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The Staff Member vs. Organizational Life
-
Normalizing Judgments, Self- reflections, and Stigma

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Abstract

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The study rests in a general notion of sexuality in an organizational context. More specifically, it entangles how the homosexual staff member reasons upon his gayness and homosexual urges with regard to various factors of organizational life. The main purpose is to determine what significance organizational life has to self- reflections, and moreover, what possible consequences are in terms of self- construction.

The empirical material entails eight thematically structured depth interviews with gay men. The questions focus on individual perception and understanding of organizational life in regards to being gay.

A stringent perspective is of Social Psychological characteristics. The main theoretical premises are Symbolic Interactionism, Human Element Theory, and Foucauldian tradition, and have been utilized for the construction of interview questions, as well as for the analysis.

The conclusions suggest that it is difficult to establish a significant and congruent association between organizational life and self- reflections. Nevertheless, further conclusions emphasize that a possible juxtapositions of unambiguous factors of organizational life and self- reflections, do influence self- construction.

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Appendix A

1. Introduction

Most importantly the introduction consists of a purpose statement and of a thesis statement. Further sections describe the disposition, empirical study, limitations, and theoretical perspectives in order to build an initial foundation for the reader.

I have several reasons for working on this study and performing it in the manner I have chosen. First of all, it fulfills a formal demand towards a Masters Degree in Sociology with a focus on Intercultural Understanding. Secondly, the experience I gain by gathering and analyzing empirical material is useful for intended professionalism within the area of Organization Development. Third, exploring issues regarding stigmatization and experienced minority status originates in a personal interest. Being a gay man in a heterosexual context, I experience daily issues of compromising my own and other's identities in order to enhance mutuality. I do not believe that these communication issues surface because of our differences *per se*, but as a result of not having enough knowledge to understand and act upon these differences. Also, it becomes relevant to understand, and furthermore, confront discourses that may shape social interaction in a judgmental and normalizing manner.

Finally, I carry the belief that the Swedish society over the past decades has experienced an increase in diversity. To some degree this has been evident in organizational life, not just in terms of a seemingly increasing diversity among staff members, but also in terms of how to deal with issues such as cultural clashes, interfering attitudes, discrimination, individual exclusion and stigmatization, legal actions such as laws against segregating and discriminatory management, etc. A common denominator could be an increasingly notable dualism of minority and majority values. I therefore find it interesting to examine how organizations manage a phenomenon of diversity, and more specifically, diversity of sexuality.

1.1 Purpose of Study

As the main purpose of the study, a descriptive and critical discussion is expected to discover a rather invisible, but possibly factual realm of sublime and rhetorical knowledge structures in social interaction that influence constructions of identities, and more specifically, gay men's identities. As a main part of the purpose I will focus on individual stigmatization and exclusion as being influenced by social interaction in professional work situations. I will on these grounds make attempts to clarify how and why self- constructions, self- conceptualization, and actions of individual staff members may be interrelated to different aspects of organizational life.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Several theoretical perspectives as mentioned under "Theory" have guided me to construct questions that I find relevant to clarify and possibly answer. As for contingency, the thesis questions are on one hand confined by a notion of homosexuality as a central trait of the individual staff member. On another hand, another stringency is aspects of organizational life, which refers to staff management, attitudes of colleagues and managers, diversity mixture of workplace, as well as an overall organizational culture. The thesis questions are as followed:

- *To what significance does the gay staff members' perception of organizational life shape his self- reflections?*
- *How could a possible juxtaposition between organizational life and self- reflections influence the course of self- construction?*

1.3 Perspectives

I intend to combine a perspective on discourse of knowledge in a Foucauldian fashion, and social psychological processes according to Social Interactionism. The purpose is to explore

the staff member's self- construction as influenced by his/her experiences of being different to others in an organizational environment. I will also include augmenting perspectives on stigmatization, exclusion, and group development, in attempts to explain why the staff member, despite a risk of dilapidating personal and professional success, makes certain compromises. Note that I have chosen to follow a perspective on the organization as perceived merely by the individual staff member. I am aware that self- constructions can be products of psychological factors, however, I have chosen the angle that the "self" is dominated and shaped by knowledge of cultural propositions.

The results deriving from the questions and the empirical study will be the target of analysis of this combination of two main theoretical perspectives. An attempt in my study is to discuss social interaction, and self- constructions as having characteristics of process and dynamism. The reason is, in my opinion that the above-mentioned power structures, and social psychological aspects in groups, are dynamic, and should be discussed as such.

1.4 Empirical Study

The empirical foundation for this study is to perform depth interviews with homosexual men (gay men) regarding their experiences at, and perception of, their respective organizations of employment. I intend to treat these interviews as exemplifying cases, which further pose as objects to theoretical analysis. The empiricism will be discussed in detail under "*Method*".

1.5 Limitations

I have only used one qualitative method, *depth interviews*, because of reasons discussed below (under "Method"). I furthermore limit the selection of interviewees to homosexual men working in one geographical area.

I will not limit the selection of organizations that explicitly perform staff management. The reason is that staff management in practice not always has to be termed as such, and furthermore is not always consciously practiced. Staff management will therefore be used to generally describe any action or attitude that managers carry out towards staff members.

Similarly, organizational culture is not always outspoken, but will be discussed in accordance with a definition. In an attempt to theoretically discuss staff management and organizational culture in pragmatic situations, I will be utilizing the results of my empirical study. It will mainly include mapping of experienced issues at the workplace, including informal as well as formal frames of reference.

Theoretically I will not devote my focus towards the field of “sexuality”, such as according to Foucault, since the purpose of the study is to focus on organizational life and not on knowledge about sexuality *per se*. Similarly, the aspect of “vocational stereotypes” of various organizations is likely to appear in the empirical material. I have however chosen not to broaden the theoretical perspective to a discussion of stereotypes about vocational roles. If I do consider it crucial to the discussion I will instead utilize available theories.

1.6 Disposition

In given order, after “Method” and “Theory” I will under “Results and Analysis” make attempts to discuss and further analyse the findings and results according to the offered theoretical perspectives. In order to make it easier for the reader to keep a contingent reading of the text, every section begins with a brief introduction. I will enter the section named “Theory” by offering definitions of concepts central to the theoretical and the empirical studies, and that furthermore could be ambiguous. I will end the same section by a summary for keeping a logical stringency.

The thoughts and frameworks presented in the “Results and Analysis” will constantly be referred to when finally attempting to offer overall answers to the thesis questions under “Conclusions”.

2. Method

In this section I will thoroughly discuss methodology, choice of method, access and selection, the manner in which I have carried out the empirical study, as well as limitations, and possible issues deriving from phenomena such as subjectivity.

I perceive the crucial part of my university studies as accumulated knowledge on *how* to collect information on social interaction, that is, the various Sociological methods. Moreover, in order to use these methods with care and responsibility, the subject of Methodology is in my opinion equally as crucial. I have on these grounds decided to invest a great deal of this thesis on a detailed discussion of the empirical study. Concepts and methodology are solely taken from Conny Svenning's "Metodboken".¹

2.1 Choice of Method

I have chosen to work with one kind of tool for the empirical study; *depth interviews*. The main reason to work with this kind of empirical search is that it offers the researcher a satisfying foundation of depth and complexity for further theoretical analysis of how individuals perceive interaction. The utilization and planning of the interview as a method will be mentioned and questioned in this chapter in a usual Sociological manner.

2.2 Access and Selection- The Interviewees (IPs)

I have chosen to limit the selection of IPs to one single *population as a group of unit for examination*²; homosexual Swedish men working in professional organizations based in the city or vicinities of Malmö. These IPs range between 23 and 33 years of age, but only one is younger than 28 years of age. A couple of the IPs are fully open about their sexuality at work, but far from the majority of them, but all of them are completely or almost completely open about their sexuality to family and friends. As for employment, the IPs demonstrate a broad diversity, such as service, education, engineering, etc.

¹ Svenning, "Metodboken", 1996. my translations.

² Ibid, p. 96

There are several reasons for me to limit myself to this selection. First, in terms of accessibility I found it geographically easy to meet with the IPs. Second, the ease by which I have contacted, and furthermore been able to talk to the IPs on a highly personal level, is because of my social network within the gay community of Malmö. I inquired the first IP for further possible candidates for my interviews. Methodologically this manner of selection can be termed as a *snowball selection*³. Along the period of the performance of interviews, I encountered a couple of persons that inquired to be interviewed because of their personal interest in my study.

During the snowball selection I had to limit the number of available IPs. I made a further selection resembling a *selection of polarity*, that is, finding individuals that clearly differ from each other⁴ in regards to homosexuality, in order to make comparisons.

2.3 Interviews

I performed a *test interview* with a friend in order to discover questions that could be incomprehensible, which I prior to the interviews altered or removed.

Since I believe the *context* in which an interview is performed is important to the general comfort and security of the IP, I insisted to interview the IP's in their homes. I also insisted to avoid any kind of disturbance such as having other persons in the room, or time pressure. All the criteria above to create a good interview situation were met. Before starting the interview I explained the thematic structure of the interview in order to offer a general overview. I never explained the purpose in detail until after the interview. The reason was to avoid the risk of the interviewer's influence on the answers.

In terms of style of interviewing, I constantly attempted to keep a low profile by attempting not to affect the IP's answers with my personal anecdotes. Also, in order to meet personal preferences of the IP, I let the IP choose the style of interview, namely, either answering the questions in a discussion, or strictly following the questionnaire. The documentation of the answers was *unsystematic*, and therefore none of the interviews were solely *structured*.

³ Ibid, p. 104

⁴ Ibid, p. 105

Nevertheless, since the presentation of the questions was either *unsystematic* or *systematic*, depending on above-mentioned preferences, the interviews could be classified as either *informal* or as *unstructured*⁵.

A related aspect is how I approached unexpected topics that surfaced in some of the interviews. If I considered the topic to be valuable to the results, I made a so called “konjunkturberoende beslut”⁶ and left the original questions aside for a moment in order to probe further on the new topic. In general an interview took 70 minutes, however, a couple of interviews lasted for about 90 minutes or longer. I documented the answers by recording the interviews on an MD- player, as well as by written notes. Finally, the interviews, as well as the documentation of these, were performed in Swedish.

2.4 Interview Protocol

The interview questions are structured according to different *themes*. The themes are listed in a certain order, starting with what I consider being the least personal in order to avoid insecurity and loss of honesty. The questions are *individual* as well as *collective*. The individual questions are specific to the IP, and constitute the majority of the questions. The collective questions are general to the IP’s work place⁸.

The first half of the interview is in regard to the organization. The purpose of these questions is to examine the IP’s perception of his work situation with focus on attitudes and openness of the organization. The second half of the interview focuses on aspects of the IP’s private life. The purpose is to clarify possible personal matters and experiences, which could affect the IP’s perception of his work situation. Note that all questions are supposed to clarify the work situation as experienced and perceived by the IP. In sum, the results are expected to offer me a foundation to discuss the question of “what the consequences of the attitudes of, and management in the organization may have for the individual?”

⁵ Svenning, 1996, pp. 106-107

⁶ Ibid. p. 123. A choice of direction in interviewing as influenced by unexpected but possibly crucial topics that surface through the IPs’ answers.

⁷ Appendix A

⁸ Svenning 1996, p. 107

The first theme contains *background* questions that are solely individual questions. The second theme is a basic *introduction* to the IP's work situation and related matters, such as length of time in working life and in present employment, demography of work site, tasks, supervisor, colleagues, etc. The third theme is named *general working climate*. On this level the questions become slightly more intimate in terms of perception and personal experiences. The fourth theme, *openness/fellowship*, is similar to the previous theme. However, the questions focus more on the localities and general sociability at the workplace. The fifth theme, *general attitudes*, focuses on the general attitudes of the management in terms of diversity and differences. The sixth theme is more to the point and focuses promptly on the purpose of the study, that is, *being gay at work*. Moreover, it is contingent to the previous theme, but with greater personal depth. Initially I ask whether or not the IP is openly gay at work, since I find it crucial to discuss why the choices have been made to be open or not about sexuality. The questions further along focus even more on the IP's experiences of demands, attitudes, gay jokes, relation to colleagues, discretion, etc., in order to enhance the discussion of openness.

