

# Queer Workers and Workspaces

*Stories about emotions and embodied experiences of LGBTQIA people in work-related spaces*

Tristan Williamson  
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Department of Gender Studies  
Lund University  
Supervisor: Signe Bremer Gagnesjö

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to map and investigate the embodied experiences of LGBTQIA people in work-related spaces. The study analyses stories of emotions and experiences based on gender, sexual orientation, and other social categories and how these intersect with normative workspaces. As such, I use spatial terms of norms to approach the questions of which bodies can move and inhabit what spaces whilst accounting for the consequential affects.

The study is based on semi-structured interviews, some of which were conducted digitally or with the go-along technique. The informants identify with nonnormative genders or sexual orientation, and work and reside in either Sweden or Denmark. The author's own personal experiences are also included in the material.

Using an intersectional approach, the material is analysed by looking at the intersections of how bodies move in spaces. The results pinpoint how intersecting forms of breaking norms matter in navigating workspaces. Importantly, the study finds that clothes, time, and various spaces matter for queer workers whilst negotiating feelings of safety and risk in relation to workspaces.

**Keywords:** space, body, emotions, labour, queer; rum, kropp, känslor, arbete

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## Introduction

“If I feel like most people are going to be accepting, then, yeah, I feel more comfortable”

“I was feeling, ‘okay, is it okay to wear it here or not in this corporate thing’”

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“If anything, probably my queer identity contributes to that I feel comfortable in that workplace”

“You feel like, ‘oh, this is the mould I have to go into’”

The excerpts above are from the interviews in this study. I searched for the keyword “feel” in all the transcriptions I have made, selected a few and assembled them to find a range of emotions that flows through lived and imagined experiences. The informants who have contributed with these excerpts identify with nonnormative genders and sexual orientations and reside in either Sweden or Denmark. Their memories and emotional expressions are connected to how they interact with spaces at and around work. It is quite telling that there should be such a range of emotions. The interviews and their monologues are so different from one another and yet they connect through patterns of so-called queerness and labour. How does it feel when moving towards normative spaces, based on gender, sexual orientation, race, class, able-bodiedness, age, and other social parameters? I believe that is what the montage of emotions above resembles. It is also what has driven this research.

This study problematises naturalised conceptions of gender, sexual orientation, race, and other social categories in work-related environments. I feel labour, whether productive or reproductive, is somewhat forced upon us. Financially, there are few ways to avoid workspaces. It is therefore important to question how these inevitable places are *felt* for some. How we move in and out of rooms, how we are frowned upon when perceived as strange or wrong in certain social settings; how anxious, stressful, hurt, glad, joyful, content, melancholic and queer we can feel. For queer workers, emotions of criss-crossing and cutting through norms can leave emotional scars, memories, and fantasies.

The study follows a line of thoughts about the exclusionary traits of work and workspaces and how they affect people who do not conform to heteronormative and cisnormative lives and values. For instance, a MUCF (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society) report described the “heteronormative and homo-/transphobic workplace” as involving both imaginative and physical violence towards LGBTQ workers, as well as embodying a

deviant form of personhood (Bredda normen, 2017:26-27). As such, hetero- and cisnorms are constantly present in workspaces, which can have emotional impacts on queer workers.

## **Purpose and questions**

My research project deals with experiences of people who identify themselves through nonnormative genders and sexual orientations in work-related spaces.

The purpose is to map and analyse normative workspaces by looking into stories of emotions and embodied experiences of work-related spaces by people who identify with nonnormative genders and sexual orientations. I focus on how workers in this study answer, negotiate and reason around these experiences.

The purpose builds on a line of queer-feminist and gender research within space theory, embodiment, LGBTQI experiences in working life, and intersectionality. People in this study identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, queer and/or other nonnormative genders and sexual orientations, and work or through other means try to gain economic security. In focus are also other intersecting social categories, which are, amongst others, race, ethnicity, class, migration status, national identity, and age. I emphasise how differences and similarities can arise in these intersections, alike how experiences of work-related spaces occur through people's own perspectives. Furthermore, my purpose is inspired by postcolonial research, i.e. global processes in local change through neoliberal and capitalist systems involving work and economy (Dhawan et al., 2015), as well as the embodiment of the racialised Other as hateable and abject bodies (Ahmed, 2006).

I understand workspaces, like home and public places, as influenced and aligned by notions of gender, sexual orientation, race, and other social categories (Ahmed, 2006; Doan, 2010; Göransson, 2012). Furthermore, it is important not to just show experiences in and around workspaces, but how emotions matter and how they stick and cluster between spaces, objects, and bodies. I understand emotions not in terms of residing within oneself but circulating between objects and bodies (Ahmed, 2006).

