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Schizoid cynicism among fast-food restaurant workers

An analysis of how and under what circumstances employees are cynical

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Abstract

Based on an ethnographic case study, this paper offers a typology of how, and under what circumstances, employees at a fast food-restaurant are cynical. By conducting participant- and non-participant observations and 10 semi-structured interviews, combined with a document analysis, we sought to understand the social realities of employees at Berger. Thus, we have had an interpretive approach to research. The theories used for the study focus on employee cynicism, functional stupidity and psychoanalysis, themes explored by using an abductive approach to methods. It is argued that earlier studies on cynicism have tended to discuss cynicism in general and assumes that employees are either cynical or not. Here, the assumption about cynicism being a “pure” phenomenon is challenged. Drawing on our results, we present the concept 'schizoid cynicism' as a way to understand the intermediate position many employees take towards their employing organization. To clarify, the theoretical concept of 'schizoid' derives from psychoanalysis and should not be associated with the concept of schizophrenia in this study. In addition, we believe that the dynamics between being cynical and functionally stupid to a large extent impact the informal ways in which 'schizoid cynicism' occur in contemporary organizational life. We thereby contribute to the research on concepts such as cynicism and functional stupidity, which has mainly previously been researched as a “pure” phenomenon.

Keywords: Cynicism, Functional stupidity, Psychoanalysis, Schizoid cynicism, Ethnographic case study

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Happy reading!

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1. Introduction

“A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing” - Oscar Wilde

As suggested by the epigraph and Baggini (2013), a cynic is apt to question people's ulterior motives and presume that they are acting self-servingly unless proven otherwise. If put in an organizational context, this means that a cynic assumes that the organization acts only in favor of itself, in many cases to promote the organization's profitability. Therefore, to explain the quote above in an organizational context, the cynic may only see the estimated profitability, the price, behind organizational attempts to motivate personnel, make campaigns or promote sustainability. Furthermore, cynicism can be enhanced by the comparatively high salaries often paid to corporate leaders (Baggini, 2013). In the literature, the topic of cynicism has become an everlasting fad, with scholars discussing and dissecting why, and how employees are cynical (Paulsen, 2017).

Even though the research field on employee cynicism has been explored in detailed ways, there are still unanswered questions. In terms of relevance, there is a further need to scrutinize how dis-identifications such as cynicism occur within organizational contexts (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Secondly, current research gives much thought to how cynicism manifests itself (Gossett & Kilker 2006; Korczynski 2007; Sewell 2008), cynicism and organizational change (Reichers, Wanous & James, 1997; Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005) or how employees switch between cynicism and other feelings (Paulsen, 2017). Nevertheless, there is reason to be critical of earlier research on cynicism since it mostly discusses cynicism in static terms and assumes that employees are either cynical or not. In previous studies, there appears to be an assumption about cynicism being a “pure” attitude, whilst it is unlikely that it would occur purely and without doubt in practice. As will be further explained, we believe that earlier research has an *either-or fallacy*, a false dichotomy wherein there is only a limited number of alternatives — but in reality there can be more. Even if some theorists mention that subjectivity leaves room for contradictions and doubt within the spaces of dis-identification and identification (Fleming & Spicer, 2003), they do not explore this notion further when researching employee cynicism. Thus, we will explore employee cynicism in psychological depth, and question whether employees are cynical to one hundred percent or not.

1.1 Problem statement

As Fleming and Spicer (2003) explain, there is a need to investigate how forms of dis-identifications, such as cynicism, take place in organizations. How we interpret processes of cynicism has consequences, not only for the legitimacy of present theories, but also for the everlasting politics of the moral significance of cultural control at workplaces. Notwithstanding, we have identified a knowledge gap in that we need *more* empirical research to strengthen, or possibly challenge, this relatively new concept in organizational studies. Hence, our aim is to find and identify mysteries, novel theoretical contributions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). As Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) emphasize; when a theory challenges our fundamental assumptions, it becomes interesting. We aim to explore this further by interviewing and observing employees at fast-food restaurant Berger.

One could assume that employees at fast-food restaurants would be quite cynical towards their employing organization, mostly due to the overall image of fast-food chains (Currie et al., 2010) and the low reward of work (Van der Hulst & Geurts, 2001). As expressed in Fleming and Spicer (2003), the imaginary McDonald's employee used as an example is cynical towards the company in means of serving high fat, low fiber food to children – but nonetheless performs the work required. Styhre (2013) advises authors to be conscious about what underlying assumptions a problem statement has. Connecting this to our study, one can argue that there is an underlying assumption that employees at fast-food restaurants are going to be cynical, instead of an assumption questioning why employees *are not* cynical at the workplace. Thus, there is a need in the collection of empirical material to be open to findings that does not go in line with our presumptions. This also means that our chosen site might be relevant in order to explore cynicism in-depth, since it is a phenomenon we expect to find.

Furthermore, as Paulsen (2016) highlights, it is not as easy as being cynical or not — instead we tend to move between different modes of actions. What we seek to problematize further, is the notion about employees being either one hundred percent cynical or not, when it may be that employees only express cynicism about certain aspects of their workplace. Connecting back to Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) mystery identification, a mystery might be that there exists intermediate positions between cynicism and other feelings employees may feel towards the company. In practice, this would mean that an employee only expresses cynicism about certain aspects of the organization, but is conflicted — somewhere in between cynicism and

other feelings — over other aspects. As Pratt and Doucet (2000) emphasize, there is no simple way of categorizing employee emotions in clear-cut groups. Instead, Pratt and Doucet argue that due to the increasing complexity and rapid rate of change, this is an era of ambivalence and uncertainty.

The purpose with this study is to make a knowledge contribution that is valuable, to do something that expands people's' mindsets and makes them think differently about certain concepts, in this case *cynicism*. Nonetheless, cynicism is a reaction which is not limited to employees in the fast-food sector, but something that can occur in different organizational contexts. Thus, this study may prove interesting for a deeper understanding of employee cynicism in general, as well as provide useful knowledge for managers.

1.2 Research Question

By drawing on a study in a fast-food restaurant and the assumption that cynicism exists, we aim to take a critical stance towards earlier research on the subject and try to present a more in-depth understanding of employee cynicism. Thus, this led us to the following research question:

- How and under what circumstances are employees at Berger cynical?

The meaning of this question, however, has evolved. Reviewing our findings from the collected empirical material, this study also appears to answer the question of how cynicism can be explained as a non-uniform variable — challenging the notion of cynicism being an either-or concept.

1.3 Disposition

Section two, *theoretical background* will provide a literature review that will be of essence for this specific study. We will shed light on some key cynicism literature as well as explain concepts such as emotional labour and functional stupidity. The purpose is not only to explain cynicism but also to raise questions of whether there is an *either-or fallacy*. In the latter part of the section, we are going to offer an overview of psychoanalysis in organization studies due to our goal to present a realistic picture of employee emotions and the conflicting feelings

employees can have-towards their employing organization.

Section three, *methodology*, will be dedicated to present the methodology that has been used throughout the study. Hence, we will present a description of the philosophical groundings, the research method, the research design, data collection, data analysis, source critique and reflexivity as well as the ethical considerations made in this study.

Section four, *analysis*, constitute the heart of our study, exploring how and under what circumstances employees at Berger are cynical. The first and second parts present two themes that employees are more cynical towards; work practices and the role of the restaurant manager. The third, fourth and fifth parts examines more conflictual themes that the employees' express doubts about, such as whether or not employees are proud to work at Berger, work division based on gender and motives for environmental efforts. These findings will be analyzed together with the literature presented in the theoretical background.

Section six, *discussion*, will provide a more general discussion about cynicism as an either-or concept. We will also discuss the concept 'schizoid cynicism' in depth.

Section seven, *conclusion*, aim to conclude the main findings and thereafter present a conclusion to the research purpose presented in the introduction. Lastly, we will present our theoretical contribution, practical implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical background

In this section, we will provide an overview of the literature of which our research is based on. Firstly, we will shed light on some key cynicism literature. Secondly, we will look into the concept of emotional labour. Thirdly, we will explain the concept of functional stupidity. The purpose of the theoretical background is not only to explain the concepts of cynicism, emotional labour and functional stupidity, but also to raise questions of whether there is an either-or fallacy with these concepts. Can an employee only be one hundred percent cynical or functionally stupid, or does there exist grey areas in between — can these concepts co-exist? During our research, we found themes that employees at Berger expressed conflicting feelings towards, for example, motives for environmental efforts and work division based on gender. This resulted in that the concept of greenwashing was added to our theoretical background and that the concept of gender essentialism was swiftly explained in our data analysis. Furthermore, in the latter part of our theoretical background, we are going to offer an overview of psychoanalysis in organization studies. The reason to why we have chosen to present the reader with an overview of the literature on psychoanalysis, is due to our goal to present a realistic picture of employee emotions and in particular, conflicting feelings about the organization. As emphasized by Arnaud (2012), the role of psychoanalysis in organization studies is crucial if the aim is to distinguish realism in a body of knowledge, something we aimed to do with background in the concepts of cynicism and functional stupidity.

2.1 The emergence of the concept cynicism in organization studies

In organization studies, cynicism has been presented as a way for employees to dis-identify with managerial attempts to control them (Fleming & Spicer, 2003), and it is often characterized by a process where employees accustom by decoupling thought from action (Contu, 2008; Fleming, 2009). According to Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) modes of resistance such as cynicism, are a prevalent theme in organizational, contemporary life. Cynicism, however, is often a concealed phenomenon which cannot be detected easily. One of the first theorists on cynicism, Žižek (1989), emphasized how individuals can distance themselves from power structures by not internalizing them, whilst still performing their work. Furthermore, Kunda (1992) paved way for cynicism studies with research on how Tech workers received managerial attempts at cultural control, and how it differentiated from bureaucratic control. Connected to normative control, employees often act in favor of the company, not because they are forced,

nor because of salary or other external factors. On the contrary, employees are motivated by internal factors and driven by a strong identification with the goals set by the company. Willmott (1993), however, is critical to this notion of identification, and claims that cultural control is equivalent to brainwash, ultimately making the employees willing slaves. Thus, the authorities' exercise absolute control over, not only how the employees should act, but their thinking. In other words, this means that employees develop some sense of self-discipline, where even subliminal thoughts are controlled to a certain extent.

As Fleming and Spicer (2003) explain, there is some research that support the notion of cultural control resulting in employees identifying with the company. As seen with the Tech workers Kunda (1992) researched, however, employees may also express cynicism against normative control. This cynicism could be expressed through humor, ridiculing company rituals as well as an overall sneering manner. Despite this cynicism, the Tech workers continued to play their part and were exceedingly effective in doing so. Fleming and Spicer (2003) further elaborated on this effect of cynicism, explaining how employees who act cynically reproduce the very same power relations that they are critical of. As an example of this, Fleming and Spicer explain how an imaginary McDonald's employee may recognize underlying business motives of the company, rather than identifying with values encompassed in company training, such as quality, efficiency and team work. Nevertheless, the McDonald's employee still executes her work and acts *as if* she believes in the company values, conclusively reproducing the same ideology she despises. In this case, cynicism acts as a safety valve, in order for the employee to feel free from managerial control. In the fictional case described above, employee cynicism can be difficult to discover. If scrutinized, however, employee cynicism can be expressed in more or less visible ways by employees. As Abraham (2000) underline, employee cynicism can be expressed through the use of sarcastic humor, which is more hidden, but also through more open, critical statements about the organization. Nonverbal behavior that may indicate employee cynicism could be "knowing looks" and "rolling eyes", something that goes in line with what Kunda (1992) defined as an overall sneering manner. These expressions indicate that the employee has a negative attitude towards the employing organization, but the specific feelings of the employee can range from contempt to distress and shame.