By exploring the seventh theme, what could lie *between work and private life*, I expect to be able to notice attitudes within the IP himself that plausibly could have an effect on the active choice of being openly gay. This theme is further preceding the eighth and final theme that merely focus on *private life*, such as experiences of coming out as gay, political interest, membership in gay organizations, and socialization in the gay community. A technical aspect dealing with the need to ask contingent questions in order to reach a greater depth and validity, is that I on the top of each page of the interview protocol, added *probe questions*⁹.

2.4.1 Feedback and Evaluation

I partly evaluate the interviews according to the feedback I received from the IPs. The overall reactions to the questions and the interview situation were very positive. All of the IPs found the interview questions interesting for their personal interest since they have not previously contemplated many of the issues touched upon in the interviews. Because of this feedback I evaluate the interviews positively; if an interviewee is interested in the questions, the answers are likely to be of good quality and depth.

⁹ Ibid. p. 122. My translation of "uppföljningsfrågor".

2.5 Subjectivity

One could criticize the *selection* because of my personal experiences of being gay. If I were to select a case based on aspects not involving homosexuality I would probably have received different results, however not more objective. I argue that I have made a selection that is theoretically and methodologically valid. I made a selection of IPs based on my perception of what could be an appropriate group of examination, that is, relevant to the perspective of this thesis. I am aware that my perception of what is relevant indeed contains a degree of subjectivity. This issue is also found in the researcher's comprehension of the answers. However, subjectivity of perception should not distort the legitimacy of a research study, unless it involves dishonesty. Nevertheless, in order to avoid misunderstandings and clarify the overall perspective, the issue of subjectivity is important to discuss for each and every aspect of a study¹⁰.

Another issue is incomprehensibility of questions. At a couple of instances I had to explain concepts that to me are obvious. Since I clarified these concepts, the IPs' interpretations of some of the questions were influenced by my subjectivity. I now realize I should have been more thorough regarding the test interview.

The fact that I have a personal relation to some of the interviewees could be of risk as well as of advantage. The risk is impending that I understood the answers according to my predisposed knowledge of the IPs, opposed to according to the answers *per se*. Similarly, the IPs may have taken several aspects for granted because of my knowledge of them and therefore omitted certain answers. On the other hand, there are obvious advantages by having a personal relationship to the IPs, such as more promptly reaching a satisfying level of openness regarding personal matters. Also, because of an already existing trust, I do not have to be as anxious regarding for example honesty.

Finally, I have had to translate the interview material from Swedish into English for the presentation of the results. This step may have involved subjectivity since my choice of vocabulary is based in my interpretation of the answers as well as of the English language.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 13-14

Nevertheless, the risk of subjectivity is also prevalent when the researcher is giving account for his empirical material by interpreting the answers, including specific word uses (uses by the interviewee), either by summarizing them, or by making collages of subjectively chosen quotes, regardless of language.

2.6 Methodological Issues

Following is a methodological discussion of the described empirical study in terms of design of study (selection and interview questions), interview situation, and subjectivity. This involves questioning of reliability and validity of the results.

2.6.1 Reliability

When I question the reliability I need to focus on the design of the interview, such as comprehensibility of questions and situational factors. According to a general definition, if the researcher uses exactly the same study design in a group of people that has not socially changed, the results ought to be the same¹¹. Since the above-mentioned correction of misunderstandings and clarification of concepts follow my subjective interpretation in some of the interviews, the reliability of the results is lowered. Similarly, the impending risk of personal relationships between the interviewer and the IPs as being influential to the answers is also deteriorating to the reliability.

Some IPs, especially those asking to participate, may have understood what the main purpose of the study is, and therefore beforehand contemplated their work situations according to such. Similarly, one of the IPs was asked to talk about, and to some degree compare, two of his previous employments. One issue could be that the answers were not spontaneous enough, and could therefore be according to a warped image of their life situations. In this sense, if any of the IPs would have been asked the same questions over again, the time aspect could have furthermore have warped their perception of reality, and further lower the reliability of the results. On the other hand, if their work situations have been contemplated beforehand, the answers may be of a greater depth and accuracy. However, I do not reckon that this is of a greater methodological problem as compared to a different interview situation since the risk is

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 60, 64-65

always impending that IPs may not be honest or answer “accurately”¹². Nevertheless, since the results will not be used for generalizations, the issue of reliability is less relevant¹³.

2.6.2 Validity

The validity of a study is its ability to capture what is intended to be studied¹⁴. *Logical* or *internal validity* deals with the correlation between theory and object of study, such as the connectivity of thesis questions, interview questions, and selection (group of examination)¹⁵. The logical validity of the interviews will be argued as being good. First, did I ask my questions to an appropriate population? The interview regards experiences of gay men at work. The selection I made was made exactly in accordance with this, and thereof I find no faulty factors that could alter the logical validity. The questions were consciously constructed from the theoretical perspectives of this thesis. Therefore, as the results will be analyzed I expect not to meet any problems of tracing the answers to a theoretical perspective.

Have I covered the contents of the themes well enough? I must state that my ability to ask enough follow-up questions in some of the interviews was not fully satisfying. Especially in one of the interviews in which the IP answered briefly and promptly without offering a deeper clarification, despite my attempts to probe further. As a result I had to strictly follow the protocol. However, this may be a consequence of limitations of the interview as a method *per se*. This interview in specific is definable as unstructured because of the systematic presentation of questions. The limitation by this kind of interview is in my opinion the difficulty to thoroughly exhaust a question, and thereof lowered logical validity.

However, the main issue of validity is whether or not the results will clarify the thesis questions stated in the introduction. I must argue that the logical validity is rather satisfying on this level as well because the validity of the empirical details are argued as being good. It is nevertheless difficult to reach *construct validity* because of the demand to make hypothetical generalizations from the results¹⁶. I do not believe I can make any generalizations of an entire gay population because of the nature of the results, namely exemplifying case studies. I may

¹² Ibid. pp. 107, 121

¹³ Ibid. pp. 64-65

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 61

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 61-63

¹⁶ Ibid.

however be able to theoretically argue for, in combination with the results, common denominators among gay men in specific, and even among minorities in general. I do not yet believe I can establish any hypothesis, and moreover, the construct validity by the share of this relatively scientifically shallow research study.

2.7 Alternative Methods

I could argue in vain why I have omitted other methodological tools. Nevertheless, when designing the research study I made a selection between several alternatives. I do find it interesting to mention these since the choice of method most likely has had a major affect on the profile and outcome of the results. I initially wanted to perform a *survey study*, but reckoned it would be too difficult to find participants for this purpose. I would have wanted to perform the survey on a similar selection of population, that is, gay men. I only found one situation though, in which a larger number of gay men are gathered within the same area at the same time, that is, a gay nightclub. It would have been much too complicated to carry through a study in such an environment. Also, since the purpose of the thesis is not to make any generalizations of the results, I do not find it necessary to use a quantitative method.

I contemplated performing *telephone interviews* in order to be able to remove the issue of geographical location. Despite this, I estimated my network within the gay community of Malmö as large enough to perform about ten depth interviews, and therefore remove the issue of physical proximity. Also, I find depth interviews too complex and lengthy to be able to be performed over the phone.

As an ultimate complement, I afterwards would have liked to perform *participant observations*. However, since most of the IPs were not openly gay in their working environments, there could have been a slight risk of “framing”. Something I unfortunately considered far too late was to let the IPs themselves perform observations, such as keeping a *journal* for a period of time, which would have been quite valuable since it would have involved a more dynamic image of personal experiences. Also, it would have decreased the risk of the researcher’s effect on the interviewees, and therefore improved the reliability of the overall study.

3. Theory

As a foundation to the theoretical frame I enter this section with definitions of what I consider are the crucial concepts for this study. I further discuss descriptive and explaining theories, followed by a more critical stance. Finally I will summarize the theories in order to clarify how they may be combined in an analysis.

3.1 Introduction to Theories

As mentioned in “Introduction”, a subsisting perspective of Social Psychology permeates this study in which a belief is that mutual recognition during social interaction in groups leads to social constructions of identities. The functions and processes by which these constructions take place will be considered by theories in Symbolic Interactionism (SI-School) according to *George Herbert Mead* and *Ervin Goffman*. The *Dramaturgical* perspective of Goffman focuses on team membership as a complement to Mead’s theory on more general and informal group membership, serving me to tie the stigmatization process to informal as well as to formal group qualities. A model focused more on group member’s reactions to organized development of the group, and role- and identity constructions therein, is that of *The Human Element Theory* developed by *Will Schutz*. Yet another perspective is of a rather critical fashion, that of *Michel Foucault*. I perceive this approach as a useful supplement to SI- theory because of Foucault’s focus on micro- politics of power. I realize the complexity of his theory, and will in this context limit my utilization of his thoughts to a rather simple manner. A main reason to rely on this theoretical stance is that I reckon the thought of “stigma” according to Goffman is rather uncritical. By using Foucault I can meet my own demands on a satisfying level in terms of a more critical as well as of a more Sociological point of view. I have considered a Marxian perspective, but I find the connectivity to a social psychological perspective of SI- school too thoroughly to carry through because of the limitations of this study.

3.2 Definitions and Clarifications of Concepts

3.2.1 Groups and Teams

Reading about *team* and *group* dynamics I have encountered uses of the terms as if these are synonymous. However, “group” and “team” are two different, but related, terms for defining

gatherings of individuals. A *group* is two or more individuals that to some degree are socially interactive and mutually dependent. A *team* is a type of group, but with the difference that a team always has a formal task or goal by its existence¹⁷. Because of interdependency between the members' informal relationship and formal structure, I find it difficult to separate the meaning of the team and the group in a discussion of group dynamics, as well as in an analysis of empirical material¹⁸.

3.2.2 Diversity

According to Merriam- Webster's Dictionary *diverse* is defined as "*composed of distinct forms or qualities*"¹⁹. A group of diverse people can be "*defined as any combination of individuals who are different in some ways and similar in others*"²⁰. This includes visible as well as invisible differences, such as for example behavior, and looks, respectively beliefs, lifestyles, and opinions. Diversity will be used in a discussion of how diversity mixture of the workplace may have an affect on self- reflections.

3.2.3 Culture and Sub- culture

I find two levels of *culture* that are important to investigate for this thesis. As for an organizational level it would be relevant to define and discuss *organizational culture*. A *macro- culture* is what I perceive as a more popular meaning of culture, that is, a social phenomenon that has an impact on every aspect of social life, including the organization as well as whole communities. With the aim of defining *macro- culture* I choose to utilize an Anthropological perspective according to Milford E. Spiro. The definition of culture that I use for this study is as followed:

As I see it, 'culture' designated a cognitive system, that is, a set of 'propositions', both descriptive and normative, about nature, man, and society that more or less embedded in interlocking higher- order networks and configurations. Cultural and non- cultural propositions differ in two important dimensions. First, cultural propositions are traditional, that is, they are developed in the historical experience of social groups, and as a social heritage, they are acquired by social actors

¹⁷ Bruzelius and Skärvad 2000, p. 294. Svedberg 1992, pp. 118-119

¹⁸ Svedberg 1992, p. 120

¹⁹ Merriam- Webster's Dictionary, 1997

²⁰ Thomas and Woodruff 1999, p. 5

*through various processes of social transmission rather than constructed by them from private experience. Second, cultural propositions are encoded in collective, rather than private signs*²¹.

This definition is also applicable to the meaning of *sub- culture*. However, one main difference prevails. A sub- culture is “*a distinctive set of standards and behavior patterns by which a group within a larger society operates*”²². An organization is affected by its environment, or aforementioned macro- culture. However, an organization has its own distinct culture that to some degree influences the internal relations. According to a definition, *organizational culture* includes propositions such as “*ideal objectives, dominating ideas and values, significant actors and role models, norms and rules, and informal communication channels*”²³. One function of a culture is to offer individuals a sense of inclusion and meaningfulness. On a more emotional level the organizational culture aids the individual to reduce the anxiety that may surface in a situation possessed with complexity and insecurity²⁴.