By using a combination of Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology and other works on normative lines, I want to shed light on the spatial relations in how informants negotiate their embodied experiences in workspaces. My main research question concretises this form of inquiry:

How are workers who identify with nonnormative genders and/or sexual orientations affected by embodied experiences in workspaces?

The significance of embodied experiences is not only dependent on the human body and the space it inhabits, but also non-human actors (Barad, 2003). I feel that it is important to consider how clothes and other materials on the body matter in embodied experiences, which leads to the question below:

How are queer workers' clothes and accessories effects of their embodiment in workspaces?

Problematising the thresholds between home and work, my third research question probes the area between home and work and how these so-called between spaces arouse various feelings in relation to work:

What emotions are expressed in relation to queer workers' embodied experiences between home and work?

In addition to these questions I also want to put forth my own (emotional) experiences to this study. What role do I play in the research process? Am I not also at work? I therefore account for the reflexive and emotional work whilst conducting this study.

## **Disposition**

Next in the introduction are research dialogues, theoretical underpinnings, and method and methodology. In *research dialogues* I discuss studies and current debates that are relevant to my study. *Theoretical underpinnings* include discussions on space, emotions, and normativity. Here I present ideas and theories that underlie my analytical points. In *method and methodology* I discuss the methods used, and the methodological and epistemological choices that guide the research process. It includes my use of *work stories*, arguments of an intersectional research, and ethical choices and concerns in doing this research. Finally, in the second part of this study, I present *experiences*. This empirical part is divided into three themed chapters, *clothing*, *safe*

*place within, and between home and work.* I round off with *final words* where I summarise and conclude this study.

## **Research dialogues**

Situated in the interdisciplinary field of Gender Studies, I see this study as a queer and intersectional research on space and temporality. It is home to questions of the body, spatiality and temporality, materiality, emotionality, and normativity. It could therefore touch upon other research fields not mentioned. I believe that the study brings questions about the body, emotions, and spatiality into gender scientific working life research whilst also focusing on labour in queer and feminist research. These focal points are seldom looked into within the respective fields.

I explore, amongst other things, the spatial and temporal relations of gendered, sexual, and racial norms that persist in work environments. As such, Petra L. Doan's article "The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces – Reflections from Beyond" (2010) is close to my study, as it interrogates the "relationship between gender and the space in which it is performed" (Ibid:648). Importantly, Doan probes the tyranny that arise for people who challenge hegemonic expectations and how these expectations signify appropriate gendered behaviour. What moves Doan's work closer to my own is mainly through the intersection of queer theory meeting spatial theory. Doan locates gender performativity and normative behaviour to certain places: public, quasi-public, private, semi-private. Through an autoethnographic method, Doan locates experiences, from harassment to affirmation, to certain spaces, including the workplace. As an artefact of patriarchal structuring, the tyranny of gender does not only affect trans\*people. But it has specifically dire effects on people who do not conform to hetero- and cisnormative conceptions of gender, which are contingent upon spatial (and temporal) contexts.

Another study that is close to mine is ethnologist Michelle Göransson's dissertation *Materialised sexualities: on the emergence, negotiation and durability of norms* (2012). Göransson approaches the intersections of body, spaces, and things. In this regard, they go about analysing the processes of how heteronorms are shaped and actuated by matter. For me, it is Göransson's usage of queer theory, queer phenomenology and dedication to materialisations, heteronormativity and space that is close to my study. I also use ethnographic methods which are inspired by Göransson.

In terms of materiality and clothes I want to mention the dissertation by fashion scientist Philip Warkander, "*This is all fake, this is all plastic, this is me*": *A study of the interrelations*

*between style, sexuality and gender in contemporary Stockholm* (2013). It investigates the production of styles and the materialisation processes regarding sexuality and gender. On the subject of home, public, safe, and unsafe spaces Leslie Moran and Beverly Skeggs bring up key issues in lived and imagined experiences of safety, security, and violence amongst LGBTQIA people in the UK in their extensive study, *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety* (2004). Finally, I want to pinpoint the importance of *Queer lines: Living and ageing as an LGBTQ person in a heteronormative world* (2016) by Anna Siverskog. As a combined research of gerontology and queer studies, it uses a life course perspective on queer life that specifically denotes older LGBTQ-identified people. Using a life story method, Siverskog approaches the intersections of gender, age, sexuality, and expectations in a heteronormative world.