2.1.2 Cynicism and greenwashing

In today's society, it is popular among companies to promote their "green work", ranging from everything between carbon neutral wine, planting trees to green cars (Adams & Nehme, 2011;

Matheson & Naydonov, 2009). Green marketing attracts conscious environmental consumers and has become increasingly popular, not only amongst industry leaders but amongst many small or medium-sized companies as well. With the expansion of the green market, it has become crucial to ensure that it is properly monitored. This is primarily important because green marketing can be characterized by the concept of greenwashing. Greenwashing is a concept where a manufacturer may, for example, overstate the benefits of a products green credentials when promoting it, which can mislead the end consumer. The danger with this concept is that it may deter consumers from purchasing “green products”, because they start to doubt assertions made by manufacturers about services or products (Adams & Nehme 2011). Thus, a rational reaction of this misleading marketing is that greenwashing can make the consumers cynical against green products, what Matheson and Naydonov (2009) call *eco-cynical*. According to Adams and Nehme (2011) greenwashing comes with many obstacles, since there is a risk of consumers becoming so *cynical* that they cannot distinguish genuine from doubtful claims. Finally, this could inhibit marketing opportunities for “true green” businesses, due to an increasing part of consumers viewing green products as “window dressing”. Adams and Nehme has observed seven different categories of greenwashing. The first one is *hidden trade-offs*, where the product is marketed as green based only on narrow attributes disregarded other environmental issues the product can contribute to. The second is *no proof*; that it is difficult to prove the environmental claim. *Vagueness*, the third category, is when the environmental claim is too broad and hard to define for the consumer. The fourth category is *irrelevance*, where the environmental claim is true but at the same time unimportant for the consumers. *The lesser of two evils*, is the fifth category, where the organization market a specific product as green, whilst the whole product category’s environmental value can be questioned. The sixth category, *fibbing*, is when an organization makes a false environmental claim. The seventh category, *worshipping false labels*, is when the product is labeled as having a third party endorsement, when in reality this does not actually exist.

2.1.3 Dealing with emotions at work

According to Abraham (2000) organizational cynicism may lead to alienation and job dissatisfaction, while at the same time undermining organizational identification and organizational membership. How employees handle emotions such as cynicism within service work is often through emotional labour (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). More specifically, emotional labour means that the employees need to adjust their emotions towards the customers to display organizationally desired emotions. This display of emotions is often due to

organizational attempts to control employees, where employees' emotions may lose status as a private matter and become more transferred into the work life (Abraham, 1998). Emotional labour can, on one hand, facilitate task effectiveness and self-expression. Also, the repression of negative emotions can create feelings of professional pride. On the other hand, masking unpleasant emotions often becomes stressful. Hence, employees can create feelings that may trigger self-alienation. Thus, emotional labour can create both positive and negative feelings among the employees (Pratt and Doucet, 2000; Hochschild, 1979; Bolton, 2001). Abraham (1998) argues that emotional dissonance can be seen as a facet of emotional labour, where there exists a conflict between expressed and experienced emotions. Emotional dissonance can be seen as a form of person-role conflict between organizational and personal mandated emotions. For example, if an organization require an employee to smile and the employees' experienced emotional displays do not include smiling, a conflict between expected and experienced emotions may arise.

Conclusively, emotional labour can be seen as one way by which employees can work with emotions such as cynicism, but also describes how employees handle conflicting emotions in general. The next section will focus on the concept of functional stupidity, a more negligent way of coping with, or even excelling, in work situations.

2.2 Functional stupidity

The debate on cynicism has expanded somewhat with the newer research field on functional stupidity, in that it can be seen an opposite pool to cynicism. Functional stupidity, as explained by Alvesson and Spicer (2012), means a lack of critical and reflective action in organizational settings. Furthermore, Alvesson and Spicer explain how functional stupidity makes it legitimate to follow others; by following the norm, the employees save cognitive capacity. In some ways, this can be seen as *opportunism*, that is, employees simply "playing along" with company practices, even though they may doubt them. If not by opportunism, employees may fall into functional stupidity by being blinded by fancy buzzwords or by having excessive trust in authority; believing that management are most suitable to make important decisions. Furthermore, as Paulsen (2017) emphasize, the stupidity ascribed is more about an individual's behavior rather than an individual's innate personality trait. As Alvesson and Spicer (2012) explain, functional stupidity indicates that an individual refuse to use his or her intellectual

capacities in other than short-term and rather narrow ways. In the short term, functional stupidity may lead to highly functional consequences such as smooth social relations, trust and commitment among employees and that company processes look legitimate. Employee feelings of anxiety may also, as a consequence, be minimized. Functional stupidity, however, also means that employees do not critically reflect on processes within the company, and thus maintain their thinking “inside the box”. A negative aspect of functional stupidity is that it can prompt a large dissonance between what is proposed by management and the reality of organizations, which may lead to employee cynicism, decreased motivation and dis-identification with the organization (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

Even though the concept of functional stupidity is useful in understanding the employee process of neglecting intellectual capacity to thrive in an organizational setting, it appears — like cynicism — to occur as a “pure” phenomenon. With this in mind, the next section brings up the concept of psychoanalysis. Here, the study changes focus to present a more realistic depiction of employee emotions, which may act to evince that it is not common that employees’ express feelings of either cynicism or functional stupidity to a hundred percent. Instead, this section illustrates that employees can feel a wide array of emotions towards their employing organization, intermittently contradictory ones.

2.3 A conflictual analysis

The psychoanalysis, as first introduced by Sigmund Freud, is a widely known method and has been increasingly introduced as a useful concept in organization and management studies. Psychoanalysis developed after discoveries were made about latent aspects of human consciousness. More specifically, psychoanalysis is about how unconscious thoughts and understandings influence human thinking, and how ideas which are expressed at a conscious stage, may simultaneously have an unconscious, hidden meaning (Halton, 2003). As explained by Arnaud (2012), Freud himself stressed how the knowledge of psychoanalysis is of interest to a wide set of domains in research — psychology and sociology amongst others. Furthermore, Freud believed that psychoanalysis could aid in understanding employee symptoms in organizations, but also the human psyche in general and lastly, culture.

Even though there has been links between psychoanalysis and the business sector since the early 1900's, it was not until studies conducted by researchers in the 1950s and 1960s that the interest of using psychoanalysis to understand organizational phenomenon got rooted. After this, psychoanalysis grew to be a fruitful way of analyzing the psychodynamics of employee behaviour and management in organizational life (Arnaud, 2012). Halton (2003) further reinforces how psychoanalysis has contributed with a perspective through which organizational activity can be scrutinized more easily. Moreover, Halton explains how psychoanalysis as a way of treating conflicting feelings of specific individuals remains a small part of what psychoanalysis has contributed with in society, but that it rather is a prolific way of understanding what goes on in organizations and that it may aid in dealing with certain organizational issues. An example highlighted in Halton that appears relevant to understand how psychoanalysis can aid in understanding employees, is the example of when some employees complained about the poor distribution of parking lots. What Halton means, is that these complaints may actually have a hidden meaning, in that employees feel angst over how managers leave little room for employee interests.

2.3.1 Psychoanalysis as a way to understand employee emotions

One of the institutional defenses commonly used by employees in order to cope with organizational life, is denial. In this sense, employees can push thinking and feelings out of their aware consciousness if they become filled with anxiety. This also makes it easier to endure job-related stress and can, therefore, be healthy for employees. Emotional feelings that can be met with resistance or denial are those that may hurt the employees pride, casts doubt on the value of employee work or in other ways cause emotional pain (Halton, 2003).

To avoid emotional pain, individuals might turn to *splitting* or *projection*. Here, Melanie Klein's work on children can be used to better understand these concepts. Klein (1946) researched the unconscious inner world present in every individual, and found that children's predominant defense for avoiding pain was splitting and projection, something she referred to as *paranoid-schizoid position*. Here, 'paranoid' refers to the art of projecting, where feelings of badness are experienced as coming from outside oneself. This self-idealization, where the individual exaggerates their own positive qualities, may act to simplify complex problems and may also lead to a culture which inhibits employee growth. As explained by Klein, 'schizoid' refers to the art of splitting, where the individual splits feelings into differentiated facets. The act of splitting can be explained further by the example given in Halton (2003) where the painful

emotions evoked by not being able to see the mother as both good and bad, can be eased in mind by splitting the image of the mother into a “good fairy” and a “bad witch”.

This type of schizoid position taken by children to avoid emotional pain, is something Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) highlight in another way when talking about employee identification. The authors emphasize how employees, simultaneously, can both identify and dis-identify with an organization, something often referred to as ambivalent, or schizo, identification. To clarify, the theoretical concept of ‘schizoid’ derives from psychoanalysis and has no connection to the concept of schizophrenia in this study. Instead, the emphasis is on the employee having conflicting feelings about the company, thus taking a position in between fully identifying and dis-identifying with it. This ambivalence, often researched in interpersonal relations, is regularly due to individuals both considering negative and positive aspects of an entity.

However important it may appear to regard unconscious factors and behaviour of employees to understand organizational life, Halton (2003) emphasizes how it often is easier to ascribe an employee’s behaviour to personal problems, rather than organizational dynamics. This downplays the significance of using psychoanalysis to understand employees to some extent. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis can be seen as key in order to acknowledge that employees may have conflicting feelings towards their employing organization — to demonstrate that everything is not black and white — although, as emphasized by Halton, it cannot be directly used to understand *all* of an individual’s behaviour.

2.4 Summary of literature review

This section has explored existing literature that is of essence to this study, with key themes being cynicism, emotional labour, functional stupidity and psychoanalysis. Firstly, the field on cynicism in organization studies has been explained in order to describe how employees can dis-identify with managerial attempts to control them, expressed in more or less visible ways by employees. Emotional labour is presented as one way in which employees can work with emotions such as cynicism, but also describes how employees handle conflicting emotions in general. Secondly, the concept of functional stupidity has been elucidated, describing an individual’s lack of critical and reflective action. Hence, functional stupidity can be seen as an opposite pool to cynicism. When explaining these concepts, the purpose was to raise questions

of whether there is an either-or fallacy — is it possible for an employee to be one hundred percent cynical or functionally stupid, or does there exist grey areas in between? Thereafter, in the third part of this section, an exposition of literature within the field of psychoanalysis in organization studies has been given, where the importance of unconscious thoughts and understandings in human thinking has been emphasized. The reason for presenting this, is due to our aim to present a realistic depiction of employee emotions and in particular, conflicting feelings.

3. Methodology

This section will demonstrate our chosen and implemented method of study. We initially start with our philosophical groundings, describing how the study has a social constructionist and interpretive approach that aims to create an understanding of how and under what circumstances employees at Berger are cynical. Moreover, we will explain how we have engaged in an ethnographic study. We will also describe how we have used an abductive approach during the research process, going back and forth between theory and empirical material. Lastly, this section will demonstrate how analysis of results have been performed, as well as source critique and ethical considerations.

3.1 Philosophical groundings

In this study, our ontological standpoint is that of social constructionism. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) this means that reality is socially constructed by individuals, rather than an objective phenomenon. Having an ontological perspective concerned with social constructionism, means that interest lies in understanding how different individuals contribute to and create social contexts. In order to incorporate our viewpoint, we have interviewed employees at Berger, with the purpose of gaining an understanding of how their social reality is created through social interaction. This view on reality can be directly connected to our epistemological standpoint, since epistemology revolves around “the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15). In this study, our intention is to try to understand the realities of the employees working at Berger, more specifically how and under what circumstances they are cynical. Therefore, we have had an interpretative epistemological approach to research where, as Prasad (2005) emphasizes, focus is on understanding the social worlds of people, with the multiple meanings they inhabit. The reason to why the interpretivist position appeared as the most appropriate approach for our study, can be explained by its focus on finding deeper meanings in discourses that may be described in a collection of observed behaviours and personal narratives. Hence, this means that there exists multiple “truths”, which collectively compose what we observe as reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

An interpretative approach was thus appropriate for our study, as we aimed to discover how, and under what circumstances, employees at Berger are cynical, in some ways exploring their unique feelings towards the company. As personal narratives origin from every individual's

own point of view, one can assume that there are as many stories, or “truths”, of the reality at Berger as there are individuals. For example, during the interviews we noticed that some employees expressed critical feelings about, for example, Berger’s green work, whilst some employees expressed more positive feelings towards this. With this in mind, one can assume that there is no universal “truth” about how employees feel about their work at Berger.