3.2.4 Homosexual and Gay

Homosexual is a technical term defined as “[...] *marked by sexual interest in the same sex as oneself*”²⁵. Gay refers to homosexuality, but also to a life style, a gay lifestyle that contains aspects that could be derived from homosexuality. Lifestyle means a way of living. I would not argue that there is an atypical way of living of homosexuals, but there are for example clubs, politics, organized events, communities, etc., that specifically exist for homosexual men. If one to any degree participates in these social activities one could be viewed as more or less living a gay lifestyle. In terms of culture, I will try to approach the term *gay lifestyle* as a sub- cultural phenomenon.

²¹ Spiro in Shweder and LeVine 1994, p. 323

²² Haviland 1996, p. 34

²³ Bruzelius och Skärvad 2000, p. 310

²⁴ Svedberg 1992, p. 97

²⁵ The Merriam- Webster Dictionary 1997

3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

A basic principle within Symbolic Interactionism (SI) is the thought that norms and rules of social groups are superior to the actions taken by individual group member²⁶. Therefore, looking on internal group processes leads the researcher to examine what consequences and functions the group membership has for the individual. In order for an individual to understand group membership and be accepted, he has to *know* what is appropriate in the eyes of others. This requires experience and knowledge in social interaction, including understanding and internalization of roles, attitudes, and perspectives of significant and generalized others (groups)²⁷, and to become a group member, the individual must acquire a significant set of symbols (significant to that group) used in interaction. In terms of *culture* it entangles learning and enacting “cultural propositions” encoded in that group. If successful, the individual learns and internalizes the significant symbols, comprehends their “true” *meaning* (true according to the group), and masters them as communicative tools in order to interact in the group²⁸.

There is also the possibility to carry an imagined interaction, that is, to *reason* (through *thinking*) in order to *predict* possible responses or *test* an action²⁹. Such an ability to reflect upon oneself in absence of real interaction could be comprehended in terms of being able to mentally review and evaluate one’s *self* as an object. If the members excel in this social competence, proximity in mutual understanding may be improved, and further, enhanced plausibility to attain effective interaction may result. In view of the fact that people interact in many different groups and individuals, there are multiple roles of the generalized others to be learned³⁰. The *function* of mastering “culture propositions”, that is, the set of symbols accepted by the group³¹, is to satisfy the needs of the individual and to decrease anxiety, such as expressing his/her wishes in order to prevent or produce someone else’s actions. The individual group member is however somewhat able to influence the social reality by reacting upon it through his/her individuality, which next will be discussed in terms of the “*Self*”. This section of the discussion will be clarified through quotes from an article by Jan Magnusson about self-constructions.

²⁶ Ritzer 1992, p. 332

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 343-344

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 336-337

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 338-340

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 341-342

3.3.1 *The Self, I, and Me*

An individual group member brings uniqueness to the group because of unique experiences and values derivable from the past. Also, thoughts for the future similarly contribute to individual peculiarity. The “voices of the past” (the most important values of the individual, for example, basic needs for survival) make themselves heard through the “I”; the peculiar actions of the “self”. The “I” cannot exist in isolation from the social realm, but is constructed in interaction with, and in reaction to the generalized other. Moreover, these actions are unpredictable, and are not made conscious until after the actions have been taken, that is, in our memory. Vernacularly spoken, the “I” expresses an urge for self- realization, and need to have a unique personality³². However, the possibility of self- realization is limited in a way that *“we can never put ourselves beyond the language and describe the world externally [(external to our mind)]. For in every description we constantly find ourselves imprisoned in the language we try to escape. The mutual relation between what we have learnt and what we wish to express, limit our existence.”*³³

Therefore, intertwined with the “I”, is the more conscious, and socially organized “me”. The group and overall societal norms and cultural value systems, are incorporated in the “self” and acted upon by the “me”. For example, we criticize ourselves because we are self- conscious. We are able to do this by a social “self”, a “me”³⁴. It involves what was previously termed as internalizations of the generalized other; it is the aspect of the “self” that consciously and socially controls the individual, and tends to obliterate his/her individuality. Note that we can internalize multiple roles of the generalized other, and can we thereof carry multiple “me:s”. Moreover, by responsibility the “me” circumvents the individual’s ability to alter the social realm by acting on urges. Then again, *“[...] it is in this limited world [of symbols] we can communicate. It is within these linguistic artifacts that we can make ourselves understood.”*³⁵ In summary, if the social self masters the art of communicating significant symbols, interaction with others is likely to be more effective. Meanwhile, the realization of the “self”, or presentation of our needs, is made possible by this mastering of significant symbols.

³¹ Svedberg 1992, p. 92

³² Ritzer 1992, pp. 344-345

³³ Magnusson 2001, article (my translation)

³⁴ Ritzer 1992, p. 345

³⁵ Magnusson 2001

If there is discrepancy between the aspects of the “self”, and we are not able to express our individual needs and values (the “I”) because of social inhibition (the “me”), a tension within our *selves* is created, which will be discussed further in depth through Ervin Goffman’s “stigma” concept. Contingent upon Mead’s model of general group membership is Goffman’s concepts of “Impression Management” and “Dramaturgy” about organized and formalized group membership.

3.3.2 *Dramaturgy and Impression Management*

In Ervin Goffman’s metaphorical terms of *Dramaturgy*, interaction takes place on a stage, on which *dramaturgical loyalty, discipline, and circumspection* are crucial for successful team performance³⁶. On this stage the self becomes a product of a dramatic interaction between the actor and the audience, and between the different actors on stage. In order to perform with success we need to know the script (social norms and value systems, or significant symbols)³⁷. Put differently, we have to maintain a skill in *impression management*. This involves managing the acting on different locales of the stage, for instance performing front- stage where we would want to create a rather socially accepted impression. We make attempts to hide *secret pleasures*³⁸ that we feel could hurt our social aptness and credibility, attempts that demand a *dramaturgical discipline* from the team and the individual members

However, Goffman’s focus is also aimed at team cooperation. Prior to entering the stage, the group members select back stage the appropriate appearance front stage, that is, *group collusion*³⁹. This includes *dramaturgical circumspection*, which involves constraining information about the team, as well as about individual members, that could affect the impression, such as secret pleasures⁴⁰. Stated differently, in order to keep a team durable, a higher degree of internal loyalty (*dramaturgical loyalty*) could be crucial, involving prevention of individual members to dilapidate the foundation of the team, or merely a mean to hinder the members to “loose self- control”. In practice, preventative actions are cues, such as warning signals, resembling the actions taken by the prompter in a theater⁴¹.

³⁶ Goffman 1982, pp. 207, 210, 212.

³⁷ Svedberg 1992, p. 110

³⁸ My interpretation is that *secret pleasures* involve urges that in terms of Mead are expressed through the *I*.

³⁹ Goffman 1982, p. 175

⁴⁰ Ritzer 1992, pp. 353-354, 356

There are limits with this kind of metaphorical perspective. On a real stage the acting is as above restricted by a script. However, in reality, the team cannot strictly follow a script, and interactional situations are usually more spontaneous. Similarly, the strict roles separation of the scriptwriter, actors, and audience is in a real life situation of a team more vague⁴². I perceive this vagueness as a consequence of the above mentioned difficulty to separate the informal and formal ties between team members.

3.3.3 *Stigma*

As I further aim towards discussing pathology in social interaction I turn to the concept of *stigma*. According to Goffman an individual experiences stigma as long as there is a discrepancy between a *virtual identity* and an *actual social identity*. Stigma can be of different character depending on whether the audience is aware of the discrepancy or not; *discredited stigma* and *discreditable stigma*. Both kinds create issues for the individual prior to and during performance.

A virtual identity is an identity a person is credited by others in interaction. If a new member of a group is perceived as having a certain set of attributes, there may possibly be an anticipation of other attributes based on preconceived attitudes and stereotypical ways of identification.⁴³ For example, if I have a predisposed template of how women “typically” act, I will likely anticipate these actions during interaction with a woman. I further credit this person an identity, a virtual identity that to some degree is founded on my expectations. However, “evidence can arise of [her] possessing an attribute that makes [her] different from others in the category of persons available for [her] to be [...]”.⁴⁴ Thereof, an actual identity is the identity that the individual *de facto* has, and that furthermore can be proven⁴⁵. If a stigmatized individual believes that others of the group are aware of his/her inferior attributes, the stigma is discredited. If an individual on the other hand believes the attributes are concealed, the stigma is discreditable.⁴⁶ Regardless of which, if the individual perceives herself/himself as possessing attributes inferior to a certain context, a feeling of shame could possibly arise. This feeling of shame can be enhanced if one is in the immediate presence of

⁴¹ Goffman, 1982, pp. 175ff, 207

⁴² Ibid. p. 112

⁴³ Goffman 1990, pp. 12-13

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 12

⁴⁵ Ibid.

people carrying the right attributes for that same context. However, attributes that lead to stigmatization may in a different social context be credited as “normal” or as the right attributes⁴⁷. Simply put, a set of “cultural propositions” may be perceived as “abnormal” in a larger cultural context, whereas they may be perceived as “normal” in a sub- cultural context.

A stigmatized individual may act upon to his stigma by attempting to *transform* the “self”. He may do this with the intention to escape or not to deviate from others as a mean to avoid possible embarrassment in interaction. Depending on the nature of the stigma, transformation could incorporate anything from correction of attribute (such as altering an accent) to corporal transformation (such as changing skin color or hiding). If the attributes are visible to others and cannot be hidden, such as having a discredited stigma, the choices of transformation are more limited⁴⁸.

In mixed settings, the stigmatized individual is likely to consciously “scan” the setting in order to make choices about what to say and how to act, for example transformation.

This process of “scanning” may result from anxiety and insecurity about the outcome of social interaction, that is, how one is going to be perceived by others. Stigmatized individuals more frequently experience this anxiety and need to “scan” a setting, and learn to manage the situation.⁴⁹ In terms of Gloria Anzaldúa, this learning process results in the developing of an almost supernatural ability (“la facultad”). This ability can be viewed as a mean to “survive” a threatening situation. By a simple gaze or even sensing, the stigmatized individual can draw conclusions whether or not he can feel comfortable. Again, this ability is developed and reaches proximity through fear, or above, anxiety of being perceived negatively or just differently.⁵⁰

3.4 The Human Element Theory

A few basic principles are centered on the thought of self- concept, which stands as a foundation to a model developed by Will Schutz called *FIRO*, *Fundamental Interpersonal*

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 14

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 19-20

⁴⁸ Goffman 1990, pp. 27, 25

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 31

⁵⁰ Anzaldúa 1999, pp. 60-61

*Relations Orientation*⁵¹. In short, Schutz claims that improved self- conceptualization, emotional security, self- awareness, and self- respect in interpersonal relations are crucial for reaching an effective work organization⁵². Schutz describes the interpersonal relations as partly dependent on a *behavioral* dimension⁵³. This dimension consists of three behavioral elements or steps that the individual must pass through in given order.

The first step is *inclusion*, that is, posing the question “*Do I belong to the group or not?*”⁵⁴ Individual behavior related to thoughts of inclusion, can ideally be perceived as having two functions, defensive and rational. If anxiety of inclusion exists, the individual could be acting rather rigidly, more asocial, and defensively. On the other hand, if the behavior is guided by rationality, the individual could search for attention and be overly social and more flexible in terms of behavioral and social adaptation. The functions of these behaviors are imposed by an urge to receive attention, to be socially active, to belong to the group, and to be unique in relation to other group members⁵⁵.

The second step is *control*. The main focus is on the question “*Do I influence the group?*” This process involves creating and finding roles and relationships. Again, the behavioral dimension contains the same two functions of above defensive and rational behaviors. The individual could act on defense mechanisms when fear of helplessness or too much responsibility surface. Rationally an individual may follow a certain level of power and control preference related to his/her personal life situation.

