construct in his life		
The early years	"NO...we didn't mention such things"	3
Now & the future	"I see how attitudes have changed...it's very optimistic really"	18
Education	"I don't think she will be able to handle it; she doesn't have the education"	11
The role of social media, technology & Arts	"I can now find support groups"	13
Dealing with feelings & emotions		
Comfort & Safety	"I didn't feel safe enough to discuss such matters"	2
Internal struggle	"It was a long struggle...I really struggled to overcome it"	4
Stigma & restrictions	Homosexuality kind of sounds as a medical term"	4
Hostility	"The only thing I remember having to do with this matter was jokes...offensive jokes"	3
Freedom	"It was a lot of despair, like feeling trapped"	5
Loneliness	"It was too lonely...It was TOO LONELY"	5
The nest	"I like the idea of building a nest"	16
Being positive	"...so I was thrilled, I was very happy about it"	17
The importance of micro and macro environment		
Physical Environment, culture and society	"I come from a small village in Macedonia"	1
Family & Friends	"I am open to all my friends...I wouldn't allow anyone to enter my life if I didn't think he/she will be able to manage"	9
Confinement in the work environment	"I was trying to avoid such conversations"	8
The relationship	"...it's a relationship that is monogamous"	13
Being a mentor	"I am quite passionate about it; to advocate that it can be done"	15
Greece is changing	"I have already experienced this change"	18

### Analysis of the theme "dealing with feelings and emotions"

One of the clusters derived is "dealing with feelings and emotions". Akis expressed an array of emotions and feelings both verbally but also physically, showing how important was this for his experience. Another reason this particular theme was chosen for analysis was because it is entangled with other emerged clusters. Direct extracts were used for the analysis.

#### Feelings of shame

During the first part of the interview, Akis seemed to be withdrawn and he didn't keep an eye contact with the interviewer. While he was referring to the early years of his life he described how confined he felt having to suppress who he was. He felt shameful about his sexuality as if it was something dishonorable; something that didn't belong to the community he was growing up.

"Noooo!!! I didn't feel comfortable to discuss such matters. It would be too risky, too radical to get in such a conversation".

Akis emphatically said that he couldn't feel secure to discuss homosexuality. He struggled as he was dealing with anxiety and the fear about his emotional and physical well being

#### Isolation

During these early years there were many times he felt isolated; he felt as an outcast and as his hidden sexuality was reason for laughter and ridicule for others.

"The only thing I remember having to do with this matter was jokes (pause). Offensive jokes towards homosexual (pause) references from tv or movies (pause). Only as a joke (pause) so I never felt comfortable".

He paused a few times showing pain and frustration about how others viewed homosexuality. He put a big emphasis on the word “*Only*” showing that he felt trapped in an one way street. If his secret would come out, he was terrified he would be ridiculed by his peers.

### **Self-denial**

Looking at his peers he could see that he was different. At the time, this was interpreted as there was something wrong with him, with his desires, and his thinking. As a result, he tried to re-programme himself as a heterosexual. He was in denial, refusing to accept his reality. He was acting as his feelings, preferences and sexual urges didn't exist.

“I tried a lot to overcome it, to make myself, to force myself to heterosexual relationships. I never managed to have one”.

He was emotionally repressed which led him to an existential crisis and emotional imprisonment.

### **Self-acceptance and grief**

He was dealing with a hurtful situation and he was sentencing himself to a solitary confinement filled with humiliation and guilt.

“I really accepted who I am, what my sexuality is and what my (long pause) route in life should be only at the age of 26. It was a long struggle...Although I felt it strongly, I also felt I wasn't allowed to be like that, or I wouldn't be happy being like that”

Akis was expressing some strong inner thoughts. He was very emotional while sharing his life journey. The long pause in his speech could indicate strong **feelings of deep grief** or maybe even anger **that words could not describe**.

### **Stigmatization**

Even during the interview, while he narrated his journey he chose to not use words such “homosexuality” but rather to refer to it as “such things”, or “to be like that”. He seemed to be deeply affected of the stigma that words can bring. When asked about how he feels about the term “gay” he said

“I prefer it. Homosexuality looks like a medical term (thinking) quite tense”

A medical terms points to a disease, to an illness; and even though he emphatically denies the characterization of being ill, he seemed to be in psychological and emotional pain the stigma that words can bring. It's like a burden that he has to carry, making him feel tired and emotionally drained.