Most of the works in this section and in the theoretical discussions below stem from gender, feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theory. This is a testament to the many fields within which I do research. That said, I identify this study with two approaches within the field of gender studies. The first is *queer-feminist* approach. It outlines the relation between queer and feminist research in critically probing heteronorms and gendered spaces (Rosenberg, 2002; Lööv, 2014). Although queer-feminism, as discussed by Rosenberg (2002), has its starting point in sexuality, I wish to add a feminist tradition that is rooted in Black feminism's intersectionality and postcolonial queer-feminism. That is, engaging in "the imagination and desires of both dispensers as well as receivers of justice" (Dhawan et al., 2015:17). The second approach is *trans/feminism*. Here, the highlight is on "the many feminisms that are trans inclusive and that affirm the diversity of gender expression" (Stryker & Bettcher, 2016:7). As such, this approach is also part of intersectional feminisms in understanding the configuration of embodiment, gender, identity, sexuality, and their ever-changing, complex processes (Ibid:9).

On transgender people in the labour market, the recent study "Hiring Discrimination Against Transgender People: Evidence from a Field Experiment" corroborated their experiences of being discriminated against when applying for work. It found that fictitious job applications centred on the male- and female-dominated occupations. That is, the estimates of discrimination were larger when transgender applicants were compared to the respective occupations, especially male-dominated.

Finally, one title I drew a lot of my preparatory work on is Arlie Russell Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (2012). I do not actually use the logics and theoretical underpinnings of emotional labour in this study – emotional labour being the management of feelings that is required by certain jobs and work duties. Indeed, I focus on



emotions, albeit regarding bodies and workspace rather than management. However, Hochschild explains that the emotional labour undertaken concerns the relations between body and mind, which “calls for a coordination of mind and feeling” (Ibid:7). Thus, work duties, supervised by companies and employers, require both the physical body and the emotional actions that follow. I believe the informants in this study coordinate mind and feeling in similar fashion; how queer workers negotiate and reason through emotions in workspaces.

## **Theoretical underpinnings**

In this section I will discuss the theories that are used in this study. They range from space, hetero- and cisnormativity, to emotion. The theories discussed will be guiding the analysis in the experiences below. Thus, the theories can be considered as underpinnings as they construct a supporting foundation for the empirical discussions ahead.

### **Space**

Space is “alive, dynamic and relational” (Bhattacharyya et al., 2017:96). It concerns emotional states and bodily (daily) lived experiences (Lefebvre, 1991; Bhattacharyya et al., 2017). In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed creates a dialogue between queer studies and phenomenology and poses the question: “What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as orientated?” (Ibid:1). Ahmed uses the phenomenological concept *orientation*, as a way of how we inhabit spaces, and how these are shared with what and who. I understand it as being the spatial terms of how we encounter norms regarding sexuality, gender, and race and how we are directed or orientated towards these. Orientation is then that which aligns bodies to certain lines, towards certain things and spaces. Lines are paths that we repetitively tread, which are made intelligible by what Ahmed calls *the straight line* (Ibid:23). This concept describes the normative and performative nature of so-called correct lines regarding gender, sexuality, race, et cetera. That is, the straight line constitutes a white, western, ableist, heteronormative narrative which renders those deviating from the straight line as misplaced and disposable (Ahmed, 2006). Importantly, those deviating from the straight line create new lines to follow. Such deviation can come across by queering lines or being unable to extend the reach of the body in spaces. Ahmed calls this *disorientation* (2006:10), which is the sense of being out of place or having lost direction. For instance, in a world shaped by compulsory heterosexuality, the body that does not follow this direction is unable to extend the shape of this world. Thus, a new shape and direction is created (Ibid:20).

### *Bodily dwelling and extension*

Ahmed (2006) explains that “bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling” (Ibid:9). I understand this bodily dwelling as the embodiment of space, where the body “is affected and shaped by its surroundings” (Ibid). Bodily dwelling is also about inhabiting space and the *extension* of bodies (Ibid:11). For instance, orientating on the straight line allows certain bodies to extend the reach of their bodies into unfamiliar spaces. However, as I mentioned earlier, disorientation occurs when this extension fails. This can happen if spaces, already inhabitable by certain bodies, do not leave room for others (Ibid:11). Ahmed describes the lesbian body moving in heterosexual and heteronormative spaces to invoke disorientation and feelings of being “out of place” (Ibid:12). Failing to extend the reach of one’s body can also produce feelings of being stopped in one’s path. For instance, black bodies experience disorientating effects when they move in spaces that are orientated around whiteness. They are therefore prevented from extending due to their hypervisible presence in these white spaces (Ibid:24).