Related to control is the function of *individual choice*. An individual may have free choice about how to perceive his/her own actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, sickness, state of body, and reactions towards others. The individual does not have free choice about factors external to his/her body; however, he/she chooses *how* to think about these external factors. However, as soon as the individual experience anxiety and acts on defense mechanisms, the choice of perception may not be conscious, and not fully free.

⁵¹ Concepts are translated by me from Swedish into English from “*Den Goda Organisationen*” by Will Schutz.

⁵² Schutz 1999, Ch. 1; pp. 6-7

⁵³ Ibid. pp. 38-39

⁵⁴ Ibid. pp. 37; summary p. 47

⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 40-41

As we explore whether we are hidden or open towards our group and other group members, we have entered the third step as described by Shutz; *openness*.⁵⁶ A rational behavior sets a certain preferred level of openness. A defensive behavior and rigid decisions in openness derive from a fear of being too vulnerable, a fear of being humiliated because of one's feelings and thoughts⁵⁷. A reaction of not being completely comfortable about openness towards others could be avoidance of contact. Another could be to strive towards being extremely intimate, however, in a rather shallow intention, in order to gain control over interpersonal relations, and openness therein⁵⁸. Related to openness is *self- conceptualization*. In order to reach a satisfying self- image it is necessary to be honest about oneself externally, as well as internally (towards oneself)⁵⁹. There are several *logical reasons* not to be externally open or honest, for example in a business situation. By believing that "*business is business*", "*it's better to avoid confusion*", etc., one denies that hidden facts about oneself could actually be useful in order to avoid confusion in interpersonal relations⁶⁰.

3.4.1 Self- Oriented Behavior (SOB)

A perspective comparable to that of Schutz, however not a section of the Human Element Theory, is that of Watson *et al*. I choose to bring this perspective about because of the subsisting element of diversity therein. Watson *et al* discuss why and how neglect of the individual and subgroups in professional task groups result in negative consequences for group processes, as well as for cooperation in the entire organization.

The authors focus on certain SOBs, or *self- oriented behavior*, that single individuals and subgroups carry out in order to define and explore roles within the organization. Examples of such behaviors are defensive responses such as fighting, controlling, and resistance to change, as well as denial responses such as passivity, indifference, and too logical reasoning⁶¹. These SOBs could interfere with group success. On the other hand, if overemphasis on the group is made, the individual may experience neglect and furthermore, loss of self- awareness. Thereof, prejudging an SOB as dysfunctional and neglecting the individual, could similarly be interfering with group success.

⁵⁶ Ibid. summary p. 78

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 61

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 62

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 67

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 68-69

⁶¹ Watson et al 1998, art. p. 162.

3.5 Foucauldian Theory

One of Michel Foucault's foci evolves around the discourse of knowledge and the production of knowledge. "*He sees knowledge generating power by constituting people as subjects and then governing the subjects with that knowledge*".⁶² I will be using the principle of how knowledge in general is produced, reproduced and shapes (governs and disciplines) subjects through various discourses.

In every institution there are disciplinary rules that are implemented with power, and in turn linked to sovereign knowledge of what is considered right and wrong. This knowledge is not necessarily true, but is on the other hand irrelevant to the discussion. Rather, what is relevant is the discussion of "why" and "how" knowledge can be considered being the truth. This can be explained with the concept of "technology of disciplinary power"⁶³ containing three strategies in social contexts; *hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and examination*. Dominant propositions or disciplines refer to discourses of beliefs, attitudes, values, lifestyles, sexualities, discourses, norms, etc., or cultural propositions in general, that are considered being correct or normal. In summary, "*power is not [according to Foucault] conceived as a property or possession of a dominant class, state, or sovereign but as a strategy*"⁶⁴.

Hierarchical observation entangles control over for example employees or group members. More importantly it involves the ability to easily enhance and keep dominant propositions constantly enacted by for example group members. Foucault focuses on this aspect of his theory by the concept of *panopticon*, that is, complete observation⁶⁵. Panopticons may generate fear within the observed, a fear of not knowing whether he/she is observed or not. A possible consequence then is internalization by the observed of the disciplinary power. Whatever disciplinary power and rules used by an organization is therefore carried out by the observed. In this sense the object of surveillance becomes an active subject of surveillance.

⁶² Ritzer 1996, p. 599

⁶³ Ritzer 1996, p. 602

⁶⁴ Smart 1985, p. 77

⁶⁵ Ritzer 1996, p. 602f

Thereof, “*the disciplines eventually [constitute] a general formula of domination*”⁶⁶. In my opinion this makes it harder to resist power because of the difficulties to determine its origin.

Normalizing judgments involves punitive action and statements taken towards those of the observed that do not obey or act in a disciplinary manner, that is, according to dominant propositions. By the principle of panopticon, self-internalization of rules (disciplinary power) is also possible by normalizing judgments. For example, self-criticism and punitive self-correction in general, could be approached as consequences of internalization of normalizing judgments. In specific I argue that self-hatred, self-destructive behavior, and internalized homophobia for example, may be perceived as pathological consequences of the same process of internalization.

The examination instrument combines the two first into a “normalizing gaze”. This entangles a mechanism (instrument) in which facts about the observed can be documented, for example through medical reports and educational files. Moreover, by such documentation mechanism the observed object is treated more as a case for or an object to evaluation, judgment, and simplification. The panopticon could in this perspective be viewed as the ease by which for example an employer can review, overlook, and judge the individual and his/her performance partly based on résumés, grades, evaluations of performance, etc., by a simple gaze in personal files⁶⁷.

Although the disciplinary power may be difficult to trace, there is always *resistance* towards it. There are multiple ways to resist power, just as there are multiple settings in which power can be exerted⁶⁸. For example, by living a certain lifestyle or exploring secret pleasures in thought or in practice could be ways to resist disciplinary power.

3.6 Summary

The initial definitions of culture can be applied to the results in order to clarify dominant and subdominant values, norms, and behavior in the various organizations. I will use this as a

⁶⁶ Smart 1985, p. 91

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 86-88

mean to clarify the experiences of the IPs as being gay in a work situation. The definitions of groups and teams may be used as a tool to discuss the exclusion and inclusion the IPs experience at work, which in turn constitute a general foundation in a discussion of stigmatization.

The SI- perspective explains the social psychological processes of the IPs' experiences. More specifically it entangles an explanation of how the IPs are generally shaped by their work situation in terms of group membership. This analysis may by the concepts of "stigma" (Goffman) be enhanced further, and moreover, be focused on pathological aspects of group membership. According to this perspective, I will be able to underline some possible eventualities for the individual security partly as a result of how the IPs experience staff management. Also, from Goffman's focus on formal aspects of group membership, I will hopefully be able to augment the analysis to a multi- faceted understanding of self- construction in interaction. Self- constructions will mainly be discussed in terms of self- ratification (self- realization) and self- correction as actions and reactions to self- reflections and organizational life. The Human Element Theory and SOB- perspective are complements to the theories of the SI- school. The model of Schutz offers a more pragmatic framework of a variety of consequences from interaction, and helps me to foremost circumvent *what* is acted out, whereas the SI- models focuses more on *why* and *how*. Finally, the more critical perspective of Foucault guides me towards a general explanation of *why* and *how* organizational rules and praxis formally and informally control and shape the individual. This perspective discover hidden processes of power strategies that in accordance with discourses may lead the individual to reason and act upon his identity in a certain manner.

On a most basic level the overall theoretical discussion could be summarized into an Anthropological perspective of the functions and processes of dualisms such as culture and sub- culture (counter culture), "us and them" (in- group and out- group), majority and minority, normal and abnormal, etc., and how and why these may lead us to socially construct who we are and what we do, in an informal, as well as in a formal fashion.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 77.

4. Results and Analysis

In this chapter I will according to certain themes present the results, including the analysis, from the empirical study. The presentation will be characterized by summaries and clarifying quotes from the interviews. I will not make any new theoretical assumptions that yet have not been granted for.

After summarizing and analyzing the empirical material, I have found certain themes that are appropriate for the presentation of the results. These could be either central concepts borrowed from afore- mentioned theoretical perspectives, or phenomena that have surfaced during the analysis, and that further have been conceptualized. However, these new concepts are not of theoretical characteristics, that is, I will not utilize any theoretical perspective that has not previously been mentioned. Questions that I let myself be guided by are for instance, “How does the IP reflect upon himself in relation to his workplace?” “What cultural propositions of organizational life could shape such self- reflections, and “how could his actions and identity be influenced by self- reflections in relation to the workplace?”

4.1 Coming Out or Realizing the “Self”

All of the IPs have come out as gay in one social situation or another. They have also chosen to socially express their desires by either entering a relationship with a man, or by living a gay lifestyle. Some of the IPs have also come out at work, fully or only to a few colleagues. I ask myself the initial question why they have come out as gay, and also what the function of this could be to the IPs?

These IPs make their “selves” heard or realized by *coming out*⁶⁹ as gay, that is, acting and reacting to others (significant and generalized) partly by the “I”. Love, desire, or sexual attraction towards men by men can also be seen as a secret pleasure as urges of the “I:s”. By acting out this secret pleasure, the IP realizes, and moreover proves his actual social “self” or identity. The “I” has however already at a stage previous to real interaction made itself heard in the mind, through reasoning and testing, and the desires are therefore consciously acted out when coming out to others. In this sense the desires are not merely expressed through the “I”,

⁶⁹ *Coming Out*- vernacular for expressing one’s homosexuality in others for the first time. I will also treat it as expressing one’s homosexuality to oneself; of *coming out of the closet*

but also with “assistance” from the “me”. If the gay man on the other hand merely had acted on his urges, it would most likely not be in a social manner. In social context, others would only be able to guess from their previous experiences what the gay man would be expressing. Therefore, reasoning about coming out requires the IP to master comprehensible significant symbols in order to be understood and to reach self- realization in interaction. Consequently, coming out could be a function of decreasing tensions within the “self”. For instance, if the unique aspect of the IP’s identity, the “I”, is not compatible to the social aspect of his identity, the “me”, the IP may experience dissatisfaction and tension, socially as well as imaginary. The individual IP could then aim for decreasing this tension by adapting the aspects of his “self” (the “me” and the “I”) to each other. Statements indicating repression of urges (adaptation of the “I”) could for example be, “*I felt ashamed. One wanted to be normal. I didn’t want [to be gay]*”, “*[coming out to my family] has affected me. It doesn’t make it easier to come out [again], even at work*”. Alternatively, adaptation could instead be done of the “me”, such as challenging values and attitudes by acting on urges; “*It makes you stronger to come out, one tests limits and one grows and develops*”. This initial discussion is crucial to a further analysis, because it lays down a frame of how possibly experienced tensions in general could trigger envisioned compromises within the IP. The processes, by which such inner dialogues may develop, will in the following sections be explained as choice of, and restriction on, reasoning and self- reflection.

4.2 Reasoning and Choice of Perception

I will in terms of *reasoning* and *self- reflection* discuss why (the function) and how (the process) the IP may be doing choices of perception of their gayness in plausible social interactions at work, as well as what these choices could be founded on. The influence the IPs’ thoughts have on their *actions* will *not* be discussed in this section, but in further sections below.

4.2.1 Reasoning on Positive Consequences

Being proud of one’s homosexuality, as most of the IPs clearly claimed they are, rather than being ashamed, could be discussed as the *free choice* individuals may have as for how to perceive themselves in relation to others. The IPs chooses to positively value their gay

identities in order to carry satisfying self- conceptual images. Similarly, they reason that they would not accept to be treated negatively, or merely differently, because of their gayness, by their colleagues and management, which could be explained as choices of how to perceive and react upon how external factors could possibly ensue. Also, pondering possible consequences of coming out (or being outed) as gay at work such as “[it] wouldn’t be a catastrophe”, “[I] wouldn’t have met any problems among the female colleagues”, “there wouldn’t have been any problems with younger colleagues”, “I would have been more genuine”, etc., could pose as examples of how the IPs have chosen their perceptions of how they would be approached by people at work. All these reasoning thoughts, and self- reflective evaluations that all bear positive images of either standing up to others, being proud of oneself, and perceiving positive reactions among colleagues, can be argued as being a course or function of how to gain control over the *influences* external factors (including generalized others) could have on the self- image. In terms of the “self”, the IPs of these examples could strive for *self- realization* in the mind (by reasoning with themselves) by this mind control over self- reflections. One of the IPs made his self- realizing urges very clear by not only stating that he would not accept to be treated negatively, but indeed would enjoy to be treated positively because of this homosexuality. Similarly, a couple of the IPs reasoned that their identity traits as gay would be assets to their organizations, and the work tasks involved. These IPs may have even reasoned their formal roles in terms of team performance; they see their gayness as merits of competence for an effective group.