### **Loneliness**

Denial brought shame, and shame brought alienation and alienation brought loneliness. The avoidance of emotions and experiences constricted his choices of human contact and of moments of happiness. His social networks were limited and as he was always threatened from stigmatization, he couldn't connect with others. At the same time though, the human need for love and bonding pushed him to take the risk he was so much afraid of up to that point.

“It was too lonely (painful smile). It was TOO lonely (pause) and I came to realize there is no way to cure it. Maybe the only thing I need is to compromise with who I am (pause) so it was mainly despair. The fact that it doesn't change; and the need for love, the need for a lover for someone to walk with”

Akis was very emotional at this point. There was another long pause on his narrative; a moment of recollection and just being. When he spoke again he just repeated the word “lonely”; showing how intense the feeling of loneliness was for him. It was as he went back in time when he had no one to talk to and he didn't feel safe.

### **Disbelief**

Akis' demeanor changed when he reflected on the outcome of his decision. It was almost as if he was still in disbelief and that he deserved and he was “allowed” to have love and happiness in his life.

“Paradoxically I feel quite lucky. It went well. I am one of the lucky guys. It worked”. “It was a relationship that lasted, so I am very lucky (pause)I consider myself very lucky”.

The choice of his words could imply that he didn't believe in his internal locus of control. He attributed the outcome of his life choices to pure luck and not to all the bravery and hard work he put into it. His words could imply the suppression of feelings of tiredness and pressure he felt working to achieve this, instead of being something easy that comes out of "luck".

### **Emotional and physical safety**

Akis also talked about how fulfilled and real he feels having made his decision to live his life the way he chooses to do so. His emotional outlook changed completely when he was talking about his intimate relationship.

He described the importance of acceptance and physical attachment; the need to hold his partners and be held both in a physical and emotional way. This showed the need for emotional and physical safety and comfort that could outweigh the insecurity and pain that isolation brings.

"Intimate relationships allow you to feel normal, to feel accepted, to feel embraced, to feel comfortable. So it is something you can hide in, you can feel warm in and of course to have sex in, to be loving and caring and all these beautiful things".

Akis has a very clear definition about what an intimate relationship is. For him an intimate relationship has to do primarily with expression of emotions, safety and comfort; He is seeking a secure attachment which will allow him to feel peaceful.

### **Emotions as a result of the new law in Greece**

Akis has also expressed enthusiasm. Feelings of joy came to surface when he was discussing the new same sex union law in Greece. He expressed happy emotions for having a formal permission to have ownership of his own life, to have acceptance and approval. He also showed great empathy for all these gay men that were suppressed not able to be who they wanted to be.

"I was thrilled when it was voted in the parliament. It was much more than what I expected. Because imagine that we had nothing and suddenly we have (pause) something that only in my dreams could happen. I was very happy (pause) and very optimistic that things will change. Apart from the beautiful emotions it is comforting to know that I have options".

Akis' happy emotions are rooted in his need for wide acceptance. It is as he has found an easier path for his life's journey. He characterized the new law as a dream and as dreams incorporate great desires, aspirations, and ideals, he hopes for a better future.

As one may see Akis' experience is characterized by an array of intense emotions that are affected by internal mechanisms but also by his micro and macro environment.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to give to a Greek gay man the chance to discuss the understanding of his experiences as a homosexual man living in Greece. The objective was to generate a rich and detailed report, depicting his experience, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and to gain full understanding of a phenomenon through the participant's point of reference (Crotty, 1996).

The participant openly discussed and self-reflected on many different aspects of his life in reference to his sexuality. Four different clusters of themes have been emerged from the interview: the need to be normal; time as a construct in his life; the importance of micro and macro environment; dealing with feelings and emotions. The researcher of this study reflected on the cluster of "dealing with feelings and emotions", as she interpreted it as core theme in the participant's experience. The findings of the analysis are supported by existing literature.

The participant's experience during his adolescent years was characterized by shame and fear. As has been previously identified in literature, social and cultural restrictions very often present sexuality as something dishonorable that causes humiliation and verbal attacks (Bader, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Veremis et al, 2013).