Racism, as much as transphobia and homophobia, stop certain bodies to inhabit and dwell in spaces, particularly those dominantly white and heteronormative. Spaces conditioned on experiences and histories of colonial corporeality, where the shape of the world is made from whiteness and racism, stop the extension of black bodies. They become objectified, placed along with other objects in the white world. “Whiteness” is made implicit (Fanon, 2008; Ahmed, 2006). Fanon describes how anti-black racism leaves impressions on racialised bodily dwelling. This does not only create hypervisibility, but constantly reminds racialised bodies about their bodies and dwellings.

### *Feelings of home*

If orientations and bodily dwelling is about being able to extend the reach of one’s body, in what ways are comfort and safety invoked in creating home-like dwelling? Whether the workplace is regarded as a place fit for homey touches or just a site of zombie-like efforts, how is the feeling of home aroused, when and where does it start and end?

Ahmed explains that spaces extend the body, which impacts the body’s dwelling, “that, in the first instance, [inhabiting spaces] is unfamiliar, but that we can imagine – sometimes with fear, other times with desire – might come to feel like home. [...] It is not always obvious which places are the ones where we can feel at home” (Ahmed, 2006:10). That home-like feeling in certain spaces can therefore be impossible to predict, which can generate fear, desire, and other

emotional states. I end up asking myself, how does home take shape vis-à-vis other non-home spaces, such as workplaces? Ahmed compares the feelings of comfort to sinking in a comfortable chair, specifically bodies that so-called fit in. The comfort is concealed for the person having that sinking feeling, whereas discomfort is felt for the (queer) person who does not. For the former, “normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it” (Ibid:147). The discomfort for queer subjects entails moments of non-sinking and requires “active forms of negotiation in different times and places” (Ibid:153). Thus, queer lives include issues of non-fitting or discomfort. These (queer) feelings, in turn, can produce both limitations and possibilities, which can have both difficult and exciting effects (Ibid:154). How one experiences their own illegitimacies towards normative ways of life can have complex affective structures.

Space in which feelings of home come about extends one’s body (Massey, 1994; Ahmed, 2006). When we often speak of home we speak of comfort and safety. Is it then that being able to extend one’s body and the feelings of home, is also to extend comfort and safety? Moran & Skeggs (2004) in *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety* write:

Comfort and home are ways of imagining place and practices of location intimately associated with safety and security. Feelings of safety and security are about experiences of being *in and out of place*. (109, my emphasis)

There is a fundamental link between feelings of home and feelings of safety and security to being in and out of place. Lesbian and gay experiences heard in Moran & Skeggs put ambivalence as a central component in understanding how feelings of home are made and experienced. Importantly, they find that comfort and home challenge the assumption of private and public spaces as imagined and lived as distinct from each other. As I have heard from informants in this study, comfort and home are significant in experiences “of being in place, of belonging” (Ibid:108) which are otherwise located away from domestic areas. As such, public spaces with feelings of home can extend beyond the confines of home, or perhaps the confines of home can be extended. Whichever way, such extension is dependent on bodily dwelling.

### **Heteronormativity**

Heteronormativity constitutes institutional and structural relations of heterosexuality as default, which means deviant forms of sexual orientations reject or fail to incorporate or follow these norms. It sets a certain normative way of life that allows for a system to be organised around heterosexuality (Ambjörnsson, 2006; Ahmed, 2014; Butler, 1990). Heteronormativity seeks to

uphold and reproduce gendered and sexual ideals that uphold monogamous heterosexual relations. That is, upholding these norms render heterosexuality as desirable and even natural, which in turn becomes invisible or compulsory (Ambjörnsson, 2006; McRuer, 2006). Heterosexuality, then, is based on the naturally given notion of sorting gender/sex into dichotomous categories: woman and man. These complete opposites, in turn, should desire each other and follow certain lines and norms (Ambjörnsson & Jönsson, 2016; Butler, 1990).

The way I approach heteronormativity is through queer-feminist and postcolonial perspectives to foreground its white, western, ableist and compulsory implications in work-related settings. Robert McRuer's *Crip Theory* (2006), for example, critically approaches compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness and argues that "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness" (Ibid:2). Such an interwoven system is in turn set on the backdrop of neoliberal capitalist economic and cultural relations (Ibid). Importantly, the production of queerness and deviance, as Ahmed (2006) argues through lines and orientation, are the undesirable and unintelligible residue that come with a heteronormative system.