A few statements are ambiguous since they indicate indifference, or blasé attitudes, regarding the possibility of their colleagues finding out about the IPs’ homosexuality, or the possibility/risk of being treated negatively. “If I choose to come out the problem would be theirs”, or “[I] wouldn’t have cared”, pose as examples of this expressed indifference. On one hand this could indicate non- internalization of the generalized other, motivated by the suggestion that it may emotionally painful to ponder how a situation may evolve to become a traumatic experience. In this sense, by becoming blasé the IPs avoid the influence of the attitudes of generalized others, including keeping the “me” under control, by their urges to realize their “selves” in reasoning. Alternatively, it could be explained as suppressing and shutting off inner urges. One IP, being “out” at work, said, “I shut off at work, I am not gay at work, [...] I do that at home, it is my work place”. By letting the generalized other (the “me”) fully dominate the “self”, the IPs may become numb to conflicts tied to their secret pleasures, or maybe more appropriately, they do not “listen” to their urges when at work. However, this

could also indicate a different urge, which is that of inclusion as self-realization, motivated by not wanting to be different and excluded.

4.2.2 Reasoning on Negative Consequences

I also met fear and anxiety among the IPs regarding their gayness, that is, expectations of negative experiences in formal and informal interaction at work; *“The older men would probably have difficulties to deal with it [(my gayness)]”*, *“Many of the [people I meet]⁷⁰ would probably have become scared”*, *“The supervisors would probably find it strange to have a gay person on their staff. They would probably have expected me not to talk about [my gayness] in front of customers”*, *“Over a longer period of time it would be hard to be openly gay. [...] Sooner or later the [customers] would find out, then they would have something to throw after you”*, etc. What I find interesting with these statements is the inferiority of gayness as perceived by the IPs, which could indicate a somewhat different facet of self-realization; the *fear of exclusion*. Negative reasoning regarding possible reactions from others at work, could be explained as a fear of becoming too vulnerable (in the tasks groups, as well as in the informal groups), and of being humiliated because of their secret pleasures. Humiliation could indicate being deviant in the eyes of others, which could result in a fear of exclusion. As mentioned, the urge to be included in a group, or to be able to be successful in one’s work, could for the IPs be important enough for their self-realization needs, that they keep reasoning it could be too negative for themselves to come out as gay, that is, it is not worth it to come out as gay because of a possible risk of exclusion. As for example, one IP stated, *“I am worried about the silence that would appear if I would have come out. It would create a vacuum. [Also,] I imagine my sexuality would have made the [colleagues] ruin my work”*. In this sense, the IP’s reasoning of attuning risks with gains could influence his choice of setting the level of *rigidity in control* and *openness* in regards to being gay at work.

A consequence of experiencing anxiety of exclusion could be that the IP reasons rigidly and defensively about inclusion, openness, and control in interaction. One IP claimed that he does not perceive himself as deviant, which indicates a choice of perception that he in fact is included, which could be interpreted as a defensive perception because of a possible anxiety

⁷⁰ In order to treat the answers of the IP confidentially I needed to change the vocabulary. Similar changes are common in all quotes, and are indicated by [“vocabulary”]. Because of the share number of changes, I will not indicate further changes as a footnote.

of becoming excluded. Moreover, he indirectly expressed his need to control interaction and information about himself; *“I’m [openly gay] towards the ones that I hang out with on my spare time, and people that I know aren’t too close to the managers”*. In a similar fashion, but more in regards to openness, he also stated *“I don’t want to be more open, I have no need. I don’t know anything about others’ private life, and that’s mutual”*. His reason, being somewhat rational, was that he has no need to be more open, and as the former quote indicates, his choices of control and openness are motivated by a fear that his managers will gain information about his gayness. In this sense, the choice may not be fully free, and is restricted by perceived intimidation from others. On the other hand, explanations for not coming out, that is, the way some IPs reason further on inferiority of their gayness, were many times rational in character. Thereof, reasoning does not necessarily indicate defense mechanisms, and could merely be a rationally set level of openness that the IPs may prefer, that is, according to a level of openness and control that is general to their life situation regardless of type of situation.

4.2.3 Logical Reasoning on Coming Out

The majority of the IPs reason that they cannot fully come out as gay in what could be a self-realizing manner, that is, avoiding possible exclusion. However, there have surfaced reasoning that is not directly characterized by feelings and self-realization, but by *rationality*. One example of what could be logical reasoning is: *“My sexuality has no place at my workplace. The workplace is asexual”*. Without any further analysis this could be explained as being a logical argument for not being able to be honest about his gayness in interaction with others. Similarly, but more faceted, another IP declared his thoughts on coming out to clients; *“For the [coaching of clients] it would have been positive to come out as gay, but I don’t think it’s good because I am not politically engaged enough in the matter. My sexuality is a part of my love life. I have other things to think about when I am [working]”*. He begins by stating a somewhat self-realizing thought of possible gains of coming out, but continues by offering logical reasons why it would not be a satisfying situation in the end. Yet another logical argument was: *“I would [in my work] not [include] my sexuality if I were straight”*⁷¹. The latter statement enhances his logical course of reasoning in which he perceives it as a matter

⁷¹ *Straight* means “heterosexual” in this case.

of common sense, or alternatively, as a value of a generalized other in regards to professional roles.

Further statements of the same IP, making the matter of logical reasoning rather complicated, were not directly in regards to openness, but instead in specific to qualities of being gay. He reasoned rationally that his gayness is profitable for his organization because he does not have family matters (children of his own) that could interfere with his work. What makes the image complicated is the aspect that he prior offered logical arguments for not coming out. The fact that he is gay cannot in the eyes of his employers be a gain since they are not aware of his sexuality, or stated differently, he was not employed because of the possible gains by his gay lifestyle. Therefore, why reason in a logical manner about one's gay lifestyle as profitable to the organization, and still reason that coming out would be dissatisfactory? The matter could be explained by Impression Management and individual task performance as being influenced by self-realizing urges to be professionally successful.

Above I quoted one IP on how he believed that his colleagues would ruin his work if they would find out that he were gay. Explained from a perspective of having *dramaturgical loyalty* towards the organization, he may rationally have contemplated possible impacts on his work tasks if he were to come out. Similarly, "*at first I was careful [in regards to my gayness]. I didn't want to scare people off*", could indicate a similar loyalty, but in relation to colleagues. The motivation some IPs find to keep their gayness hidden could be driven by dramaturgical discipline in order to avoid degradation of work efficiency, and loss of credibility. As a consequence, such discipline confers the IPs' with responsibility to circumscribe their secret pleasures. In this sense, the work role they have internalized is of a "professional" character, and does not offer any respite for a gay lifestyle. Logical reasons could then indicate what could be rationally separated roles, that is, separation between roles of the private realm (for instance, love life) and of the professional realm (work). One IP also explained his viewpoint on a professional situation, by what could be a logical reason, but in addition a motive of dramaturgical loyalty; "*In some situations my sexuality is not of any importance, for example in meetings with supervisors, discussing [work related] subjects [...] I don't want them to sit and think about my sexuality. One is focused on what one is [working with]. Similarly, if someone comes in and starts talking about [personal matters] I become irritated. I'm here to do work*". Clearly he not only expressed his own dramaturgical loyalty, but also a reaction against faulty impression management of colleagues losing self-

control. The IP did by this statement also demonstrate another understanding of the generalized other in regards to *stage performance* at work. He put in plain words that certain situations are purely work related as an example of a front stage. In terms of significant symbols, the IP also exhibit a well- learnt script being utilized front stage, a script that does not offer any choice of acting upon his gayness.

Finally then, why decide not to come out at the workplace despite the logical reason that one's gayness could be profitable to the organization? Simply, and as a summary of individual impression management, by not coming out at work, but still positively reflecting and acting upon one's gay lifestyle (in secret), one plausibly avoids the risk of degradation of task performance, as well as of a satisfying self- concept. Overall it could be explained as realizing oneself by perceiving (as a choice) certain workplace matters as compatible to one's private lifestyle; juxtaposing the "me" and the "I" in order to decrease tensions within the self, which will be probed further under "Stigma" below.

Rational or defensive reasoning, logical or not logical, it is possible to discuss choices of perception and reasoning, including impression management in thought, as founded on learning- experiences in interaction. As such, reasoning involves an anticipated interaction in the mind, shaped in a normalizing fashion by knowledge of the generalized other.

4.3 Reasoning as Influenced by Organizational Life

What are these choices of, and restrictions on perception founded on then? What knowledge available to the IPs is significant to their reasoning? Apart from the "I", self- realizing thoughts also requires the "me" to be involved, or *self- reflection*. When IPs bear expectations (reason) of how they could be approached as gay in interaction, it may be because they have *internalized* certain significant symbols or cues, as either compatible or non- compatible to their gay lifestyles. I will subsequently clarify what *knowledge* available to the IPs could ever make them contemplate consequences of being deviant or normal in general, as well as gay or heterosexual in specific. This could be according to their understanding of propositions of a macro- culture in general, or/and the organizational culture in specific. Regardless of origin, these propositions are enacted in the workplace, and could be perceived as being a part of sets of significant symbols in accordance with generalized others specific to the workplaces.

Moreover, choice of perception may also, because of *lack* of significant symbols, be limiting and circumventing to reasoning.

4.3.1 General Management and Organizational Control

First, some of the IPs' understanding of their organizations, and organizational cultures, could be discussed in terms of how the IPs perceive the management's and colleagues' *attitudes* towards differences, SOBs, deviances, and conflicts. One IP describes his managers' approach to inferior SOB;

There have been conflicts between [colleagues] and [clients]. Purely objectively there are [colleagues] that have acted wrongly, [...] they are disclaimed of their authorities, [...] but [the conflict] is still there, and they feel unfairly treated. They feel harassed, of course, by the management. They are pretty nicely outmaneuvered by the management. The conflicts are not dealt with, they prevail, I mean, it is an incredibly open wound. [...] everyone is aware of what happens, but it is a lot of rumor too so it is not fully acted out.

The style of managing inferior SOBs, or differently, *normalizing judgments* towards those who do not act in a disciplinary manner, has been contemplated by the IP. As for reasoning, the IP may have understood the general style of conflict management as typical to the culture of his organization. He clearly states that his colleagues involved in the conflicts feel excluded or negatively treated by the management in a punitive manner. As a consequence, the IP may reason that there could be risks of acting in a self-oriented manner in general, because what could be perceived as inferior and possible object for punitive correction. A somewhat similar example is in regards to looking different compared to colleagues. It is similar in the way that it describes how a manager treats deviance. However, these following quotes could show how the attitudes of a manager towards one single person may be generalized to become a significant symbol, and furthermore be internalized and accepted by the staff as a cultural proposition;

[...] there is some harassment of one man at the [workplace]. He gets the worst work assignments; he never gets to come along on trips. The boss is a bit mean to him. The other ones don't say anything. I usually question it. [The man] is a small man with a very squeaky voice. He is a bit girly and doesn't have the guts to take any responsibility. [...] He becomes a little bit of a laughingstock. Everyone jokes

around with him. [...] our boss doesn't say anything. [The man] is good for doing all the dirty work. Therefore our boss doesn't let him go. [This] is a general understanding.