The participant reported having to conceal his sexual identity as both his family and friends were looking at homosexuality as a "joke". This reflects on previous research showing that many gay men lacking support from friends and family hide their sexual identity (Rostosky, et al, 2004; Veremis, 2013). Akis experience of emotions is concise to the findings of Flowers & Buston (2001) reporting that their participants experience is characterized by statements such as "defined by difference", "self-reflection and inner conflict", "alienation and isolation".

Even though the participant is open and comfortable with his sexuality, there were many points during the interview that he referred to homosexuality as “these things”, bringing up the issue of stigmatization. Literature has extensively discussed stigmatization (Goffman, 1963, Veremis, et al, 2013; Bader, 2009); however the participant’s words bring a new insight on how a linguistic choice can affect a person’s wellbeing.

The participant’s statement, that even though coming out was scary and stressful, it was equally liberating, allowing him to be true to himself, coincides with previous studies (Brown, Ramirez, & Schniering, 2013; Berger, & Mallon, 2015; Giddens, 2013).

The participant has exhibited and described an array of intense emotions. As theory indicates lack of family and social support can bring out feelings of anger, pain, and guilt (Flowers & Buston, 2001; Rostosky, et al, 2004 Smith and Mackie, 2007; Veremis, et al, 2013). However, Akis was also able to experience positive feelings as a result of his intimate relationship as Sternberg (1986) indicates in his theory of “triangular love”. He described intimacy as a state where he feels connected, and has a common path in life. He spoke of commitment, as previously indicated by Flowers et al (1997), as a state of trust and love. The participant also talked about how important the feeling of belonging and safety is for his wellbeing as Shaffer (2008) has previously discussed on a study examining happiness in collectivistic societies.

Akis has also experienced happiness, hope and optimism because of the new law in Greece. He described feelings of comfort and safety and less stress. This is supported by literature showing that social acceptance affect self esteem and life satisfaction (Shaffer, 2008; Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013). As the law of same sex unions is a relatively new development in Greece, the current study adds to previous findings the knowledge that the new law has a positive affect in feelings of safety and comfort.

The contribution of this study is that it added, to existing literature, insight on how a gay man in Greek society has experienced similar emotions with gay men around the world as a result of lack of acceptance and understanding. In addition it supports an optimistic outlook that solutions are possible; that there is hope that the gay community can find happiness through intimacy but also through acceptance. Aki’s message is that inner conflict deriving from social stigmatization lead to isolation, feelings of loneliness and despair. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of these psychological implications. Social networks, education and support can be the only solution to the problem of stigmatization because of sexual preferences. The creations of formal social networks supporting the gay community as well as new therapy approaches as the Pink Therapy can significantly contribute to acceptance and support. Social justice and equality on national and international levels are of great importance in order to support and protect gay rights.

The chosen methodology for this study depicts the importance of using interpretative phenomenological analysis in order to explore in depth how a participant is experiencing his reality. Through this, the researcher was able to explore many deep levels of the participant’s psychological constructs in relation to a social and cultural context. As a theoretical contribution this current study intelligibly examined the participant’s complex and dynamic emotions which are integral part of thoughts and actions (Eatough & Smith, 2006)

One limitation of the current study is that the analysis was limited in only one higher order theme. Many other theme cluster have emerged during the interview and it would be of great importance for one to examine them as reach material have been discussed by the participant. It would be of high importance to examine the role of times in the subject as well as how deeply socio cultural elements can affect ones reality.

Future research on the topic can consider doing a follow up interview after a period of time trying to examine how the participant continue to experience emotions through developments in his micro and macro environment. In addition further study on the subject could include different other participants from the LGBT community in Greece that would allow to examine how they understand and experience their reality.

In conclusion the researcher of this study aimed at investigated how a Greek gay man experienced his homosexuality over the course of his life in Greece; a country that has just signed a same sax union law. The nature of the qualitative study, using interpretative phenomenological analysis has helped the researcher to give voice to the participant and to analyze his experiences and concerns from a psychological perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). This was achieved through a dynamic process, where researcher self-reflected (Appendix IV), removed biases and reflected on the world view of participant (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997; Finlay, 2009; Flowers & Buston, 2001).



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