Whilst deviance is at times accepted, others have shown to what extent it is accepted and how it can have racial implications in constructing queer and non-queer subjects (see Petzen, 2012; Kosnick, 2015; El-Tayeb, 2012; Bracke, 2012; Haritaworn, 2012). In Haritaworn's *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others* (2015), we follow how the "queer lover [...] becomes a lovely sight in the shadow of racialised Others" (Ibid:154). Haritaworn enquires about the gendered and racialised bodies omitted from view where new queer bodies appear as positive signs of diversity; "much can be (and has been) said about the colonial, cis-heteropatriarchal, and disablist logics of this liberal identity ideal, which has if anything become more hegemonic under neoliberalism" (Ibid:155). The "identity ideal" (Ibid) that works to establish correct queer subjects are the works of *homonormative* (Ibid:11) white ideals, excluding and marginalising bodies which do not fit dominant western queer norms. For instance, the Muslim queer, the disabled, and racialised Others. Western nationalist ideals follow this thread of how queer subjects inhabit space. They do so through gentrification, displacement, and sexual exceptionalism (Haritaworn, 2015; Puar, 2005). In this sense, it is worth considering homonormative lines to describe the accommodation of ideal queer bodies and the rejection of those illegitimate and abjectified (Stryker, 1994; Ahmed, 2006).

## **Cisnormativity**

Like heteronormativity, cisnormativity as a concept points towards how intelligible and recognisable subjects are constructed through disciplinary power techniques and gender and sexual norms (Nord et al., 2016). For instance, their genealogy can be found in Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix, where bodies are sorted into feminine women and masculine men, with biological differences and bound to desire each other. However, whilst heteronormativity focuses on compulsory heterosexuality, I use cisnormativity to point towards trans\*subjects. The asterisk after trans is meant to show the variety of identities that people use to identify themselves which are not cisgender. Trans\* can include but are not exclusive to genderfluid, non-binary, agender, two-spirit, gender non-conforming, amongst others.

Understanding the concept cisnormativity allows us to consider the invisibility of trans\*gender experiences vis-à-vis cisgender. Cisnormativity unfolds “the subjectifying system instead of [...] the two subject positions cisgender and transgender” (Nord et al., 2016:6, my translation). That is, understanding gender norms with which subjects are constructed as intelligible and disposable, moves away from dichotomous relations between cis and trans whilst simultaneously unfolding the subversive strengths in making visible trans\*experiences. There are criticisms towards the dichotomous effects of invoking transgender and cisgender. As Enke (2013) puts it, they become essentialised and contrasted identity positions, which make other gender identities and expressions such as agender and gender fluid invisible (Nord et al., 2016). However, I see cisnormativity as a way of addressing and undermining the subjectification processes that construct the “seams and sutures” in us (Stryker, 1994:241). The use of cisnormativity, through its critical approach towards subjectification (and abjectification) of bodies, helps us to understand “how we, as a society, construct intelligible subjects, and which function the abject, that which cannot be recognised as human, have” (Nord et al., 2016:5, my translation). Stryker uses this logic to deconstruct norms and move towards the subject's constitutional instability, how we all are constructed and reconstructed in unstable and ambiguous terms. Thus, we should all be concerned about cisnormative subjectification processes inasmuch as we all stem from them (Stryker, 1994; Nord et al., 2016).

## *Clothing*

A way cisnormativity can be concretised is to pinpoint nonnormative gender and sexual expression. One of the techniques used in the informants' bodily dwelling are clothes and materiality. At numerous occasions – sometimes simultaneously – clothes and materiality provided protection, risk, strength, happiness, misery, and ambivalence for the informants, me

included. At times with emotional reflections. Consequently, it is one of the theoretical considerations that came at a later stage. As I did not expect how clothes, accessories and other objects affected bodily dwelling. Warkander (2013) sees the body “as an ongoing process, defined in large part by its place in different forms of interaction” (Ibid:212-213), and is dependent on the context in which the body orientates. Similarly, Ahmed describes the body as being affected and moved by orientation and dwelling, tossed between familiarity and unfamiliarity. I therefore ask myself how objects mediate and facilitate the body and its dwelling? “To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must “turn away” from objects that take us off this line” (Ahmed, 2006:21). Objects appear before bodies whilst treading lines, whether they affirm or reject hegemonic norms.