Further along the interview the IP stated, “*one can get a bit tired of the man with the squeaky voice, [for example], ‘I don’t have the energy to eat with [him] today’*”. Similar to above, this could demonstrate how the IP may reason with a generalized other on how a deviant person should be treated. In this sense, the treatment of the “laughingstock” *per se* is of a normalizing judgment, possibly influencing the IP to negatively reason upon his own gayness, of course, assuming homosexuality as being inferior in the eyes of the generalized other. However, the quote could also be an example of how the manager’s attitudes have become generalized and internalized by staff members, and moreover, how these exert disciplinary power against one person. There is virtually one narrow generalized other, which is that according to the manager, and there is no alternative generalized other available at the workplace. It is narrow in the sense that no one seems to openly resist the dominant attitudes of the generalized other. In the sense that social norms and values are prior to individual urges, the normalizing judgments against the “laughingstock” have instead become an accepted and general formula of domination. Also, the implication that virtually everyone participates in similar treatment of the “laughingstock”, suggests that he is object to almost total observation (panopticon). The IP did nonetheless express his dislike, and partly resisted these judgments, and that according to an attitude of a seemingly different generalized other. But then again, the IP does also to some degree perceive the “laughingstock” as inferior, and has not been able to fully react against, and resist the dominant propositions of the generalized other at work. An explanation could be because of above mentioned deterring affect the case of the “laughingstock” might have had, as evidence that everyone is under the dominance of the same panopticon.

A clear example of impression management as a forthright rule in the organizational culture, possibly influencing the IP to reason in a logical fashion.. The IP described it as a daily collusion between colleagues in order to hinder clients from gaining information about the staff members’ private life; “*One has to accept that the openness is low because of security. We let each other know when openness becomes too much. One thinks about secrecy all the time, but it isn’t that difficult because it is a natural part of the job.*” By a case such as this, I want to demonstrate that negative or logical reasoning upon coming out is not necessarily because of a prevalent intolerance, but instead because of a generalized and formalized

control on closeness. The formal rules, posing as significant symbols accepted by the generalized other, offer the IP virtually no span for expressing his gayness, but maybe more fundamentally, no span for realizing much aspects of his private “self” at work in general. As a result, openness in general is reasoned upon as inferior to the workplace, regardless of contents, and ought to be disciplined. *Group collusion* then, as a strong foundation of organizational culture, could be explained as the staff members’ internalization of hierarchical observation. Instead of the managers observing and judging the staff members, these constantly observe and discipline each other by being active subjects in a common *panopticon*. From yet another perspective, the IP may instead not have been able to determine the attitudes of the generalized other for example in regards to his gayness, and cannot reason upon the matter, and therefore offer logical reasons.

4.3.2 Obscure Symbols

How is the individual IP’s reasoning affected if the generalized other is not entirely recognized by the IP? The IP, who’s statement of conflict management mentioned in a previous section, reasoned further in another statement, and explained that conflicts are not formally or officially ventilated, but are instead dealt with behind locked doors. This could indicate the IPs limited knowledge of how conflicts and SOBs may be approached by management. For instance, if his secret pleasures were to become known by his co- workers, he stated, “*I don’t know how I should think about or react upon this*”. The generalized other as internalized by the IP, does not offer a matrix of anticipatable actions or attitudes in the matter, and in this sense there is no available course of reasoning. Similarly,

One doesn’t really know how they think, one doesn’t really know what is going on where they sit and make decisions. [...] I am not fully honest about things that I know can end up with the managers, I don’t really know how they would interpret it. [...] They appreciate some persons more than others. [...] There are persons that are fired, [or] they don’t get any [work tasks]. It is a way of exclusion. We don’t really know why.

There are restrictions in reasoning with the generalized other about differences as understood from style of management, possibly resulting in insecurity about general attitudes towards individual deviances. Maybe more importantly, the IP expressed a limited knowledge of what is even considered being deviant in the eyes of the generalized other, resulting in perception

of openness as riskful. Another perspective could possibly discover a function by such obscurity. By not offering a clear set of significant symbols, and an outspoken generalized other, the managers can indirectly control interaction and manage impressions to avoid the risk of inferior SOB among staff members; the employees are shaped into active *self-correctional subjects* interacting in a panopticon founded on uncertainty. As for the IP's knowledge, virtually anything could be inferior SOB in the eyes of his managers, apart from the limited significant symbols that he has learnt. In this sense, the IP can feel secure if he disciplines himself to only use these obvious significant symbols.

4.3.3 Colleagues Commenting on Sexuality

Examples of cues that are more specific to homosexuality are of reassuring as well as of deterring characteristics. First, a few IPs described significant symbols as reassuring. For example, *“One lady talked about her gay friends, which broke the ice for me. I felt accepted”*. The IP encountered available significant symbols compatible to his “I”, which he has chosen to react and reason upon in a positive manner. Another IP spoke of a similar situation, but that seemed to have no reassuring affect on him, which also explained indifference; *“one time someone made a [gay] joke [at work], I didn't care, but my friends reacted and became angry”*. Apart from counter-compatible attitudes, the latter quote shows however attitudes compatible, to his gayness. Nevertheless, the IP demonstrated indifference, being an example of the “I” not being reactive to any of the generalized others available in interaction at work. It is not possible by the share of this isolated quote to establish if indifference in reasoning possibly could be influenced by a generalized other. As mentioned, urges could be the motivator to such standpoint, however, since a theoretical suggestion is that the “me” is always involved in reasoning, a possible explanation could be that indifference is motivated by a belief of the generalized other in professionalism and impression management, as already discussed above.

Second, as for deterring experiences, one IP referred to an incidence in which a gay man came out who experienced relational problems with clients (my choice of vocabulary), and furthermore had to leave his employment. The IP also indicated how this particular situation has had a deterring affect on his choice of coming out. He also recalled interactions with male colleagues in which these made homophobic comments about homosexual men. Additional IPs recall similar comments from colleagues and managers. For example, *“After six months of*

employment I heard comments about faggots⁷² [from a section manager]”, and “I experienced gay jokes in a raw but sophisticated manner. No one ever talked against these gay jokes. Even the manager joined in and laughed to the jokes. [...] I experienced these as repressing for coming out. I didn’t feel very accepted”. Evidently, one of the IPs experienced the gay jokes as deterring. The IPs that have experienced these derogatory comments and deterring examples have chosen not to come out at their workplace, which could be explained as a consequence of how gay jokes and treatment of gay colleagues may function as normalizing judgments. However, deciding whether or not there is a clear correlation is hard. For example, another IP described an openly homosexual woman at his workplace, who has not been reacted upon as negative by his colleagues. The IP reasoned upon this as reassuring in regards to his own gayness. Even so, he reasoned further that it could be generally more difficult with male homosexuality in terms of acceptance. His doubts could on one hand be explained as the IP not having access to significant symbols specific to male homosexuality at his workplace. On the other hand, it could indicate that he has internalized a belief about male homosexuality elsewhere, such as from a more general cultural proposition. Regardless of which, his doubts reveals that the correlation between reasoning and experiences at work is hard to establish.

As mentioned, the majority of the IPs had come out to some colleagues, who in a few instances had offered advice in regards to coming out. For instance, *“They have [...] advised me against [coming out] on grounds that they know how the [clients] think. [...] This has strengthened me in my belief. They can relate because they know what is like. It is very easy [...] when one talks to somebody at RFSL [(National Gay Organization)] who says ‘of course you should come out’ [...]. But someone that is almost exactly in my situation can see how it really works”.* First of all, in terms of group collusion, his colleagues could have understood his gayness as inferior to professional performance, and have therefore, back stage prior to front stage performance, advised him not to let his secret pleasures out. Something not possible to establish is whether the advice were motivated by keeping an entire team durable and creditable, or by empathy in order to hinder the IP to discredit himself. Second, as the IP clarified, the advice had strengthened his understanding of the generalized other as being non-acceptant. This may further have established a juxtaposition of deterring examples (other gay men’s experiences for instance), his own fears of coming out, as well as of his interpretation

⁷² *Faggot*; Derogatory for a homosexual man

and enacting of a script (significant symbols) accepted by the organization, virtually obscuring alternative generalized others that could be compatible to his secret pleasures.

Significant symbols that are in regards to sexuality in general, may have an indirect affect on the IPs perception of his homosexuality in specific. In almost every interview I encountered examples such as “*many colleagues have asked if I have a girlfriend*”, and “*I had a big break up with my boyfriend. The [colleagues] took notice of my sadness and asked if I had broken up with my girlfriend. I lied and answered ‘yes’ to the question. I was in need for empathy from co- workers. This has made it more difficult for me to come out as gay later on.*” The colleagues’ expressed expectations of the IPs as being heterosexual men are symbols not necessarily significant to the organizations, but are nevertheless prevalent in the workplaces. In a similar process as in relation to comments specific to homosexuality, the IPs may have internalized these expectations as being attitudes accepted by the generalized other. This does not indicate that homosexuality is perceived as something wrong among the colleagues, but nevertheless that homosexuality is not normalized at their workplaces. Nor is it generalized as a cultural proposition or knowledge that gay men could reside anywhere.

Finally, and maybe farfetched, the statements that are directly or indirectly in regard to the IPs gayness as not anticipated, or as inferior, could also be explained as being dominant propositions and dominant knowledge on sexuality, functioning as a normalizing judgment in order to hinder the IPs from realizing their “selves” as gay men. It is difficult to establish whether or not comments, advice or gay jokes, are consciously expressed in order to circumvent the IPs ability to be gay at work or in society in general. However, the consequences of such comments may be equally deterring and disciplinarian to the IPs’ decisions of coming out at work.

4.3.4 Workplace Diversity

Finally, demographic factors, vocational stereotypes, and diversity mixture of the workplace seem to influence the IPs’ course of reasoning. In quotes discussed above, several IPs reasoned on positive and negative reactions from colleagues as being dependent on age and gender. The beliefs in regards to this aspect do not necessarily have to be derived from organizational life per se, but instead from general cultural propositions. However, some of the workplaces of the IPs’ are stereotypically characterized by a certain age or gender group,

and have expressively influenced the IPs. An example of such vocational stereotypes, which could also indicate organizational culture, clearly influencing the IP's reasoning in a positive fashion are *"The workplace is influenced by the openness of femininity and that comes from the work as characterized by women. [...] I wouldn't have met any problems among the female colleagues. [...] The older men would probably have difficulties to deal with [my gayness], but they would probably have to follow the women because of their informal power"*. In a similar context, a couple of IPs perceived femininity of their workplaces as directly compatible to their lifestyles as gay. In some of the interviews the factor of staff diversity was expressively referred to. One IP clearly related general diversity to attitudes of his workplace, *"The attitudes of the [workplace] were very mainstream. My colleagues had similar backgrounds, and there were very few variations in social status"*, which he further related to his perception of workplace attitudes, by stating, *"There were not that much tolerance towards differences"*. In another sense, staff diversity could *per se* be explained as being a dominant proposition and normalizing judgment. By keeping a virtually similar and non- diverse staff, the consequences for the IP could be that they understand similarity as being knowledge of what is accepted, normal, and mainstream in that organization. If I turn the perspective around, one could claim that a more diverse staff, such as the example on gender differences, offers the IP a wider range of reasoning.

However, the correlation between diversity mixture, vocational stereotypes, and acceptance towards differences may not be as ideal as the quotes might have shown. This could be indicated by how one IP questioned the issue, comparing two separate workplaces, which of the first he perceived as accepting towards gay men, and the as latter non- accepting, *"It would probably have been easier to come out at [the previous workplace] because there were more women. I experience these as having fewer problems with a gay man. There were however women at [my latter workplace too]"*.

4.4 Self- construction and Normalizing Attitudes

As contingent to the discussion of the IPs' reasoning and self- reflections, I will in a final section focus on self- constructions of the IPs'. In accordance with SI- school and a Foucauldian tradition, this section suggests that the individual is dominated by the generalized other and normalizing judgments. In previous paragraphs I have mentioned how a course of

reasoning could be explained as a function of decreasing tensions within the “self”. This will subsequently be clarified more thoroughly, and more specifically according to a model on “stigma”.