3.2 A qualitative research approach

Qualitative research has a focus on how people experience processes and make sense of their surroundings. As Styhre (2013) clarifies, the data collection of qualitative methods often includes interviews and observations in order to thoroughly capture the thoughts and beliefs of individuals. In order to generate in depth-findings, our aim was therefore to use qualitative methods since it captures the context of the organizational members at Berger. Since our intention was to understand how and under what circumstances employees at Berger are cynical, qualitative methods benefited our research. More specifically, we have engaged in an ethnographic study, which according to Prasad (2005), means doing in-depth participative observations as well as developing close connections with the subjects being studied. Although we have developed close connections with the employees at Berger, our participative observations mostly acted to increase understanding and confirm or contradict statements made in interviews. As will be explained in more detail below, in 3.5.2, we aimed at developing an understanding of the employees cultural practices taking place within the organization.

Furthermore, as a researcher, when you first enter a field of study you cannot be sure about what you will find (Styhre, 2013), which is why we have used an *abductive approach* to methods. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) explain, an abductive research method is a combination of induction and deduction. More specifically, this means that the researchers can alternate between theoretical frameworks, their own previous understanding and empirical material. Entering the field, we had presumptions about that the employees at Berger would be cynical, that is, a theoretical construct. Not being entirely satisfied with what earlier research presented, however, we collected empirical material which ultimately prompted us to review other theories as well. Going back and forth like this, using an abductive approach, was thus the most realistic approach to research design for our study. Especially since we are all, in some ways, theory-laden before we enter a field of study in means of our previous understanding. As

Hanson (1958, p. 180) argue, “observation of X is shaped by the prior knowledge of X”. As Mills (1959, referred to in Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011) emphasized, research cannot be simplified in steps, manuals or models, which is why an abductive approach was most appropriate — it is not a step-by-step model but rather an interactive process.

3.3 Case study design

We chose a case study design to guide us through the execution of the research method, something that is widely used in business research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The basic form of a case study design means a detailed study of a single case, for example, a specific community or organization (Bryman, 2011), in our case a fast-food restaurant in Sweden. According to Knights and McCabe (1997) the case study acts as a “tool”, where the researcher can combine several qualitative methods, hence avoiding relying on a single approach. In our case, this allows us to combine semi-structured interviews with observations and document analysis. In turn, these findings can be used to gain an understanding of how and under what circumstances employees at Berger are cynical.

There exist questions of how a case study research can be generalizable, that is, how our findings at Berger can be utilized in a more general setting for future organizations. As emphasized by Ryen (2004), however, the purpose with qualitative studies is not to find statistically generalizable data, thus implying that this is nothing we should strive for in our research. Furthermore, as mentioned by Lee, Collier and Cullen (2007) the strength of case studies lies rather in its specificity and detail, rather than in generalization. What should be of utmost focus in a case study design, is rather the uniqueness of every case and the aim to gain an understanding of the its complexity. Our selection may in this case be seen as relatively small, whilst also exhaustive, since it covers all employee positions at the company.

3.4 Case company: Berger

The research was conducted at fast-food restaurant Berger in Lönne, a restaurant division part of one of the largest fast-food chains in the Nordic region of Europe. Currently, there are 34 employees working at the division, 10 men and 24 women. The restaurant manager, Bengt, is a so-called “partner”, meaning that he receives bonuses based on the profitability of the specific restaurant. Working under the restaurant manager, there is a division of employees

into what they refer to themselves as “gray hats” and “white hats”; “gray hats” being the middle managers and “white hats” being the rest of the employees.

One way of ensuring that employees provide customers with excellent service is the concept of SEN: “smile, eye contact, nod”, something all employees should do when a customer first enters the restaurant. This is believed to make the customer feel both seen and welcomed in a warm way. This is a rather new concept, of which employees are trained in and questioned on in, for example, computer education quizzes. Key for Berger restaurants is also to name the customers *guests*, since they are not customers self-serving themselves through a supermarket, but guests supposed to enjoy a stay at their restaurant. It is all about giving the guests an experience out of the ordinary whilst eating at the restaurant, thus the naming.

To explain the current situation at Berger further, we have copied a twelve field matrix set up in their staff room. The matrix prompts anonymous answers, since the employees only put a magnet on the field that describes their feelings. As for the colors; green means yes, yellow maybe and red no. The magnets under the matrix represent employees who have not participated.



Figure 1: Matrix set up in Berger staff room

As can be seen in this twelve fielder, employees appear to be content with most aspects of their work. What is striking, is the steady deviation about employees feeling job satisfaction. In the data analysis, we will connect back to this specific matrix – mostly focusing on job satisfaction.

3.5 Construction of Data

This qualitative study focuses on our and the employees’ subjective understanding of how and under what circumstances they are cynical. As Bowen (2009) argues, a qualitative research is

expected to draw upon at least two or more different data sources of evidence in the study of the same phenomenon. Although it is not usual for qualitative researchers to look for evidence, we have listened to Bowens advice and consequently used multiple methods when constructing our data for this study. More specifically, we have used three different methods available for qualitative researchers: semi-structured interviews, participant- and non- participant observation and a document analysis to reduce the impact of potential biases (Yin, 1994). The first referring to conversations with employees at Berger, the second to observations of how the employees behaved in practice, and the third referring to an analysis of papers in the staff room.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

In this study, *semi-structured interviews* are the primary source of data. According to Kvale (1996) the purpose of semi-structured interviews is to gather insight in the interviewees viewpoints, with the aim to interpret meaning of a described phenomenon. In our study we have done a focused study, interviewing employees currently working at Berger in Lönne. It consisted of ten individual interviews where we repeated some interviews to obtain richer insights and at the same time check for consistency, something Schaefer and Alvesson (2017) advice for in order to see whether interview statements are tied to a specific time context. A common bias in research can be social desirability where the interviewees provide answers that will be viewed favorably by others, hence they are thinking about what they are talking about and how they depict themselves. To avoid this, we picked Berger, a company where the employees primarily have younger employees who may not be as thoughtful when answering interview questions. Hence, it was our belief that they would provide us with more honest and raw answers. In order to acquire valuable information and diminish potential language barriers, all the interviews were also conducted in Swedish. Our sample adheres to principles of qualitative research which is not concerned with reviewing an entire field, but doing thorough studies (McCracken, 1988).

Our interviews, each lasting from 50 to 80 minutes, were conducted in three different rounds, first with the two managers, Emma and Filipa, then with seven employees and finally with Bengt, the owner of the restaurant. Firstly, the interviews with Emma and Filipa were conducted in order to gain a general understanding of the restaurant and how the employees may feel about their work. Secondly, the interviews with the employees were more focused on specific themes that were found during the two initial interviews, connected to our research

question; how and under what circumstances employees may be cynical at Berger. Themes revolving around how the employees reflect on gender division, how they feel about work practices, what they think about the company's green work and their opinions about the restaurant manager's role were treated. Thirdly, we had a final interview with the owner to gain insight into his viewpoint; how the employees may feel about their work, his role at the restaurant as well as his thoughts about the company's green work and gender division at the restaurant. Depending on how the interviews developed, the questions were continuously adjusted after where the discussion was going. To be source critical, we also carefully considered if interview statements made by the restaurant manager and the deputy restaurant managers could be restrained by political correctness, norms for corporate ideology and exercise in "management lingo" (Alvesson & Schaefer, 2017). An important aspect considered during interviews, was allowance for time flexibility. We did not want to squeeze information out of employees who had less to tell, but at the same time we did not want to disrupt employees who wanted to share more information. To facilitate the interviews, we had divided tasks between the two of us. One of us was responsible for leading the interviews with support from the interview guide. The other one had a more attentive role with focus on asking follow-up questions, such as "Would you like to give us an example?". Questions like the aforementioned enable, as emphasized by Kvale (1996), richer material.

3.5.2 Observations

As emphasized by Schaefer and Alvesson (2017, p. 3) a method involving interviews, should be complemented by, for example, observations and documents in order to "triangulate the phenomenon under study and minimize biases", something we aimed to do in this study. A few weeks after the initial interviews, we decided to broaden our research with observations at the site. The purpose of the observations was to explore if interview statements from the employees could be aligned with how the employees behaved in practice. As Arvaston and Ehn (2009) also emphasize, observations are often used to create credibility, a criterion we aimed to meet in our study. To explain our observations, we have chosen to follow the dramaturgical vocabulary of Erving Goffman (1959), in that we will do observations both "front stage" and "back stage".

Firstly, we wanted to observe how employees acted towards customers. Hence, we were present "front stage" amongst other employees at Berger in Lönne. Interestingly enough, all employees

emphasized how they could retain their emotions, usually being nice to customers, whereas they more often than not commented on co-workers' inability to do so. During two work days, we actively participated in the working life at Berger in Lönne, the aim of this being *symbolic interaction*. As explained by Prasad (2005), symbolic interaction is more participative than detached observations and often include long hours spent in the organization to become acquainted with the employees, their use of vocabulary as well as what is important to them. As the researcher should aim at infiltrating the everyday lifeworld of the individuals being scrutinized in order to understand their procedures and sense-making, we set out to be their work colleagues for two eight hour-work days, wearing their work uniforms, helping them serve customers and using their work vocabulary to fit in. Even though a common bias with participative observations is that employees maintain a facade since they know that they are being observed (Halvorsen, 1992), this is something we believe we avoided, especially since some employees thought that we were new workers at Berger. During our first participative observation, we noted that one employee in particular stressed that we should learn how to check the bathrooms and clean them. She also made comments about how we should do our work and occasionally snapped at us for being slow or if we forgot something, something that — to us — indicated that she was not adjusting her behaviour during our visit. Furthermore, our purpose with the participative observations was to see if interview statements could be confirmed, contradicted or if any new information of interest to our study would reveal itself. Moreover, we wanted the employees to feel comfortable in our presence, being able to tell us information that we would not have understood otherwise, as well as making our “back stage” observations a little less unusual and bizarre.

Secondly, we wanted to observe how employees behave in the staff room, where they do not interact with customers, the employees' “back stage”. By not being actively involved in the staff room, by being idle watchers on the side-lines, the risk of steering conversations into a desired path was diminished. Nevertheless, our prior knowledge from the interviews could not be disregarded, and we were aware of that our presence might affect their behaviour. During our observations, we documented our impressions in the form of notes. Furthermore, we documented specific information about time and context, practically trying to follow what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) describe as “the salience hierarchy”, merely noting observations that stand out and are of interest to our specific study. We did not put as much time and effort into the “back stage” observations as our “front stage” observations, due to the stressful characteristic of the job — employees rarely had time to be in the “back stage” area of

the restaurant. Back stage observations were performed for about two hours on three different days, something we deemed as adequate. In means of ample time spent on “back stage” observations, we mean that it was, what we deemed as enough time to see if there were any major differences between what we could discover “front stage” and from interview statements against what revealed itself in the “back stage” sector.

3.5.3 Document analysis

During our observations at the site, we also aimed to dissect potential organizational documents. Organizational documents such as policies, decisions, statistics and website presentations have been a predominant part of many qualitative research methods (Bowen, 2009), and in our case it was used to confirm or contradict interview statements or observations, as well as provide an overview of the company. One of the documents we looked at, were documentation of who the winners of the Berger Gala had been during these past few years, set up in the staff room. These papers were studied in order to gain insight into who the winner had been and how the prizes were distributed between women and men, if the same individuals usually won several prizes at the Gala since it had been a widely discussed phenomenon in our interviews. What we wanted to examine, was factual and efficient information about Berger, something documents could provide for. The twelve field matrix we copied and inserted in our study (*fig. 1*) was one of these. Since our purpose is to understand the point of view of individuals, however, one could argue that the relevance of a document analysis is downplayed. As Bowen (2009) emphasizes, a document analysis as a research method is of relevance when the purpose goes in line with scrutinizing formal communication, decisions and representations, rather than understanding people’s life worlds. Nevertheless, as a document analysis require interpretation, one could argue that our semi-structured interviews and observations made it possible for us to elicit meaning from, what could be seen as, quite formal or bland documents. Conclusively, this made it possible for us to further investigate our research purpose and the document analysis was thus of relevance.