In “Posthumanist Performativity”, Barad (2003) explains that materiality is not merely an effect of human agency, but itself an “active factor in processes of materialization” (Ibid:827). Processes of human bodies are continuously flowing with agency that are not exclusive to human bodies. They are intertwined and mutually transformed with non-human bodies. These processes can be understood as working in *intra-action* (Ibid:815). Thus, Barad highlights human and non-human agency. I agree that materiality needs far more attention concerning agency and that no one entity, whether human or non-human, are sole actors. Objects or materiality on the body have their own inscriptions and significance. Of course, I understand that material inscriptions and meaning can be warped depending on the inscriptions of the body. For instance, Michel Callon’s *actor-network theory* describes the relations between actors as mutually defined. Thus, if one actor changes, the entire network of actors changes (Göransson, 2012:28-29). This way of thinking grants me the possibility to view objects and bodies as mutually developing and dwelling. It also helps me to understand how the spatial terms of norms factor in deviance and embodied experiences.

## **Emotion**

The turn towards affect over the last decades have tried to designate certain areas where concepts such as affect, emotions, and feelings can be distinct from one another and placed accordingly. In some corners, emotions have been defined through psychological phenomena, as opposed to the biological or physiological aspects of affect (Koivunen, 2010). Affect can be seen as the experiences of the body whereas emotion have more social connotations of expression. However, that does not mean that there is conceptual consensus on what the *affective turn* might entail, including how to approach affect, emotions, and feelings (see

Liljeström & Paasonen, 2010). I do not feel that there is a need to distinguish each concept on its own. Indeed, affect has been given a larger role than emotion. Personally, I use affect and emotion interchangeably, and for some reason I give more weight towards emotion. In Ahmed's words: "emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others" (2014:208). Here, emotions do not reside in subjects or objects but have attributes of *stickiness* (Ibid:4). They move and stick between bodies and objects, which become sites of social and personal tension. The stickiness in emotions encompass movement and attachment, as emotions connect bodies with each other and objects. "The relationship between movement and attachment", Ahmed explains, "is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place" (Ibid:11). Dwelling and emotions have considerable impact on subjects, which also informs us of spaces and the emotions that stick to those spaces and the objects that reside therein (Göransson, 2012). Ahmed continues that emotions of hate can stick on Other bodies, i.e. non-white subjects. Such emotions do not only concern the alienation of Other bodies, but also bind together ideal bodies and spaces.

The politics of emotion have focused on affect as power through norms. This is especially evident in queer theorisations of the emotional subject, critiquing the normative understandings of the relations between affect and the subject (Koivunen, 2010). Such critiques relate to Ahmed's idea of how the emotional site is in the circulation of the subject and its surroundings (objects, bodies, and spaces). Berlant (2011) speaks of the *cruel optimistic relations*, "when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (Ibid:1), where the nearness of a fantasy elicits an affective structure of optimistic attachment. Such attachments to these fantasies involve objects and scenes (Berlant, 2011). Likewise, Halberstam (2005) informs us, based on Berlant, that the queer politics of emotion cannot begin inside the subject but the interiority has to be conceptualised with "a concomitant attention to social, political and economic relations" (Ibid:224). Power and norms, within a social and political framework of heteronormativity, shape the possibilities of what bodies can do and how they bring scripts of the familial good conduct and ways of living (Ahmed, 2014). Thus, I believe emotions can be a site of revealing what these norms entail and what impressions they make on queer bodily dwelling.

In discussing so-called queer feelings, Ahmed (2014) brings to the fore the repetitive idealisations of heteronormative and homonormative life and the queer subjects that reject them. Feeling queer does not portend a particular emotional life due to their bodily experiencing "failure to inhabit or follow a heterosexual ideal" (Ibid:146). Although claims can be made that

the failure to inhabit normative ideals generate certain emotional experiences, these can involve both feelings of comfort and discomfort.

Ahmed, like Halberstam (2005), argues that emotions are no private matter as if deriving from within and then expressed outwards. Rather, emotions circulate between signs and bodies (Ahmed, 2006). As I mentioned, they have adhesive effects of binding/sticking subjects and objects together, whilst also creating imaginations of collective bodies. Particularly, the collective can be found in discourses and economies of hate. For instance, how the immigrant is a threat for white workers. In this sense, I want to hark back to Haritaworn's (2015) identity ideal. In establishing an imagined correct queer subject, it creates certain bodies of others as hateful. Hence, certain emotions of hate and love attaches to certain groups. "Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement" (Ahmed, 2014:44). Importantly, how are informants in this study affected by the effects of affective economies? In addition, I find that the feelings of not sinking in can produce a double discomfort that comes with queering normative lines and not being so-called queer enough according to identity ideals.