4.4.1 Stigma

The majority of the IPs stated that they had come out to only a few or not at all, indicating that their *actual social identities* (of being gay) in most instances are not known to others. Meanwhile, these IPs declared several times that their *virtual identities* (as credited by others) are clearly not compatible to their gay identities, such as above example of colleagues anticipating that the IPs were heterosexuals. As such, there is a discrepancy between the IPs’ expressed “selves” in interaction, and their “real selves”, hence possible illustrations of *stigma*. The reminder that most of their colleagues and managers are not aware of their gayness, and hence of their stigmas, moreover suggests that the stigmas are *discreditable*. However, since many of the IPs have come out to a few colleagues, the possible stigma has tendencies to be *discredited*. Alike, one IP not being out at work, stated “*there are colleagues that have asked around the matter, but the question never came about so I didn’t bother saying anything*”, indicating a possible discredited stigma of the IP.

I have in the first section already attempted to establish that the actual social identities of the IPs are in regards to this study, gay identities. Nonetheless, virtual identities need to be explained further. Assuming that co- staff members are not aware of the IPs’ homosexuality and that the IPs recalled derogatory comments, indicating normalizing judgments on homosexual men could signify that the IPs unknowingly have been credited virtual identities of deviance and inferiority. On a direct question whether or not the IPs had ever been approached as gay at work, the ones that had not come out answered that they likely had been approached as heterosexual men, which reinforces the argument that the crediting of virtual identities were not conscious.

However, one IP claimed that he had been approached neither as gay nor as heterosexual. On one hand, this could be explained as denial, something that I cannot establish. On the other hand, by what could be a non- crediting of a virtual identity, the IP could possibly experience uncertainty, similar to above discussion of obscure significant symbols as being limiting to the ability to reason. In this sense, the IP may have had difficulties to decide whether or not he

should reason upon himself as stigmatized, and further act upon such. Alternatively, non-crediting of virtual identities could be normalizing, and hence stigmatizing *per se*, because the actual social identity of the IP does not compare to a virtual identity, or more appropriately, it cannot compare; a kind of stigma, however not tangible enough to determine. Course of reacting upon such vagueness of stigma will be discussed below.

Apart from comments as crediting of virtual identities, another normalizing judgment fortifying the development of stigmas could be diversity mixture of the workplaces. An example of such in terms of lifestyles is, “*I don’t see [the lifestyles of gays] among colleagues*”. Perceiving one’s workplace as non-compatible to one’s actual social identity, also encompassing above discussed reasoning on a mainstream and homogenous organization, demonstrate a context in which the IPs’ gayness could be credited as “abnormal”, or just different from the norm. First of all, IPs residing in a homogenous group, that moreover suggests fortification of negative reasoning on being comparatively different and deviant, could result in *shame* among the IPs. However, this was evidently not the case since all of them claimed the opposite, that they are proud of their gayness. The share fact that they constantly realize themselves elsewhere, such as socializing among other gay men, might has fortified a ratification of their actual social identities to a degree that they have developed an urge to resist normalizing judgments, at least in regards to diversity mixture. Nevertheless, before probing further on resistance, I will attempt to explain more thoroughly how the IPs react to possible stigmatization processes, as well as the functions of such reactions.

4.4.2 Consequences of Stigma

There are several courses of reacting to one’s stigma and to normalizing judgments. First of all, the majority, of the IPs not being openly gay at work, demonstrated reactions of what could be explained as *transformation* of their “selves”. As a function of attempting to avoid the risk of becoming object to punishment, one IP chose to become an active subject of self-correction, “*I consciously act straight [(heterosexual)] at work*”. Since homosexuality does not necessarily have to be a visible trait, *correction of attribute* such as this, is a possible reaction. *Corporal transformations* were also possible to evoke, such as for instance avoiding (rather corporal removal) participating in spare time activities together with colleagues, which a few IPs stated they were doing.

In terms of openness, such transformation indicates *defensive reactions* in order not to be open to a degree that it could involve revealing one's gayness. Maybe these IPs experience others' actions as uncontrollable, and in order to gain control of the process of being stigmatized, they choose to rigidly control their own bodies by transforming it, oppose to resisting normalizing judgments that could fortify the creation of a discredited stigma in the first place. Similarly, vagueness of stigma could create uncertainty, and in order to recreate some kind of frame of reference for interaction, the IP may actively choose to transform his "self" to something tangible and controllable that can be reflected upon, and furthermore be acted upon. However, active control may not be possible in the longer run as a couple of IPs reasoned upon of what could be explained as unresistingly and indifferently becoming an object under normalizing judgments, "*After a long period of time it would be possible that [the heterosexual lifestyle of colleagues] could become my own lifestyle*", and "*after a few years one gets used to playing the role as straight*". In this sense, transformation may not necessarily be an active self correction, but instead an inevitable consequences of interaction. Yet another explanation of why some IP:s transform themselves in interaction could be in terms of self-hatred. They may have let internalized knowledge about their gayness as inferior dominate their "selves" to a degree that they actively suppress their urges, motivated by a "true" feeling of having second-rate attributes. As one IP stated his belief of general attitudes, "*Gays are second class citizens*". However, arguing that the IPs hate themselves is not a probable cause since they claimed that they are proud of their gayness. Nevertheless, the attitudes they have internalized may not be accepting to their gayness, making them feel "abnormal" at work, which in turn influence them to be self-correctional as a mean to either become normal or to be perceived as normal by others.

Second, one IP clearly expressed a reaction that indicate a "trait" of a stigmatized individual, "*I'm careful about being openly gay in situations where there are new persons to see if it could be harmful to me. [...] Any minority person scans such situations*". In one sense, any above reasoning on consequences of coming out could be seen as *scanning*. Therefore, all of the IP:s carrying out vast reasoning in order to decide whether or not it would be comfortable to come out, could be perceived as being stigmatized. Moreover, since scanning is developed through *fear* of being harmed, and also brings about an ability to manage one's actions, individual impression management could be explained as motivated by fear, oppose to above as being motivated by an urge to be professionally successful, and by a team loyalty. In turn, fear as motivator may be seen as conditioned by a situation of *panopticon*. In this sense, the

IPs would not know when they are under the surveillance of a co- worker that could possibly be exerting power of discourse, such as for example normalizing judgments on homosexuality.

To explain what makes these individuals perform scanning in the first place, I would have to bring about a discussion of factors external to the workplace, which I have decided to omit. However, I need to make the assumption that these IPs have experienced fear elsewhere, because if not they would not be able to reason upon their gayness as inferior, nor to perform scanning. As mentioned in terms of transformation, some IPs have avoided social contact with colleagues on their spare time. As a result of fear, the IPs may have scanned their workplaces, and furthermore decided to keep rigidly low openness in interaction. Nonetheless, one IP being out to only a few colleagues declared the opposite; *“I try to join all social activities at work”*. This indicates a virtually social and open attitude, which could be explained as an IP not performing any scanning because of a lack of fear. However, it could instead be understood as a rational attitude in order to be perceived as an in- group member. Thereof, the fear of exclusion could be prevalent, explaining vast socializing as a need to gain control of what is going on, which is similar to scanning. A somewhat different perspective is that the IP himself could create a panopticon by attempting to perform total observation of co- staff members. His choice of not coming out to certain people could then be perceived as normalizing judgments towards and exclusions of others. In summary then, perceiving a situation as threatening, regardless of foundation, brings about ability and need to consciously observe interaction, and ponder cultural propositions.

As already indicated, scanning as reasoning requires learning significant symbols, including symbols that are stereotypically heterosexual as an explanation of knowing how to “act straight”, or adapting to a heterosexual lifestyle. Nevertheless, a consequence of such could be *increased tensions* within the “self”. Simply put, by adapting the “me” to a lifestyle not compatible to the “I”, there may be a conflict between the two, a stigma. But there seems to be further consequences of such tensions. If tensions are made aware to the IP, such as reasoning upon adapting to a heterosexual lifestyle, the IP may develop an ability of being conscious of how social contexts evolve, and how this affects himself. For example, *“Gay networks give a sense of belonging. Straight gives another perspective, together they give a wide perspective; it’s a choice of a greater selection”*. In this sense, scanning is perceivable not just as a function of making decisions of coming out, but also as a function of successfully learning

significant symbols in general, as well as previously argued, as an ability to vastly control, observe, and judge others in interaction

Furthermore, the more threatening a situation is, the better the ability. For example, several IPs explained how heterosexual colleagues talked freely about their private matters, which on one hand could indicate a non-existing fear among these. Moreover, some IPs explained that they perceive their workplaces as more compatible to a heterosexual lifestyle than to a gay lifestyle. On these grounds, their colleagues may not perceive their sexuality as inferior in the eyes of the generalized other, and can feel comfortable because of such. Therefore, they may not need to scan social situations at work because of their heterosexuality. On another hand, this augments the explanation that the IPs as being gay may have a greater need than their colleagues to increase proximity of their ability to scan, in order to manage their secret pleasures, as attempts to avoid correctional punishment and other normalizing judgments, such as social humiliation and exclusion.

4.4.3 Resisting Stigma

As illustrated, some of the IPs demonstrated *resistance* against those normalizing judgments that have a deterring affect on their decisions of coming out. In terms of stigma it could be explained as resisting affects of colleagues and managers crediting virtual identities. For example, almost all of the IPs have come out to a few colleagues at their workplace. By doing such, they may be decreasing the affect of their stigmas, that is, they demonstrate their actual social identities as a mean to *decrease tensions* within themselves. On one hand the risk is impending that some colleagues may not respond positively, and credit the IP a virtual identity that is not compatible to his gayness, which indicate a stigma becoming discredited. However, none of the IPs have experienced such reaction from colleagues. Instead they explained coming out to a few as, *“it makes the relationship better in private. It makes it more enjoyable to hang out”*. This indicates that the IP has resisted a possible panopticon by letting a few people in on his secret. Within this group of colleagues he does not have to act according to a “me” that is incompatible to his gayness, which possible has decreased tensions within his “self”.

A few other IP:s argued that the diversity mixture of their workplaces was compatible to their gayness, influencing them to positively reason their gayness. These arguments suggest that at

least one aspect of the generalized other that they have internalized into their “selves”, aids to decrease tensions. As a choice of perception then, the IP:s have in a resisting fashion chosen to normalize their gayness through internalizing a “me” that is compatible. It is not possible to establish if these aspects are compatible when it comes down to real interaction, however, by choosing not to internalize non- compatible characteristics, the IP decreases risk of tensions. A final example of resisting normalizing judgments towards gay men is how a few IPs declared how they perform transformation and consciously act straight, because of other reasons than above. These IPs explained their dislike towards generally stereotypical expectations of gay men as effeminate, and by acting straight they have chosen to actively resist such cultural propositions.

4.4.4 Example of a Non- Stigma

One IP chose to come out as gay because of reassuring comments specifically about being gay at work; *“I heard that it wasn’t wrong, instead it was a positive thing to be openly gay already at the interview. It was brought up [on the interview] when I was asked if I had a partner. They asked about my situation of being gay and how it was to come out. [...] I received only positive reactions during the interview”*. In this sense the attitudes of the generalized other were very clear to the IP by positive significant symbols already internalized prior to the interview, which led him to not only positively reason on possible reactions, but also to enter a dialogue (interaction) in which he expressed his secret pleasures. Indicating that his gayness is not of a stigma is, *“Everyone knows, it makes it more relaxed. One feels very good about oneself after one had come out”*. This demonstrates a decrease in tensions in the sense that the IP does not internalize a “me” that is incompatible to his gay lifestyle. Stated differently, the virtual identity as credited by his organization correlate to his actual social identity, which is made increasingly clear by his non- scanning and non- reasoning, *“I never think about the fact that I’m gay unless it is discussed”*. In a similar sense, the diversity mixture can be of reassuring and normalizing affect; *“There are many gay men at my workplace. They have a reputation of being service minded. There are in total 3 gay men out of 7 or 8 men [in total]”*.