Moreover, document analysis is notably relevant when performing case studies, where there is a need for rich descriptions of an organization or specific events (Stake, 1995 and Yin, 1994 cited in Bowen, 2009). More than analyzing documents, being a part of the employees Facebook group made it possible to obtain statistics about the employees in means of gender,

something we wanted to present in the empirical background to enable a greater understanding for matters discussed in the interviews.

3.7 Analysis

Our methods left us with interview transcripts, field notes from our observations, as well as a matrix summarizing three different wellness-factors at the company. Important to mention, is that we believe that the interpretation of data starts already during the interviews, hence before reading the transcripts. As mentioned above, both of us partook during the interviews. Furthermore, the interviews were followed by a reflection upon interview answers, trying to compare them with each other and find similar themes. Later on, when coding our interviews, we categorized the empirical material using a model presented in Styhre (2013), which is based on three different procedures; open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In practice, this means that we identified key concepts, created sub-categories and lastly, integrated the theory.

Firstly, the interviews were transcribed, something that was executed during the interviewing process when the interviews were still “fresh in mind”. Afterwards, these transcriptions were utilized to perform *open coding* in our data analysis (Styhre, 2013). When first reading the material from the interviews, we decided to work individually in order to avoid being affected by what the other person thought were useful quotes. We both highlighted important material and made comments in the margin of our transcripts. Afterwards, we discussed our ideas and tried to identify key concepts that the employees expressed doubt about or criticism towards. Moreover, useful quotes have been translated from Swedish to English, the accuracy of which has been reviewed and validated by bilinguals.

Secondly, we created predefined sub-categories such as how employees feel about 1) work practices 2) the owner 3) the company’s green work and 4) gender division 5) being proud of working at Berger. These predefined sub-categories allowed us to sort repetitions of words and reoccurring topics in the different interviews (Styhre, 2013; Ryan and Bernard, 2003) Afterwards, repetition (Ryan and Bernard, 2001) was executed. through printing all transcripts in order to attain a nuanced view of the text as well as to assure that we did not fail to notice important material. Furthermore, in these specific categories, the employees expressed

diversified feelings, prompting us to create a scale describing how employees can take an intermediate position towards their employing organization.

Thirdly, after categorizing the material, these categories were linked to existing literature, concepts connected to our research purpose such as cynicism, functional stupidity, emotional labour and psychoanalysis. When analyzing field notes from our observations, we made sure to go through them several times in order to categorize them in the ideal predefined sub-category.

As Schaefer and Alvesson (2017) criticize, however, most researchers provide detailed descriptions for their coding procedures, whilst giving little or no attention to source critique, something we take into consideration in the next section.

3.8 Source critique and reflexivity

Schaefer and Alvesson (2017, p. 10) highlight that when “studies are based on interviews with a variety of people involved in the same processes but with different backgrounds, perspectives and interests”, it is easier for the reader to have trust in the researchers’ interview study. This is something we have tried to take into consideration, interviewing employees at Berger with various positions; the owner, middle managers, employees and a serving host. By interviewing employees with different positions who work at the same restaurant, we aimed for diversity in interview answers. Furthermore, this meant that we could cultivate our understanding of restaurant processes and the employees involved in them. To enhance the credibility of our study we also performed observations, which could act as confirmations of the interview statements. This also meant that potential discrepancies could be explored further. We also tried to consider signs of political correctness and company norms, being critical to what the interviewees expressed, especially when interviewing managers, which Schaefer and Alvesson (2017, p. 9) explain may include exercise of “management lingo”.

Furthermore, during our study, reflexivity was taken into account by occasionally taking a step back and questioning our own assumptions. As explained by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), this is what reflexive researchers are concerned about. As it is common that researches might try to force themselves to find something interesting and novel in contrast to existing literature, it was regarded of utmost importance to see to our research interest in the process of reflexivity

— as it otherwise could mean a decrease in the relevance of our study. As mentioned earlier on, one preconception during this study has been that employees are going to express cynicism at Berger. With this in mind, we have aimed to be reflexive in means of being careful to ensure that any empirical material that does not go in line with our presumptions are seen to as well. In the process of analyzing data, this was demonstrated through the introduction of concepts such as functional stupidity. We used this concept to expand our theoretical background, since it was a phenomenon that directly contrasted cynicism and that appeared to some extent in our empirical material. Furthermore, reflexivity was triggered when we first noticed that the empirical material did not reveal that employees were cynical at Berger, but rather that employees had conflicting feelings towards their employing organization. This prompted a reconstruction of the study's structure, demonstrating our awareness and openness about the subjective nature of our assumptions. Also, using sentences like “Our interpretation of this...” and “Our impression of this...” frequently in our data analysis when presenting our empirical material reinforces this.

3.9 Ethics and confidentiality

All access to the company was arranged by Bengt, the restaurant manager. He informed all organizational members about our presence and research goal. Participation in interviews was voluntary and before the interviews, we stressed the importance of honesty and allowance was asked for recording the interviews whereby full anonymity was emphasized. In this way, we hoped to create trust among the employees which could result in credible and honest findings. To achieve rich data, we used pseudonyms with any findings and data containing easily identifiable links to the employees and the organization. Furthermore, to protect sensitive organizational confidentiality and information the company's name has been anonymized (Sarantakos, 2005), and is therefore called Berger in this study. Finally, sensitive information about Berger was removed from documents in the appendices. We also excluded values expressed by the employees, which could be directly connected to the company, to prevent it from being shared in public. Nevertheless, we are aware that despite these efforts to anonymize the employees and the organization, the use of, for example, quotes makes it hard for us to guarantee full anonymity.

4. Analysis

In this section, we will present and analyze the data collected. We have interviewed ten employees at Berger, all contributing with valuable insight into how, and under what circumstances, they are cynical. The interviews illustrated that although there exists some employee cynicism at the workplace, the employees appeared to be non-reflective, or at least conflicted, about some aspects of the organization. In response to this, we introduce the concept of 'schizoid cynicism', explaining the intermediate position many employees took towards Berger. This concept was demonstrated in two different ways. On one hand, an employee could have conflicting feelings towards Berger as a whole – being more cynical towards some themes whereas being more functionally stupid towards others. On the other hand, an employee could be in-between cynicism and functional stupidity on one specific subject, for example, Berger's effects on the society, expressing their feelings ambivalently.

The analysis is divided into *five* different parts. The first and second section present two themes that employees are more cynical towards; work practices and the role of the restaurant manager. The third, fourth and fifth section examines more conflictual themes that the employees' express doubts about, such as whether or not employees are proud to work at Berger, work division based on gender and motives for environmental efforts. This analysis is constituted by presentation of the empirical material, as well as connections between this material to the literature that has been presented in the literature review.

4.1 Cynicism towards work practices

At Berger, there is a procedure for interacting with customers which involves “smiling, eye contact and nodding” [SEN], a procedure that employees appeared to follow occasionally. To describe their job tasks, the employees emphasize how one should disconnect one's feelings in order to deliver high quality service, which can be seen in the following quote.

One should almost be like a robot, one could say. But you know, that it should be service-minded, only focus on the guests, not really care about the employees, really, at all, but to the level of disconnecting in some way. - Sebastian

Sebastian assesses, that to be an ideal employee, one should be more like a robot than a human being. Emma supports this, by stating that one has to adjust one's behaviour at work:

You get into your role at work, and “here you go, enjoy your meal” *alters voice* I don’t speak like that otherwise, you have that [voice], go in and then you sound like a damn service gnome and then you switch it off later, somehow. - Emma

Sebastian and Emma assess that to be the ideal employee, one should be like a robot, or at least alter one’s voice to sound more pleasant — something that can be described by the concept of *emotional labour*. This is something that we noted during our participative observations, where most of the employees changed their tone of voice when interacting with the customers. Emma and Nicolas reinforce this further by describing that one goes into a role at the workplace, even if it is only window dressing.

Mm, smile, eye contact, nod. That's the only thing that's needed, really, because then you know someone comes in, to not look angry or such, but with a smile on your lips. Even if it's a fake smile, they [the customers] don't know that. - Emma

Yeah, I mean, when you overlook the restaurant you have your smile on, eyes and mouth, or whatever it is. And as soon as you turn around then ... you're a like a monster in the back [of the restaurant]. - Nicolas

As Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) explain, how employees handle emotions such as cynicism within service work is often through emotional labour. Looking at the employees at Berger, it becomes clear that the employees need to adjust their emotions towards the customers to be able to display desired emotions. An example of this is when Emma says that one often has a “fake smile” whilst working, sometimes even a fake service voice. Nonetheless, it is difficult to assess whether or not this emotional labour means that the employees conceal feelings of cynicism, rather than other feelings. It could just as well be a part of *functional stupidity* (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), where employees simply “play along” with company practices, even though they may doubt them.

Furthermore, Louise explains how this upholding of an image with desired emotions towards the customers can escalate in that employees feel pressure and need to go into the back and let out some steam: “Some people can be like, they need to go into the back of the restaurant and maybe wait there for a little while, some even starts to cry. We’ve had someone who started crying, haha [...] Then they just go into the back of the restaurant immediately”.

This is also something that Bengt, the restaurant manager, verifies:

It [stress] affects people in the beginning; some people become more aggressive, some people become more withdrawn. It's so damn stressful to work here. In order to make it less significant we try to change the customers' behaviour, put them to work, for example by getting your own drinks [...] I think it's a blast when it's stressy, but some people completely break down and start crying. - Bengt

When describing one another, it becomes clear that the employees describe themselves in a positive light, compared to how they describe their colleagues. Clearly, the employees exhibit more negative reactions towards the customers, than what has been explained earlier on:

I know someone who was supposed to quit, you know, who completely stopped giving a fuck, she told the guests how everything, how long everything took to prepare. If the guest said "Yeah, I would like some chicken wings", and she would be like "Oh, okay that'll take 6 minutes, just so you know". [...] She was also, like, she would moan and sigh towards the guests. - Sebastian

This was also confirmed by Filippa and Emil:

You can see it, especially, on people who are going to quit. That they don't care at all. Like "here, just take it" *throws a burger at the table* Kind of. - Filippa

Some people have been like "I DON'T GIVE A FUCK" [when they are going to quit]. - Emil

In these cases, one could argue that employees that are going to quit has expressed more negative emotions towards work practices compared to how they behaved before. As explained by Nicolas and Emil, however, this negative behaviour towards customers is a recurrent theme even among employees who are currently working at Berger.

[...] This is what I mean, like, people are unpleasant to customers [...] That... has to be your own responsibility, I believe. I'm never going to go and tell someone that they are unpleasant, they have to realize that themselves or else... Bengt [the manager] will have to handle it. - Nicolas

I definitely try to think about NOT doing it [show that he is stressed or irritated towards the guests], because I know how easy it is. You can tell straight away on someone else, if they've had a bad customer, you can tell, because they abreact it on other customers or on one of their co-workers. – Emil

This was also confirmed by Maja; “You can tell if someone’s stressed in their interaction with the customer, they can snap at them, sometimes”. Our interpretation of this, is that it may indicate that the employees permit some of their cynicism towards work practices shine through in customer interaction. Moreover, this is something that we recognized during our participative observations; during stressful times some employees had a hard time retaining a nice front towards the customers. For example, in almost all interactions with the customers, one employee handed over the food, said “here” and then turned around. Our interpretation of how cynicism is expressed does not necessarily go in line with how employee cynicism is framed by Fleming and Spicer (2003), where employees may still act as if they believe in company values. Instead, our impression is that employee cynicism shines through when employees have an *overall sneering manner* (Kunda, 1992), for example when they sigh and moan towards the customers. This sneering manner was especially distinct when the employees experienced stress at work, as well as when an employee was about to quit. However, during another observation, when the environment was calm and there was only one customer in line, we noticed that almost none of the employees smiled. This contradicted the way in which employees described themselves to a large extent, since they often explained negative behaviour towards customers through stressful situations. Interestingly enough, most employees described negative behaviour towards customers as actions more commonly made by co-workers than themselves, or as a consequence of stress. This could be explained by that the employees engage in the art of projecting, which according to Klein (1946) means that feelings of badness are experienced as coming from outside oneself.