## **Methods and methodology**

My moving towards experiences and to understand them as stories of relations between the personal and the social are informed by the manner these experiences are voiced. That is, in what ways they are narrated, the theoretical connotations, and importantly my role in receiving and analysing these experiences. For that, this section is used to discuss how I approach embodied experiences and what this implies in terms of method and methodology. It will consider not only my role as researcher but the relations that play in the intimacies between the researcher and what is researched as well as the ethical terrain that establish such relationships. This includes how and through what means I approach the emotionality in work experiences.

## **Work stories**

In making sense of work experience, research wise, I tend to understand the lived and imagined experiences in and outside work-related spaces. The informants' telling of work experiences are very much like telling a story, filled with complexities, contexts, memories, and life. In their dissertation on older LGBTQ people's experiences of queer life cycles, Siverskog (2016) explains that *life story* as method values the subjective experiences over wider truth-claims (Ibid:51). From specific moments to life histories. The focus is on the story told by the



informant and how, when and where it is told, inasmuch as it encompasses storytelling during an interview or diary writing. I see *work story* as a method to be within the frame of life story. It delves into life histories and subjective experiences within work-related structures. That is, work experiences, as I will show, are not isolated events but are connected to wider social dynamics. For instance, in this study I argue that home, seemingly unrelated to work, is connected to workspaces. However, the locus of labour, as it is in this study, constructs or contracts the stories into what I call work stories. As I daresay that they are similar to life stories, there are of course differences.

Work story, as I see it, is a biographical method in that it is a form of life writing. I see it as a part of life stories, as it focuses on a wider aspect of life rather than specific and isolated events (Siverskog, 2016:52). The knowledge taken from work stories include larger narratives, as work stories are interwoven with other aspects of life.

Work stories can be expressed through long and short narrative forms, which are then converted into written form (through transcription), and then published for the reader. The method includes multiple subjective experiences and positions: the informant, the researcher, and the reader. The life written is construed in ways as to be understood by the reader, all of which, and as a result, are highly influential in both understanding and interpreting the lived and imagined experiences (Denzin, 1989). My usage of work stories and the emotionality within rest on:

[...] subjective and intersubjectively gained knowledge and understandings of the life experiences of individuals, including one's own life. Such understandings rest on an interpretive process that leads one to enter into the emotional life of another. Interpretation, the act of interpreting and making sense out of something, creates the conditions for understanding, which involves being able to grasp the meanings of an interpreted experience for another individual (Denzin, 1989: ).

What is in focus, then, is how emotional life can be constructed and construed in narrative and life writing forms. Work stories rest on the complexities and multifaceted forms of life, which is not to be seen as only concerning work, i.e. workspace involves larger social, economic, political and cultural structures in which the personal life operates (Ahmed, 2006). I see the work story as including these integrating structures and the relations between micro/personal and macro/social analyses. The efficacy of the work stories is then to use lived, daily and imagined experiences in order to understand their place in the mechanisms and powers of social

structures. Burawoy (1991), through extended case method, argues that everyday experiences can challenge and open up to theoretical destinations in scientific inquiry. Indeed, such an inquiry takes its starting point from microsociology to uncover macro foundations; to see how “systemic forces and the way they create and sustain patterns of domination in micro situations” appear along with analyses of resistance (Burawoy, 1991: 283). Smith (2005), however, moves away from having any pre-given theoretical destination and forms the inquiry through ethnography. What I find helpful here is how such an approach remains within everyday experiences and works throughout the development of the researcher’s inquiry. Institutional regimes are ethnographically problematised – through local everyday experiences – rather than assumed. The informants are never left behind, so to speak, in favour of theoretical findings but are collaboratively producing knowledge on the organising of power and agency (Ibid). For instance, the informants’ experiences in this study point towards normative structures within which they face challenges on a daily basis.

### **Informants and material**

There are five informants in this research. Four are currently working and one has worked but is currently studying. Most of them have different nationalities and reside in either Sweden or Denmark. I had four semi-structured interviews and one digital interview/diary. In all of them I had an interview guide to assist my questioning techniques. Only one interview used go-along technique. In this particular interview we began walking from their home to their workplace. It was cold, rainy, and windy, and so we did not make it all the way. We rounded off by sitting inside at their home to finish what we started. Two other interviews took place at the informants’ homes. In response to my asking about taking walks they preferred to stay at home. These choices could have something to do with the lack of trust in both public spaces and in me as an interviewer. Thus, go-alongs could have been possible if we would meet on multiple occasions and in safer public spaces.