All these significant symbols as described here suggest to the IP that his gayness is not only accepted but also a positive quality in task performance. Seen from a critical perspective, the normalizing judgment could be that gayness is the correct attribute for the workplace. The fact

that sexuality was brought up already at the interview could suggest that the managers examine the IP in order discipline him into perceiving his gayness as a required credential. As for resistance he said, "*I don't act on my gayness. [...] One is not suppose to look gay. It is something that is built in*". By this statement the IP demonstrated that his urges are not necessarily to be able to act on his gayness, but something else, which further suggests that he may experience a discredited stigma. His actual social identity as gay does not then necessarily correlate to the virtual identity as credited by his managers, that is, their expectations on the IP as service minded because of his gayness. In this sense, initially coming out at the interview could then be perceived as a self- correction. A motive could thereof be to hide his actual social identity of not wanting to act on his gayness, which because of normalizing judgments could be understood as an inferior trait.

5. Conclusions

In this final section I will by the thesis questions as presented in the Introduction, make attempts to tie the different parts of the analysis together to a whole and clarifying image. I will also as final comments, offer future topics and research questions that are related to the field.

In regard to the first question of what significance the individual staff member's perception of his workplace had for his self- reflection, I will have to conclude that there is no single answer. Many of the IPs demonstrated positive as well as negative thoughts about coming out as gay at their workplaces. However, the IPs that had not come out believed that their colleagues and managers would in some way or another treat them differently because of their gayness. This suggests that the IPs self- reflections to some significance consonantly had been influenced by attitudes within their organizations; in general these staff members had accumulated knowledge about their homosexuality as not being appropriate in a professional working situation. Similarly, one IP being out to his managers and colleagues, declared that certain attitudes of his organization were reassuring, and had directly influenced him to reflect upon his gayness as non- inferior. Nevertheless, despite the suggestion of a significant and direct relation as offered by these parts of the analysis, an opposite image was also illustrated. Even though some IPs perceived deterring and non- reassuring propositions, they reflected upon their gayness in a positive fashion, and even though the IP mentioned above perceived attitudes as being compatible to his gayness, he still reflected upon this trait as not entirely satisfying for interaction.

There are several plausible conclusions to make of this seemingly ambiguous significance of perceived attitudes as influential on self- reflection. First of all, self- reflections are ideally dependent upon two symbiotic aspects, external knowledge and internal urges. External knowledge could further be compatible, non- compatible, or neither, to a possible ratification of internal urges. It has been suggested that there is an existence of elements within the organization that offer the individual staff member a frame of reference of how certain identity traits could be of positive as well as of negative value in a formal and informal notion. Moreover has the issue of vagueness of attitudes been demonstrated as having a paralyzing affect on self- reflective abilities. Similarly, exceptionally lucid attitudes seemed to have an equivalent impact on the clarity of self- reflection. On these grounds then, the knowledge available to the individual is significant to the individual's self- reflection. On the other hand,

the individual's choice of perception could filter such knowledge hence to an existing "I" and to inner urges. As suggested, the "I" does not merely host sexual attraction towards men, but also other values irrespective to sexuality. Thereof, self- reflections may not directly and congruously be shaped by external knowledge because of individuality.

Secondly, another possibility is still pending; the staff member may reflect upon his gayness at work by knowledge external to the entire organization, such as of a societal culture, or of significant others' attitudes. These could for instance be directly in regards to homosexuality, or in regards to professionalism, that is, a belief that one should separate professional and private roles. Nevertheless, general cultural propositions have likely had an affect on each and every of the organizational cultures, and in turn could be discussed on equal terms. However, since I by this study cannot establish the significance of such shaping by organizations of a macro- culture, I will not expand this conclusion any further.

In summary, the ability to establish what significance the staff member's perception of his workplace has for self- reflections is close to unattainable by this study. The image is far too complex and dynamic because of an interrelationship between organizational culture, macro- culture, internal urges, as well as personal values that moreover are shaped by the three former aspects.

The following discussion is contingent to above conclusions as an attempt to clarify how a possible juxtaposition of organizational life and self- reflections shape self- construction. I have concluded that it is difficult to establish a simple relationship, but nevertheless, I have underlined that the IPs have somehow been influenced by organizational life because of the simple fact that they actually have reflected upon their gayness in relation to their workplaces. This is augmented through how the IPs demonstrated self- realization on one hand, and self- correction on another hand, as being consequences of reacting to specific factors of organizational life. First of all, I have illustrated that self- ratification, such as resisting negative attitudes, could be a consequence of positive self- reflection that are tied to specific aspects of the organization, regardless if these are reassuring or not. As such, self- ratification as a direct reaction to specific organizational aspects could then be concluded as being a concern of *reconstructing* one's actual social identity that is general to one's life situation. In this study it would be indicated by life situations of the IPs as living open gay lifestyles external to the workplaces. Regardless of congruence then, one consequence of possible

juxtaposition of attitudes and self- reflections could be self- realization made increasingly distinguishable. A non- existing juxtaposition augments this conclusion. For instance, vague significant symbols diminish the ability to reason and reflect upon one's "self", and as a result, the possibility to react is lessened, including the plausibility of self- ratification. In this sense, there would possibly not surface any self- constructions as a consequence if self- reflections and organizational life would not be juxtaposed.

Secondly, I have also demonstrated that self- corrections were prevalent reactions among the IPs, which suggests that they were adapting their "selves" to the workplace. In order for the staff member to know what traits that need to be corrected in the first place, he must internalize knowledge that is specific to these traits. Consequently, the staff member performs scanning and reflection upon his "self" by utilizing this template of knowledge as a mean to establish whether or not his actual social identity hosts such traits. On one hand, such knowledge could be unspecific to male homosexuality *per se*, but specific to deviance, such as for example how SOBs are managed by the organization. In this sense, the juxtaposition of more general attitudes and self- reflection could consequently affect the staff member in an equally general fashion, such as for example managing his impression in order to be professional and loyal to his organization. On the other hand, I learnt that almost all of the IPs demonstrated some kind of stigma related to being gay.

Stigma is a consequence of how the actual self does not (through self- reflection) congruently compare to a virtual identity as consciously or unconsciously credited by co- staff members. I have demonstrated how such crediting could be perceived as judgments that have a normalizing impact on self- construction, such as corporal transformation ("acting straight"). One possible conclusion is that corrections of homosexual traits could only subsist in contexts where self- reflections on male homosexuality *per se* are feasible, that is, in a juxtaposition of self- reflections and organizational life. In the analysis, such contexts moreover posed to hold knowledge that in general was in regard to sexuality, and therefore not necessarily to male homosexuality. It is complicated to establish if there is a difference in impact between knowledge on heterosexuality and on male homosexuality. However, a concern comparable to differentiated knowledge on sexuality in a workplace context, surfaced as one IP reasoned upon male homosexuality as possibly valued differently than female homosexuality. In turn such differentiated reasoning could have an equally differentiated influence on self- reflection. Furthermore, though evidence had surfaced that a homosexual woman had not been treated as

inferior to the workplace, the IP had actively yet not come out, which still indicates self-correction. In this sense, it is possible to establish that there actually could persist a difference in impact on self- construction as dependent on the exactness of knowledge about male homosexuality. However, knowledge influencing self- reflection was demonstrated above as being non- typical to the workplace. Therefore, in a similar fashion as previously argued, self-correction at the workplace may merely be according to a preferred level of openness that is general to the individual staff member's life situation.

The overall conclusions that are possible to make, is that a specific juxtaposition of organizational life and self- reflections, as a frame of reference, is to begin with necessary in order for the staff member to be able to make decisions for constructing his "self". However, the *manner* in which the "self" is constructed is not necessarily shaped by a juxtaposition of self- reflections and organizational life *per se*, but could be according to a repertoire of actions and reactions that is generally preferred by the staff member regardless of situation.

Further Studies

In a comparative study it would be interesting to examine whether or not there are differences between male and female homosexuality in regards to a similar professional working situation. Since men and women are plausibly approached differently in such situations because of certain expectations according to cultural propositions, the likelihood of differences in terms of homosexuality is prevailing. Such a study would probably be enhanced further by utilizing a Foucauldian model to a greater depth than I have for this master thesis, also including further foci on macro- culture.

Questions in regards to Human Resource Management (HRM) that I would find interesting to explore as contingent upon my study are for instance "*How could increased organizational awareness of diversity and enactment of diversity traits affect the organization as well as its members?*" Such a study would make me focus more on the organizational level oppose to an individual level. Also, the issue of responsibility would be a crucial to examine, since increased awareness would involve an active and professional standpoint. One pragmatic field appropriate for such a focus could for example be Diversity Management, which is a sub- area of HRM.

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Oral References

8 depth interviews with 8 Swedish homosexual men, ranging between 23 and 33 years of age, Malmö, Sweden, July 2001

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Why? How? Develop? Explain? Anything else? Sum? How does this feel?

Background

Gender/Age/Sexuality/Ethnicity

Introduction

Education

Length of time working

Employment

Main task/role

Describe a typical workday

Who is in daily interaction with you?

Who manages you?

The demography of the workplace

General Working Climate

Are you satisfied with colleagues/tasks?

Gossip?

Mobbing?

*Do you receive enough attention?

Do you want to be more/less social with colleagues?

Do you experience a satisfying cooperation with colleagues? Better with a few?

Have you thought of changing jobs?

Why?

Do you miss something at work? Responsibility? Influence?

Openness

What does the workplace look like?

Common areas?

Common activities on the spare time? How often?

Everyone?

Do you participate?

Are your colleagues personally open towards you? Who?

Are you personally open? Towards whom?

Is it important with openness?

General Attitudes of the Workplace

Is your workplace open towards differences?

Ignore?

Adapt and ignore?

Diversity as good?

*Do you have common conflict management?

Would you like to have more?

Demands of the organization?

Looks?

Education and training to meet diversity?

To be Gay at Work

Why were you employed?

Are you openly gay at work?

(YES>)

How did you come out?

When?

Why?

Reactions?

To whom did you come out?

Why?

Do you want to be more open?

Have you come out to everyone?

Do you act upon your gayness?

Gains/loss to be gay at work?

(NO>)

Do you feel a need to come out?

Possible reactions?

How does it feel not to be out at work?

Are you worried to be outed?

Possible gains?

Do you experience a minority status at work?

*Do you know of anyone else that is gay at work?

*Are there specific persons that you hesitate to come out to?

Anxiety?

Possible reactions?

*Have you influenced your workplace in any way?

Your gayness?

*Are you more discrete/anonymous?

Do you pose demands on your organization or managers?

What?

Would you pose demands because of your sexuality?

Do you want to see more room for your sexuality at work?

What?

How?

Why?

*Does your sexual preference hinder your work?

Has your sexuality changed your relation to your colleagues?

Do colleagues or managers influence you in your decision to come out?

What have they said? Insinuations?

When you first met colleagues/managers/others.....

....were you approached as heterosexual in any way?

....were you approached as gay in any way?

....were you worried about their attitudes?

Between Work and Private Life

Describe a stereotypical gay guy?

Do you fit in to any of these?

Do you think anyone else fits into these?

What image do you colleagues and managers have of homosexual men?

Is homosexuality discussed at work? How? What?

Gay jokes?

Do you act more straight in some situations?

Do you hide away facts?

*Do attitudes/culture/expectations of your organization go against your lifestyle as gay?

*Do you think there is a certain jargon among gay men? For instance?

Do you adapt to this?

Is there a certain jargon or lifestyle at your workplace? Example?

Have you adapted to this? Why?

Are they in conflict with each other?

Private Life

*Do you think gay issues are interesting?

Member of a gay organization? Purpose?

Are you social in gay networks?

Where?

How often?

Why?

Do you think gays should have the same rights as heterosexuals?

Demands on family and friends?

Demands on you from them?

Positive aspects about being gay?

Negative aspects about being gay?

How was it to come out?

To whom?

Reactions

How has this affected you?

Are you ashamed of your gayness?

Are you ashamed of other gays?

In what situations are you not comfortable showing your gayness?

Transformations?

Changed jargon?