When asking if employee behaviour changed when Bengt was absent, Maiken explained how it is like night and day:

Yeah, I mean, when Bengt isn't there it can be a playhouse, a sandbox - or that's the way it is every time he's not there, I can assure you. And then when he [Bengt] shows up, people pick up a cloth, or you know, it becomes very... people become “eye-servants”. And I hope that he knows that. - Maiken

During times of Bengt's absence, one could argue that employees expressed more negative emotions towards work practices compared to how they behave when Bengt is there. As reinforced by Emil; "There's definitely more shit going on when Bengt's not here". Furthermore, Sebastian explains how it is common to deviate from being "on stage" at the restaurant for some time, but that not all employees share a common understanding of when this is acceptable:

I mean, I'm not the "good one" here. I've been sitting in the office at the back as well [when Bengt's not there], but it's all about knowing WHEN you can do it, you know. If there arrives a lot of guests, you can't just go in there and just... sit and wait. And be like "Oh, is there people outside?", "Yeah" I feel like, "Why the heck did you go into the office then? Why didn't you tell me?". Haha, but yeah, it's terrible for fucks sake. - Sebastian

What Sebastian stresses, is that some employees choose to deviate from work during stressful times, when there *actually* is work to be done. Confirming Sebastian's statement, we noted during our observations at the site that several employees disappeared from the "on-stage" section of the restaurant — probably to places like the office in the back. To us, this indicated that some employees, who have negative emotions towards work practices, seize every opportunity they can to sneak away from their work tasks. Our impressions of this, is that some employees do not take their jobs seriously. The concept of "SEN" is also somewhat of a laughing stock amongst the employees, as explained by Emil:

But I believe that people mostly just joke about it; "think about SEN" [...] Yeah, after Bengt [the restaurant manager] has brought it up during meetings you are a little bit like "think SEN", and when Frank Löverling is here, the district manager, then you think about "SEN" as well, haha, it's a little bit of a joke. - Emil

This was furthermore confirmed by Maiken:

Nod! Yeah, I mean, I can think that it's kind of ridiculous, actually. I mean, that we're supposed to nod towards the customer. If it would've been me entering the restaurant, and someone would, like, nod towards me... I mean, personally I think that it's a little creepy. I've never done it myself. But yeah, they're [management] nagging about it. - Maiken

That “SEN” is a little bit of an in-joke, was something that we noted during our participative observations, where employees (already on our first day on the site) made jokes about that someone did a “nice work with SEN” followed by a wink and a smile. Our interpretation of the employees’ uses of *sarcastic humor* (Abraham, 2000), when talking about and describing the concept of “SEN”, is that they are cynical towards work practices. Reinforcing that some employees are cynical, Žižek (1989) means that employees can be cynical by distancing themselves from power structures, by not internalizing — but still performing them. As seen in the quotes by Emil, as well as our observations, some employees still perform “SEN”, but not in a sincere manner.

In this section, with help from the literature review, our results indicate that the employees to a large extent express cynicism towards work practices, rather than being conflicted or functionally stupid. Although this illustrates how employees can have a quite unilateral cynical attitude, our subsequent results demonstrate how this is far from usual amongst employees. In the section that follows, situations where employee cynicism may arise from hierarchical gaps, where employees critically reflect about Bengt being both a partner and a manager, will be discussed.

4.2 Reflections about Bengt being a manager and (at the same time) a partner

One theme that most employees are aware of is how the restaurant manager can be affected by the daily results, since he obtains bonuses based on the restaurant’s results. Some employees are not bothered by this, but for others it can be a source of irritation. Below is one example of an employee who is quite indifferent, noting that since Bengt is a partner, the restaurant’s expenses is his expenses as well:

Filippa: You can just let the boss know [that you want to go on a course in Stockholm]. And say that “I want to go on this course”, and then he will say “Yeah, absolutely, I will check if there are spots available” and then you’re sent up [to Stockholm]. But it’s pricey, of course.

Interviewer. For you?

Filippa: For Bengt.

Interviewer: For the restaurant?

Filippa: Haha, yeah for the boss.

The interesting part here is, as mentioned above, that Filippa equals the restaurants' costs and Bengt's costs. Clearly, Filippa is aware of what it means to be a partner, and in Bengt's case, to be well off:

Yeah, I mean, I think that I probably could move on, but.... I don't know what I want to do *sigh*, my thought is that I'm not going to stay here forever. But as good as Bengt has it - I can live with that, you know. - Filippa

Many employees furthermore emphasize the positive aspects of Bengt being a partner, as exemplified by Maja: "He is super engaged and cares more, than if he wouldn't be (a partner), and that affects us in a positive way as well". For many employees, Bengt being a partner also means that the employees are more pressured into selling extra, upselling, when working. On the question of why they should upsell, Emil answered the following:

So that they [Berger] make a bigger profit than they're already doing. So that we can sell all the dip sauces we've bought in, it's terribly much really, and then you're supposed to try to sell it all on people. - Emil

Emil's description can be comparable to how Filippa explains upsell:

Everything extra that's sold is good for the restaurant. For me it's like, personally, not so important. No, but since I became a manager I realized that, you know, that it's good for the restaurant. Everything you upsell is, yeah. - Filippa

Both Emil and Filippa explain how they have a general understanding of the digits behind Berger; why upsell may be important. As emphasized by the employees, there appears to be a focus on upsell and profit due to the restaurant manager being all about numbers:

I think that many employees think in terms of money, because our manager is, you know, it's a lot of numbers and "we're making losses" and this and that. And

people are pushed to sell, to upsell, and I think that people think that “now I didn’t upsell that much, oh no, now I didn’t generate that much and that much money”. I don’t think that people are thinking “damn, that customer got really pleased now” instead. - Maiken

Other ways in which the employees have noticed that the restaurant manager is focused on numbers, is when there is talk about reducing costs. For example, during our participate observations, we noticed that Bengt was cost-conscious since he reduced evening staff from six to five people because we were going to work there for free. Another example of this is when they, in general, have less personnel during the evenings to cut losses:

Nicolas: Then I was just like “What the hell am I doing here”, I mean. Because I thought it was so unfair that so few employees were working in the evening. You get pissed off.

Interviewer: What do you think that is dependent upon, having less personnel in the evening?

Nicolas: Saving money. They’re very keen on keeping personnel costs low, that’s obvious - it’s the biggest expense of them all, probably.

Furthermore, it may happen that when there is less to do, employees reluctantly have to go home earlier than scheduled, which can create irritated feelings:

Interviewer: One hour earlier, because there’s nothing to do?

Fanny: Yeah, there was nothing that needed to be done and I wasn’t needed any longer. Then it’s another matter if you want to go home or not.... That you just can’t... *looking down*

This cost-saving phenomenon was further explained by Emil:

We should send people home if there’s not enough customers, so that we’re always proportionally as many people working, as we’re selling. So then he [Bengt] obviously makes losses, if he’s supposed to pay salary for someone when we’re not even selling as much. It affects you in that you get less salary yourself. But more than that, I don’t know. - Emil

Noteworthy, is that most employees appear to be aware of how much it costs to have personnel working in the restaurant, something they have reflected on and occasionally express criticism

about. What is more, Emil equals Bengt's costs with the restaurants costs. One explanation for the general understanding of costs from the employees, could be that Bengt is keen on creating a cost awareness through, for example, performance reviews:

Performance reviews, is where you get to fill in yourself [from 1-10] how much you feel that you know something, different questions such as "do you have an understanding of the restaurants results?" and "do you know why are we aiming at that?". - Emma

Some employees become insecure, feeling that there exists a conflict of interest between Bengt and the customers. In this conflict, the employees occasionally stand in the middle, both sympathizing with the interest of Bengt as a partner at Berger, but at the same time sympathizing with the needs of the customers:

It affects me [that Bengt is a partner] in that I get insecure about what to do sometimes, to suit everyone's needs. So, then you stand there [with unhappy customers], and say that you're sorry 10 times over. Then they want their money back and Bengt shows up saying "no, they shouldn't get their money back", so then you're in the middle and just don't know what to do. It affects me, of course, but after they've left it's like "new customer, new possibilities" [...] I can definitely understand where Bengt comes from, he owns the restaurant. - Louise

Another remarkable situation that some of the employees have reflected on is that Bengt skips out on work for two hours every day, without no one criticizing it:

But, for example, Bengt only works Monday to Friday, then he leaves at 2 pm, and then he comes back at 4 pm to "clock out", you know. And then it's like, it's his company, absolutely, so he can do whatever he wants. - Nicolas

This is also something we noticed during our participative observations, when we arrived at 3 pm and Bengt was absent. There is some questioning about Bengt's behaviour, as expressed in Nicolas quotation above, but since Bengt is a partner he can do "whatever he wants". This could act as an example of how cynicism may arise from hierarchical gaps (Baggini, 2013), where managers make more profit and work less, whilst employees are struggling with the daily work tasks which can be, as emphasized by most employees, highly stressful and not very rewarding in means of salary:

I think it's mostly the salary, the reason for people quitting. I mean, I can openly say that I'd rather work at, maybe, a supermarket than working here. Mostly because, standing here a Saturday or Sunday and, you know, making 22 Swedish crowns extra isn't that great. - Sebastian

It appears that most employees are aware of how much it costs to have personnel working in the restaurant, a notion some of them have reflected about and in some ways been critical of. They give an impression of that they recognize Bengt's underlying business motives, when being critical about how he tries to reduce costs by having less personnel working in the evenings. They furthermore reflect on how they may be pressured to upsell more, due to his position as a partner. This employee consciousness may go well in line with how a cynic is apt to question ulterior motives and assume that actions are made self-servingly (Baggini, 2013). The employees are critical of their salary, but know that there is not much they can do to affect them. However, when Bengt leaves work earlier without clocking out, and when people have to go home early to save personnel costs — questions are raised. Problem is, questions and criticism is only expressed internally between employees. How the employees handle these negative feelings in general, is essentially by retaining them and continuing doing their job, something that goes in line with how Fleming and Spicer (2012) explain how employee cynicism can manifest itself in companies.

The following part of this analysis will discuss a more conflicting theme involving cynicism, where focus is on the employees' reflections about serving unhealthy food as well as Berger's environmental focus.

4.3 Conflicting thoughts about Berger's effects on society

As mentioned in the literature review, it is common in today's society amongst companies to promote their "green work" (Adams & Nehme, 2011; Matheson & Naydonov, 2009). This is something Berger is actively working with and something the employees highlighted in their interview answers. When discussing Berger's effects on the society, most employees believe that Berger has a positive effect by offering healthier food options compared to competitors, as well as due to their environmental focus. From our document analysis in the staff room we did receive information about Berger's green work, that is, how some burgers lead to less emitted

carbon dioxide compared to others. Furthermore, there was information set up on a dashboard with information about how Berger plants trees in Africa. However positive employees feel about Berger's environmental work and vegetarian options, they also highlight negative aspects. Some employees believe that the business Berger is conducting ultimately leads to people consuming unhealthy food, therefore having a negative effect on society:

It's not just a little meat fast-food chains sell. Then again, I don't know the specifics about how much carbon dioxide that generates, but all companies - in some ways - are contributing factors to that the world is going under. - Nicolas

Nicolas highlights what he believes to be the most negative effect Berger has on the society, where he takes a quite critical stance against consumerism in general. On the other hand, Fanny understands it in a different way:

[...] They work for the society, the environment, but yeah I don't know. If it's like - weight. I know they were going to do like, they would make healthy burgers as well, there are many choices. A fast-food chain that is still about burgers, but it goes ... So you don't get completely fat, but you get fat. - Fanny

Fanny demonstrates how there is a consciousness concerning Berger's both positive and negative effects on society, since they offer both normal burgers and healthier ones. In this quote, we argue that the 'schizoid cynicism' becomes apparent. Fanny has a hard time trying deciding what leg to stand on and is, in our opinion, perceived as ambivalent in her opinion on the matter. Another employee, Emil, does not agree on the part about making healthy burgers, but stands more critical against that assumption:

They [Berger] try to make everyone eat fast food, no matter if you're a vegetarian or not [...] I don't know if it's even a healthier option, since everything is deep fried as well [the vegetarian options]. - Emil

As further explained by Emil, the art of decoupling may be useful in order to perform the daily work tasks. In this sense, employees can push thinking and feelings out of their aware consciousness if they become filled with anxiety, like a state of denial (Halton, 2003). One may not want to think about contributing directly to the consumption of fast food, but instead view it as doing something else entirely. To make his job easier, Emil decouples thought from action,

in line with Contu (2008) and Flemings (2009) idea of how cynicism may occur, and consequently thinks of making a burger, as making a puzzle:

I know what's good and what's not [in means of food], I try to think a lot about it, for myself, to not eat that many fries and not eat Berger every day... I know that it's not healthy [...] but if I sell it to the customers it doesn't really matter, that I work with it. It feels like making a puzzle, when you're in the kitchen making burgers - that it's just different parts put together. - Emil

Even though there exists a consciousness about that they are selling unhealthy food, our impression is that the employees try to justify working at Berger by explaining the positive societal effects Berger might have, such as working with goodwill. One example of this is how Emil, who expressed cynicism above, additionally stated that: "It's really, really good, because every year employees from Berger can perform volunteer work, in for example Africa". Their reasoning can act as an example of how they in general appear to have conflicting thoughts about Berger — usually expressing both the "on the one hand" and the "on the other hand" — weighing alternatives against each other. This is further exemplified by Sebastian beneath:

Well, if we're supposed to be completely honest, one contributes to, you know, obesity in Sweden. Well, if you go that far. [...] But then they plant trees and all that, so that's a good effect on society. But then, you know, one contributes to people eating more "crap", so that's that. But then, at the same time it's... what would you say, it's a business. - Sebastian

[...] It's a business, to be plain. Berger can't just disregard that [being profitable]. If I ask if a person wants a dip sauce, then it's his or her own responsibility if he/she answers yes or no. So, simply, it's about making money. - Sebastian

As emphasized by Sebastian, it is a business. This implies that there is some reflection about the underlying agenda of the company, to be profitable, even if it leads to increased obesity. Sebastian is critical to the assumption that Berger's sole goal is to provide the customers with excellent service, but realizes that it concerns generating money. Thus, he expresses some cynicism, in this case about serving high-fat food. Nonetheless, he is simultaneously weighing Berger's negative effects with what he believes to be positive effects, planting trees. In our definition, this is where 'schizoid cynicism' occurs.

On the contrary to Sebastian, one employee feels that he has a responsibility towards the customer in terms of what the customer will consume:

I don't know what it makes me feel [upsell], maybe it gives me a negative feeling as well ... that I've forced one packet of mozzarella sticks onto someone who doesn't want it, or that I've even given them that thought, to eat more. - Emil

Two employees demonstrate that there is reflection on that Berger's environmental approach may be a way of capitalizing on modern trends and awareness in order to increase profit, one of them being Nicolas:

[...] they brag about it; "Planting trees in Africa", and that is dead good. Then, I don't know how much of that [they actually do], it's always, like, false marketing, I believe. - Nicolas

As expressed by Nicolas, there is considerable skepticism about whether or not Berger's attempts to be green are simply "false marketing". Another employee who expresses doubt about this is Emil:

They also focus on environmental stuff, like, for every seventh burger they plant a tree in Africa or what the hell it was, eh, I don't know [...] So, maybe it doesn't happen at all, you can't know for sure. We haven't gotten any proof of it actually happening. - Emil

As expressed by Emil there is no proof of Berger planting trees in Africa, thereby making it doubtful. Berger's environmental claims, can thereby to some extent be seen as greenwashing. What Emil says, goes in line with one category of greenwashing, which according to Adams and Nehme (2011), means that there is *no proof* of an environmental claim. With this in mind, one could argue that some employees at Berger are *eco-cynical* (Matheson & Naydonov, 2009). Nicolas and Emil thereby stand quite critical towards the environmental approach of Berger, whilst it appears like other employees have not reflected as excessively on what agenda Berger may have when working for the environment — is it genuine or a minimum required effort?

We are very - planting trees in Africa and so on [...] and then we have food waste and so on. So yeah, I would say that we do [have an effect on society]. Deposit cans and so on, so yeah I would say so. - Filippa

Whilst Filippa appears to disregard potential negative effects completely, and not reflect excessively on what Berger does for the society, Emma appears to be more conflicted:

Effects on the society, yeah, of course we have that, both, but still, I feel like they are good at climate compensation, they are very forward with the environment, and [...] they have vegetarian options. - Emma

Here, one notices that Emma is close to mention that they can have a negative impact on the society, when saying “both”, but hesitates and decides not to mention it at all. Again, our impression of this quote is that the employees have conflicting thoughts about Berger, neither being purely non-reflective, nor being purely cynical. This ambivalence, as Emma and some other employees express, often arises when individuals consider both positive and negative aspects of an entity (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Thus, we would argue that there exists 'schizoid cynicism'.

Something we had in mind, was that Emma is deputy restaurant manager at Berger and therefore may feel more inclined to depict Berger in a positive light. The same goes for Bengt, the restaurant manager, who also hesitates in the quote below – and decides to talk about positive effects instead:

Honestly, I don't know [if Berger has a negative effect on the society]. We always chase things that we can affect; selling green products, offering a vegan milkshake. By offering a vegan milkshake, we directly cut profits from Berger to do better things for the society. [...] Apparently, Berger's owner believes that he already has enough money, haha. – Bengt

By saying “Honestly, I don't know”, Bengt expresses doubt. In the quote below, Bengt touches upon the thought about Berger not offering “healthy” food, and what effects that may have on the society:

People *have* to eat. It's not “thin” food, even if it's green products that doesn't mean that it's “thin” food. Do you want to do something that has less impact on the society, be my guest and sell lettuce. And then make people on bikes deliver the food to the customers, so that they don't waste gasoline coming here. - Bengt

Even if Bengt acknowledges that it is not “thin” food, he quickly draws upon a rather harsh comparison; selling nothing but lettuce and using bikes to deliver food. Nevertheless, we would still argue that Bengt is in the spaces of 'schizoid cynicism', since he is neither functionally stupid, by not reflecting at all, nor cynical when discussing this matter. He reflects about that it is not “thin” food, that is, indicating that it is fat food. To weigh this up though, he mentions several positive effects that Berger has on the society – something we believe to be a form of “management lingo” or political correctness (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2017) from his side.

One employee who in particular stands out is Maja, whose approach to Berger, to some extent, goes in line with Alvesson and Spicer (2012) *functional stupidity*. She explicitly states that she has not reflected about Berger’s effects on the society, but that she is “just doing her job”. This indicates a lack of reflection, furthermore proving that even though most employees are conflicted — it is possible for employees to be somewhat functionally stupid about a specific matter:

I haven’t reflected about that [what effect Berger may have on society], really. I mean, it doesn’t feel like I’m pressuring people into buying [fast food], because it’s them who - in the end - choose “I want to eat fast food today, so I’m going to Berger”. They’ve already made up their mind, so I don’t feel that responsibility. I’m just doing my job, that’s how I feel. - Maja

To conclude this section, the vast majority, however, express more conflicting thoughts about Berger’s effects on the society, thus reinforcing the existence of 'schizoid cynicism'. On the one hand, obesity is expressed to be a negative effect and on the other hand, environmental work and vegetarian options are explained to be positive effects. The next part will discuss another conflicting theme involving cynicism. Focus is now on the employees’ reflections about gender division and gender essentialism at the workplace.

4.4 Conflicting thoughts about gender essentialism at the workplace

A conflictual theme that was discovered during the interviews and observations was the existing notion of gender essentialism. According to England (2010), gender essentialism can be explained by that women and men are innately and basically different in skills and interests for

reasons that are unchangeable. An example of this, is the notion that view women as more competent in service work and social interaction compared to men. Furthermore, it is common to use gender essentialism as an excuse for gender-based biases in society, that is, to justify the idea that service work traditionally held by women have lower pay and have less respect (Epstein, 1999; Gerson, 2002 cited in Charles, 2003).

One topic that the employees discussed is how the work tasks are divided between the employees. Usually, the girls perform some work tasks whereas the guys perform others. However, the employees do not fully question the reason for this division in workforce:

Yeah, so on the job, it's like, he [the manager] has placed all the girls in the drive through for example, and all the guys in the kitchen...because he doesn't think the guys can handle the drive through [...] he has said to me at several occasions that "the girls are usually a lot better here", and he's always been a little bit like, favoring girls. Then again, I don't know why he thinks that. - Fanny

It's the drive through, it's only girls who work there [...] I don't know, it's Bengt [the manager] who has said that it's supposed to be like that. No, but with a twinkle in his eye he said that. It's not like I don't know how to handle the drive through, but it's... if it becomes too much I panic. – Sebastian

These quotes demonstrate how some employees appear to have accepted that this is status quo, and whilst observing their reactions to the question it appears like the words of their manager is law. As one may argue, some employees have fallen into functional stupidity, by having excessive trust in authority (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), by what Bengt believes to be a known fact; that girls are usually better at Berger, more service-minded in themselves. Another employee, Emil, questions status quo:

Yeah, Bengt says, like, that the girls are better in the drive through because they can multitask, but yeah, I can do that too! - Emil

A negative aspect of functional stupidity is that it can prompt a large dissonance between what is proposed by management and contemporary reality of organizations, which ultimately can lead to employee cynicism (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). In this case, the proposition from management is that girls are better in the drive through, but the reality at Berger is rather that the boys can multitask or handle the drive through as well. As we can observe in Emil's answer,

this has prompted some cynicism. Another employee who stands quite critical against status quo, Louise, reflects about that it feels contradictory:

He [the restaurant manager] says that he wants all of us to learn everything, especially if you're going to work full time. But at the same time, everyone doesn't know how to handle the drive through and everyone is not capable of standing in the kitchen, so... - Louise

When trying to explain the reason for the division in work though, there are different opinions in how women and men manage service work:

We think it's a girl thing. We usually discuss it, that girls have better abilities to keep several things in their minds at the same time. But, when a guy handles it [the drive through], everything runs smoothly! I just think it is, that it just IS. It's predetermined. – Maiken

Maiken appears rather conflicted. On the one hand, she does not question status quo, but on the other hand she does reflect on that guys can do the job in the drive through as well as girls. She does not explore this notion further, or express criticism about it. Hence, we would argue that she is in the spaces of 'schizoid cynicism' on this subject. Another employee, Filippa, highlights how it has differed between girls and guys at Berger:

Girls are better. No, but Bengt [the manager] thinks himself that girls are more service-minded, that we are nicer, can do several different tasks at the same time. Yeah, I mean, I personally think that it's more fun to have it more mixed, but it takes a whole lot longer for a guy to learn - we've noticed that. It takes, if we say that it takes two weeks for a girl, it can take up to a month - if not longer - for a guy. - Filippa

Filippa emphasizes what most employees describe as the reason for the division in labour, that women can multitask better than men. This goes in line with *gender essentialism*, which in this case, means that there is a view of women as more competent in service work compared to men (England, 2010). Emil stands critical against this, meaning that men can do the same work as women: "I think that guys get treated like they are a little bit more stupid in themselves, when they first get here. Like, everything will take a longer time". When asking the deputy restaurant manager, she expresses herself quite ambivalently on the question:

Girls fit very well, it sounds a bit wrong, very degrading, but... in this profession. There's a bit of multitasking and some guys just have service, are happy, lovely guys, but you need a little, ah I don't know. – Emma

The quote above illustrates how Emma is conflicted. Rather than claiming that Emma is not reflecting on this matter, our interpretation is that it is difficult to grasp what her opinion is. She appears to be in the middle of cynicism and functional stupidity; where we argue that 'schizoid cynicism' takes place. She reflects, but does not follow through. Her use of words like “very degrading” demonstrates that although she has been affected by the norms at the company, she has reflected on the meaning of this view on women and men. This implies that she has reflected on it, but does not necessarily contemplate what consequences this could have. One consequence, which we see as problematic, is how company norms may fuel a notion of men as more inert or slow, as emphasized earlier by Emil, ultimately degrading in the opposite direction as well. In the quote below, Emma continues reflecting on gender diversity in workforce:

I don't know, but guys are supposed to be macho, work in their places and everybody may not think that it's super cool to work at Berger. Yeah, no, I don't know, girls are, we are, it sounds like gender roles now, and eh [...] And some guys want something they can brag about to girls, yeah I don't know. I don't study gender... -
Emma

In her reasoning, Emma uses gender essentialism as an excuse for gender-based biases in society (Epstein, 1999; Gerson, 2002 cited in Charles, 2003), explaining how men might not consider working at Berger due to its “status” on the labour market. Nevertheless, she continuously expresses doubts which, as above, we argue is the general pattern in 'schizoid cynicism'. Problematizing the gender essentialism situation further, Berger has a Gala each and every year where employees can win prizes such as “This year's drive through champion”, “This year's chef”, “This year's Express champion”. During this Gala, three different restaurants come together to eat a three-course dinner, participate in a prize ceremony and party together. The prize ceremony is individual for each restaurant. We believe that the interesting part, is that there exist prizes such as “This year's drive through champion” when only girls can win it. As explained by one employee, the distribution of prizes may sometimes create frustrations among the employees:

Last year it [the frustration] was mostly because a guy didn't win a specific prize. As we, as I thought, should've won. And then someone else overheard that I said that, so it got all wrong, and she thought that I meant that someone else didn't deserve the prizes and all that. - Sebastian

Sebastian reflected on that someone else should have won, which created a heated discussion during the prize ceremony. That it was a *guy* who did not win, was not reflected on excessively. As exemplified by Maiken, reflections about why some employees win appears to be quite gender neutral, not focusing on that only girls or guys can win:

After the Berger Gala there were a lot of frowns, almost like... not brawls, but people were upset because they were thinking that "I'm just as good as that person, but I haven't won. Why?". - Maiken

On top of this, there is a prize for "This year's upsell champion", based on all employees' upsell numbers. As expressed by most employees, the person in the drive through typically wins due to guests in the drive through generally purchasing more extra products — hence this prize is also a girls-only. This problem also exists with the prize "This year's chef" since, as Fanny mentioned earlier on, it is more common for guys to work in the kitchen. It does not appear like the employees have reflected over this situation, but more like they have focused on the fact that the prizes are distributed unfairly:

For some people it's merely negative, this [prize ceremony], I mean, the initiative to throw a party is so much fun, but when there's like... 13 prizes in total and yeah, we were four people who won almost everything. That's fucked up. And it was like that on every restaurant. So, you really can tell, which people are the loudest and most seen, or how to put it [...] Some people I voted for weren't even nominated, so that was a little bit weird. - Nicolas

To conclude this last part, the prize ceremony is not fair. Our reflections on the quotes is that the main goal is to motivate all employees, but it becomes contradictory when almost "only" girls can win some prizes and "only" guys others. What the employees put emphasis on however, is that one person can win four different prizes and that this is unfair. This is something both reflected on and discussed between employees, but it may also distract attention from the gender essentialism at play.

The section below discusses another conflicting theme involving cynicism, focusing on the employees' reflections about how they identify with Berger and if they are proud of working there.

4.5 Being a proud hamburger king or not?

When asking if the employees were proud of working at Berger, most employees had a hard time answering. A common theme was that their answers were somewhat contradictory, often trying to justify working at Burger by comparing it with being unemployed. During our initial interview with Filippa, she emphasized a clear “nah, I don't know”, thus prompting us to ask her once again during a repeat interview why she felt that way:

I mean, it's not like I'm embarrassed to say that I'm working at Berger. And if you say that you're the deputy restaurant manager, it sounds even better. If you say that you're an assistant [middle manager], that sounds good too, but when I was a normal employee I might have thought that it was a little bit embarrassing. But then again, I am [proud], absolutely. There's nothing to be ashamed of. Not many have jobs, so then you've got to be content with having a job at all. - Filippa

When asked if he is proud to work at Berger, Emil answers quite contradictory:

You know, there's people who don't even have jobs, but I wouldn't say that I hoisted the flag, so to speak, and it's not like I'm mega, super proud over it [my job], but I felt more like, before, that my friends had better jobs than I did and that maybe I wasn't... So, maybe I weren't that proud before, but now I mostly feel that it's cool, you know. - Emil

We can see that both Filippa and Emil are unsure about whether or not they are proud. Even though they claim that they are proud, they do not want to compare it to other jobs, but rather with being unemployed. An employee who describes this type of conflict in thought more clearly, is Sebastian:

Proud and proud... I guess you're proud to have [a job], I mean... Both yes and no. [...]. It's a little bit of both, I would say. I'm in between. - Sebastian

The emphasis in psychoanalysis, is that employees have conflicting feelings about the company, thus taking a position in between fully identifying and dis-identifying with it (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), as can be demonstrated in Sebastian's quote above. These conflicting thoughts, as expressed by Filippa, Emil and Sebastian, are in the spaces of what we define as 'schizoid cynicism'; rather than claiming that they are not reflective on this matter, our impression is that it is difficult to comprehend what their opinions are. Another employee who explains this type of conflict in thought is Fanny:

Fanny: Yeah, I guess you could say that it's fun to say that you work at Berger. No, I mean, it's a damn difficult question. You may not be proud to work at Berger really, but it's still cool to work at Berger because everyone likes Berger. If I were to choose a hamburger chain, like fast food, I would choose Berger.

Interviewers: Can you see a future within Berger?

Fanny: You mean me? No, absolutely not!

Building upon what Fanny said about not seeing a future at Berger, Nicolas claims that this is what determines whether or not he feels proud about where he works:

Yeah, I mean I wouldn't say that I'm proud, because that indicates that you're content. So that's the wrong word for it, I mean, I connect those two a lot (proud and content), and I'm not content here, I want to move on. – Nicolas

In his way of reasoning, Nicolas differs from other employees. Looking at the Matrix (*fig. 2*), which we have reproduced with a highlighted area for pedagogical reasons, there appears to be several employees who are not completely content, or at least satisfied, with their work situation. Whether or not this can be connected to employees being proud is hard to tell, but our interpretation of this is that it indicates that employees may not be fully committed to Berger.

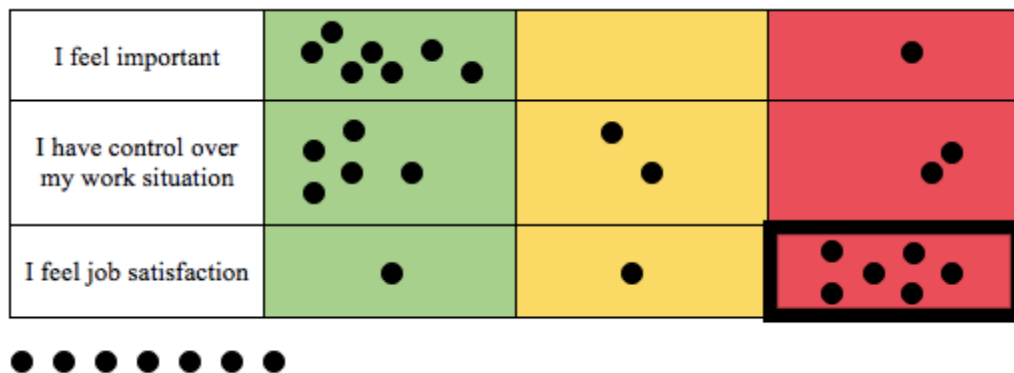


Figure 2. Matrix set up in Berger staff room, with highlighted area

Another quote reinforcing how most employees may not be fully committed to Berger, is Bengt's view on his employees: "In my imagination, most employees are sad to leave (work) and happy to go (to work). Unfortunately, it's the other way around". Bengt, however, also mentions how the morale is high amongst the employees and that they often recommend working at Berger in Lönne to their friends.

So why do some employees feel that they are proud of working at Berger, especially? Emma claims that it is because of the goodwill they do for to the society, by hiring employees through a Swedish company which helps people with disabilities to enter the labour market, Samhall:

Everything with Samhall, that you're using "that kind" of personnel, that maybe has a hard time entering the labour market - like Oskar who is here now. Who has, what's it called, Downs Syndrome. So, like, he gets to come here and work Monday to Friday from 9 to 2 pm, he thinks that it's so much fun! Even if he just walks around sweeping up fries and gets to help out, he wants to do it all the time, he's the one who wants to learn! Like, really want to learn. And it feels so good that you can give "them" that. That you have that, that Berger adapts, thinks that this is something we should do. That you have employees from... Samhall. [...] So yeah, I would say that, actually, I'm proud to work at Berger. - Emma

Even though Emma claims that she is proud to work at Berger, there is an emphasis on the word "actually", since it may indicate that it would not be expected of her to be proud. Another employee who is proud to work at Berger, says that it is due to her identifying with Berger's values and especially, their work with vegetarian options:

Yes, I am [proud to work at Berger], I've always been. [...] And then, now these last few years it's the vegetarian options. Since I'm a vegetarian myself, this is something I find super exciting and really can pride myself with. - Maiken

What amplifies Maiken's identification with Berger, is that she is a vegetarian herself. This may act as an example of work that Berger does to, what appears to be against all odds, make employees strongly identify with the company — trying to put an emphasis on greener options.

Even if employees feel that they are somewhat proud of working at Berger, this may also be affected by what other people think about their work:

I don't know, but I come from Lönne, you know, where people are like "you shouldn't work at a fast-food chain, you're better than that"; that attitude. Where you look down on people who does [work at fast-food restaurants]. - Emil

Social norms appear to affect whether or not some employees feel proud, possibly contributing to employees doubting the value of their work. Being told that you are better than working with fast food, as explained by Emil, can be an obstacle to feeling proud. As explained in psychoanalysis, a state of denial or resistance, may be due to doubts about the value of work (Halton, 2003), something we believe to be a key contributing factor to dis-identification at Berger, since many employees' express doubts about the value of selling fast food. The employee state of denial becomes clearer through how Maja explains whether or not she is proud. She claims that she feels proud of what their team can do together, but disregards that she is working at a fast-food restaurant at all. Thus, there exists conflicting feelings – Maja simultaneously distances herself from the company, but claims that she is proud of her work team:

If I'm proud? That depends on the context... because I studied music in high school and people always said that typical thing, like: "you're going to end up selling dip sauces and extra fries anyways" and that's how it is for me now. I mean, I don't really think about that it's Berger - that it's a hamburger restaurant, a fast-food chain... I think more about what we do in our work group. And that makes me proud.
- Maja

Our interpretation of this quote, is that Maja is expressing some degree of 'schizoid cynicism', with emphasis on being proud dependent "on the context".

4.6 Summary of analysis

To summarize the analysis, we recognized that there exists some employee cynicism at the workplace. Looking at, for example, employee attitudes toward work practices, it becomes clear that there exist negative feelings towards Berger. Nevertheless, the research findings *mainly* revealed that the employees have conflicting thoughts about Berger as a company. This becomes evident when the employees discuss Berger's effects on society, gender division at the workplace and whether or not they are proud to work there, the interview answers being distinguished by ambiguity and doubts. Thus, the employees appear to be somewhere in between cynicism and functional stupidity, arguably in the spaces of 'schizoid cynicism'.

In the next section, *discussion*, we will examine cynicism in a more general term and explain our study's key insights.

5. Discussion

We began this project curious about how to understand cynicism in an era of ambivalence and uncertainty. With this in mind, we developed the following question to guide us in conducting our research, structuring our research findings and to be an inspiring source for our data analysis and discussion:

- How and under what circumstances are employees at Berger cynical?

Having an assumption of that employees working at Berger, a fast-food restaurant, would be cynical, we sought to problematize the notion about employees being either one hundred percent cynical or not. Our aim was to further explore what we thought could be a novel theoretical contribution; that there exist intermediate positions between cynicism and functional stupidity where employees may be positioned.

The thinking, as emphasized by Pratt and Doucet (2000), about that there is no simple way of categorizing employee emotions in clear-cut groups is one example of the increasing complexity we wanted to study. This sparked our interest to explore a concept that has been framed to a large extent as an either or feeling in organization studies: cynicism. Turning toward cynicism scholarship, we discovered that although some theorists mention that subjectivity leaves room for doubts within the spaces of dis-identification and identification (Fleming & Spicer, 2003), this notion is not explored further when researching employee cynicism. Rather, earlier literature on cynicism has focused on how cynicism occurs in means of employee behaviour (Gossett & Kilker 2006; Korczynski 2007; Sewell 2008), in organizational change contexts (Reichers, Wanous & James, 1997; Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005) and how employees span between being cynical and other feelings (Paulsen, 2017). Further, earlier research discusses cynicism in general and assumes that employees are either cynical or not. But it is also reasonable to assume that an employee cannot be fully cynical or functionally stupid. It is easy to imagine an employee who possesses different feelings towards their employing organization, perhaps being positive towards the company's environmentally sustainable products whilst being more cynical of the organization's low payment to employees in third world countries. Whilst the employee can reflect on certain matters more than others, it is unlikely that the employee would be fully cynical or functionally stupid on a matter. As a

result, we believe that the employees cannot be put in a specific category; *either* cynical *or* functionally stupid, but should rather be seen as somewhere in between.

Our study yields two key insights. First, cynicism and functional stupidity co-exist, that is, there is some critical thinking as well as non-reflectiveness. Second, we offer 'schizoid cynicism' as a way to theorize and explain the intermediate position many employees take towards their employing organization. 'Schizoid cynicism' means that one is simultaneously cynical and functionally stupid, thus, one expresses conflicting feelings. It is a temporary state of mind (on the continuum between cynicism and functional stupidity). In consequence, 'schizoid cynicism' implies a struggle between cynicism and functional stupidity where the resulting location can never be fully cynical nor functionally stupid, but somewhere in between. In this study, this location manifested itself in two ways. First, one and the same employee could have conflicting feelings towards Berger as a whole – being more cynical towards some themes whereas being more non-reflective towards others. Second, one and the same employee could be in-between cynicism and functional stupidity on one specific matter, for example work division based on gender, their opinion being expressed ambivalently.

Based on our key insights, and as emphasized in section 1.2 research question, this study also challenges the notion of cynicism being an either-or concept. Our study thus answers the question, How can cynicism be explained as a non-uniform variable? In the section that follows, our conclusion, we will provide a short summary of the discussion, as well as discuss how the notion of cynicism being a non-uniform variable is significant for future research.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to understand how, and under what circumstances, employees at a fast food-restaurant are cynical. Our study revealed that although there exists some employee cynicism at Berger, the employees appeared to be non-reflective, or at least conflicted, about some aspects of the organization. This prompted a re-thinking of made assumptions; that employees at Berger would be cynical. Moreover, the definition of concepts such as cynicism did not encompass what we observed at our case company, since employees had conflicting feelings towards Berger. Thus, we created the concept of 'schizoid cynicism' to explain the intermediate position employees took towards their employing organization. More specifically, the themes that we examined were employees' thoughts about work practices, Bengt being a partner and a manager, Berger's effects on society, work division based on gender and whether or not employees are proud of working at Berger. The first and second theme are two themes that the employees were more critical towards. These are not themes that depict an employee's conflicting feelings on a specific subject, but rather what (combined with other themes) demonstrates how 'schizoid cynicism' exists towards the company as a whole. To explain further, this was illustrated when, for example, one and the same employee expressed some cynicism towards work practices, but simultaneously did not reflect on Berger's effects on the society. The three latter themes however, demonstrate how an employee can have conflicting feelings on a specific matter – expressing both the “on the one hand” and “on the other hand”. Neither being purely cynical, nor being purely functionally stupid; reflecting on a matter, but not following through on these reflections.

Furthermore, our scale (*fig. 3*) offers a tool for understanding the mode in which employees can be “in between” cynicism and functional stupidity. As this model also illustrates, there may be cases where cynicism and functional stupidity appear quite confidently, as was demonstrated in this study when employees reacted towards work practices.



Figure 3: An illustration of how employees can be conflicted or “in between” cynicism and functional stupidity

As with most research, there are limitations to this study. Important to consider, is that it is impossible to conduct a complete study. With background in our aim for self-reflexivity (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), we have recognized characteristics of methodology and design that have influenced our study, which could have been done differently. Firstly, a constraint has been the limited amount of time given to complete this research. Given that this is a Master's thesis, the time frame has been restricted to a few months, indicating that additional time could have been spent in order to gain a broader understanding of the research subject. Furthermore, this also means that more time could have been spent to indulge in interpretation and unpacking of data. In response to this, we knowingly commenced working on our research idea and collection of empirical material earlier, in order to reduce the impact time limitations could have on our study. Nonetheless, we suggest that scholars indulge in future research within this field through a longitudinal study, since it would be able to offer a more detailed account of conflicting emotions within organizations. Secondly, in our opinion it is important to acknowledge that reality is ambiguous and context dependent. That said, we believe that conducting our study at one of Berger's restaurants in Sweden has impacted our results to a large extent. Although this study does not seek to generalize findings, it is significant to consider that our study is context-dependent and that researching employee cynicism at Berger in another country could generate different results. Thirdly, our participant observations could act as a limitation in two different ways. In part, conducting participant observations means a risk of reporting bias data, since the researcher can both romanticize or deprecate data based on subjectivity and involvement with tenants. Also, participate observations may include deceiving research subjects to gain information, which poses some ethical difficulties. As mentioned when describing one of our participative observations, some employees at Berger thought that we were new employees, and not there to conduct research. We did not, however, avoid announcing that we were there to gain information if the question arose. To acknowledge potential biases due to participant observations, we also proof-read the study several times, being especially critical of how we framed Berger and the employees.

Regarding the "theoretical reach" of our research contribution (Charmaz, 2006), we believe that it can be extended beyond the concept of cynicism. There will be differences between occupational, national and organizational context, and we welcome studies that seek to explore 'schizoid cynicism', this intermediate position, when analyzing cynicism in other settings. Based on our findings, we suggest that a critical lens on cynicism and other organizational

phenomenon is useful in understanding organizations. We suggest that there is relevance in expanding people's mindsets and make them think differently about certain concepts, in our case cynicism. The intermediate position we found that many employees took is a reaction, which is not limited to employees in the fast-food sector, but something that can occur in different organizational contexts. Thus, this study may prove interesting for further research as it demonstrates that some concepts have an *either-or fallacy*, not fully exploring the intermediate spaces in which individuals are positioned. A tool for enhancing new ways of observing organizational life, as used by us in this study, is psychoanalysis. In principle, the argument is not difficult to comprehend. By putting emphasis on the complexity of human emotions, individuals need not be categorized in clear-cut groups. Rather, the same individual can be in-between different emotions. With this in mind, we argue that future research could aid in rethinking and redefining concepts in organizational theory to better explain the reality of organizational contemporary life — with all the complexity it inhabits.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

General questions

1. How long have you've been working at Berger?
2. How would you describe your role at Berger?
3. Describe your work tasks
4. What motivates you at work?

Cynicism against work practices

5. In general, how long would you deem that employees stay at Berger? What do you think that is dependent upon?
6. How would you describe the morale?
7. When do you have a good feeling/less good feeling whilst working? What is that feeling dependent upon?
8. How would you describe how your co-workers feel about their work at Berger?
9. How would you say that you deal with customers?
10. If you're having a bad day, would you say that it affects your service? Why/Why not?
11. Would you say that your mood towards the customers, can be affected by the customers?
12. How do you handle stress?
13. If it's stressy, would you say that your way of working changes? If, then how?
14. Would you say that your co-workers' service changes when it's stressy?
15. How would you describe the ideal/perfect employee at Berger?

How people behave "behind the scenes"

16. Does everybody take responsibility for the work tasks, even when Bengt is absent?
17. How do the employees at Berger use the "office", for example during calmer times?

Evaluation and development

18. Does there exist an evaluation for employees? Tell us-
19. What kind of questions are asked?

20. Do you believe that these questions are suited for your working position? Are some questions more difficult to answer, because it's about a work position you've never tried i.e. the drive through?
21. Do you have any follow-ups on these evaluations?

Thoughts about gender essentialism

22. What do you think is the underlying thought behind the work division at work?
23. How is it that (most of the time/often) girls work in the drive through?
24. Has anyone ever reacted on the fact that girls work in the drive through and guys in the kitchen? Please explain further.
25. Can you, as a guy, feel that you are less guys at the restaurant. If, then how?
26. Would you say that women and men are treated equally at the workplace?

Effects on the society

27. What is your opinion on fast-food?
28. Would you say that Berger has an affect on the society?
29. Can you give us some examples of good things Berger does for the society, or an example of less good things Berger does that can affect the society?
30. How do you feel about selling fast-food?
31. Now that the restaurant works more with vegetarian options, is that something that is communicated from management? If, then how?
32. How do you, as a new employee at Berger, get informed about what Berger does for the society?

The Berger Gala

33. How does the Berger-gala nominations work?
34. Would you say that the distribution of prizes is fair? Explain why/why not?
35. We have noticed that some have won several prizes at the same Gala, do you believe that that is fair?
36. How is the atmosphere in the group after the Berger Gala? What do you think that is dependent upon?

Bengt as manager and partner

37. What does upselling mean to you? Is it important? For you/the restaurant?
38. If you upsell, what kind of feeling do you get?
39. How do you think it affects the employees and the restaurant that Bengt is a partner?
40. Do you think Bengt can be put in a weird position, wanting to act in favor of both the employees and the restaurant?
41. What do you think about SEN - “smile, eye contact, nod”?
42. Why do you think that Bengt wants you to follow SEN?
43. Have you noticed that some of your colleagues have react differently on “SEN”? Give an example.

Being proud

44. Do you feel proud, working at Berger? Why/why not.
45. Would you say that your co-workers are proud of working at Berger? Why/why not?
46. What does Berger mean to you?
47. What are Berger’s values?
48. Do you feel that they suit your personal goals and values?

Lastly...

49. Do you want to add something?

Interview questions to Bengt

General questions:

1. How would you describe your role at Berger?
2. Describe your work tasks?

Cynicism against work practices:

3. In general, how long would you deem that employees stay at Berger? What do you think that is dependent upon?
4. How would you describe the morale?
5. When do you have a good feeling/less good feeling whilst working? What is that feeling dependent upon?
6. How would you describe how your employees feel about their work at Berger?

7. Would you say that your employees' service changes when it's stressful?
8. How would you describe the ideal/perfect employee at Berger?
9. Can you, as a manager, feel that employee behaviour change towards the customers if they - for example - have given notice to leave?

How people behave "behind the scenes"

10. Do you believe that everybody take responsibility for the work tasks, even when you are absent?
11. How do the employees at Berger use the "office", for example during calmer times?

Evaluation and development:

12. Does there exist an evaluation for employees? Tell us-
13. What kind of questions are asked?
14. Do you have any follow-ups on these evaluations?

Thoughts about gender essentialism

15. Does there exist an "underlying thought" behind the work division at work?
16. Have employees complained over the work division?
17. Explain why girls often work in the drive through and guys in the kitchen?

Effects on the society

18. What is your opinion on fast-food?
19. Would you say that Berger has an affect on the society?
20. Can you give us some examples of good things Berger does for the society, or an example of less good things Berger does that can affect the society?
21. Now that the restaurant works more with vegetarian options, is that something that is communicated from management? If, then how?
22. How new employees at Berger get informed about what Berger does for the society?
23. We've heard that you're planting trees in Africa – why is that? Do you have an opinion on this?

The Berger Gala

24. How does the Berger-gala nominations work?

25. Would you say that the distribution of prizes is fair? Explain why/why not?
26. How is the atmosphere in the group after the Berger Gala? What do you think that is dependent upon?

Bengt being a partner

27. What does upsell mean to you? Is it important to you? To the restaurant?
28. Would you say that sometimes you can get in a weird position - being in-between what's best for the employees versus what's best for the restaurant?
29. What's the thought behind SEN – smile, eye contact, nod?
30. Why is it important that employees follow “SEN”?
31. Have you ever noticed mixed reactions to “SEN” as a concept? Please explain.