The fourth and final interview I had face-to-face was conducted in a university group room. This was a better option since the informant was studying at the time and could fit our session in-between study hours. The fifth interview was a digital interview, which I also deem a diary. I offered a modified version of my interview guide as a guide for the informant to write about their experiences. I also offered to have an interview via video chat, but they preferred to write and ponder on the questions at length. I believe this option was advantageous for the informant since they could take their time to go through the questions for themselves without

my presence. In addition, two interviews were in Swedish, and after transcribing I translated the selected excerpts when analysing.

In finding informants for my project I posted a brief explanation on several social media groups describing my intentions. These groups were specifically for queer and/or trans\* people. In most of them I had to disclose my reason for joining the groups, to which I replied several intentions, both personal and research-wise. I have later found that these groups are popular sites for researchers to find informants and participants, which have had mixed feelings amongst the members. The informants in this study did not have negative feelings towards my post. Upon asking them why they joined, all the informants felt that LGBTQI research is important, and I also felt that they wanted to share their stories from LGBTQI perspectives. The future informants contacted me personally where I explained more in depth about my intentions and what their participation would entail. All the informants are between 20 and 30 years of age. Their relatively early stages of their life cycles can of course impact their perception and experiences in and outside workspaces. I understand that the informants here do not represent any one monolithic identity group. Likewise, doing this research with the same informants in another space and time does not guarantee the same stories.

The interviews varied from two hours up to four hours, depending on the conversation and storytelling. These were recorded and transcribed at a later point. My intention with a semi-structured interview was to both create dialogues for discussion and leave space for the informants to talk about their experiences and lives in monologue fashion, with emphasis on the latter. In the beginning whilst constructing my interviews for potential informants, my project's focus revolved around Hochschild's (2012) emotional labour. That is, managing feelings and expressions to meet the emotional requirements of a job. My aim was then to include queer workers' emotional labour. For several reasons, the aim of this research has slightly changed into emotional experiences in workspaces. Nonetheless, emotional labour is repetitively used in both questions and direction in the interviews. Of course, if I would have structured new interviews the questions would be different. Not only because my aim is slightly different, but the stories told and discussed give new ideas. Just like a new book I read on the subject can change my direction or going through the transcribed material through new perspectives. Thus, my project feels like it is always in motion if I did not have a deadline to meet. That said, the interviews have not made the research less pertinent. The discussions and directions we followed in each interview gave new direction and important points, which were some of the reasons why the research aim changed.

I believe my presence affects the interviews and interviewees in several ways. Their perception of me can create comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. I therefore felt compelled to share not only my intentions with the project but also my own experiences. I was at times moved, both emotionally and physiologically. For instance, there were moments I could feel affirmation and feelings of solidarity, and sometimes I would feel goose bumps from top to toe as my hairs would rise in response to certain stories. These responses would trigger certain moods in me, as I felt the need to sometimes react by sharing parts of my life in the middle of the interviews. Thus, my embodied impact can have multiple reactions, from their perception to my participation. When the colour of my finger nails align (or clash) with my beard. I constantly asked myself: how am I, seemingly a heterosexual cisman cupping my hands around my seemingly normative gaze to view the so-called eccentricities of queer life, perceived by the informants? Do they really see me like that? Is it professional to tell them my feelings and how norms of gender, sexuality, whiteness, and able-bodiedness have affected me? Is it okay to disclose such feelings in this research? As I will discuss below, these intimacies entail certain researcher/researched relationships.

#### *Go-along and interview-diary*

Besides interviews, I have used other methods to highlight or complement the materials in this study. Firstly, I have during a session of talks used a go-along interview method (Kusenbach, 2003). We wandered through the streets, specifically the place between the informant's home and work – on roads, footpaths, and other tracks. The point of this method was to inquire about the lived and imagined emotional experiences within these so-called in-between spaces. For instance, Doan (2010) explores and experiences trans spaces, including harassment in public, private and 'mixed' spaces. Now, that is not the point of choosing such a method, to witness the informants getting harassed. But Doan tells a story that is indicative of heteronormative and cisnormative patterns, and (re)living, writing and analysing these spaces according to Doan inform us of representations of gender and the emotions attached to certain (queer) bodies. For instance, Doan tells the story of being confronted by angered strangers in public. This is also an experience or expressed fear of the informants in this study. Here, it is important to note the potentially ethical issue. For instance, putting informants in situations where they relive memories of uncomfortable or traumatic experiences. Of course, the go-along method was not used if the informants felt uncomfortable to do so, which was the case most of the time.

What can these go-along talks tell us then? Kusenbach (2003) explains that go-alongs give 1) unique perception of informants' experiences and their social contexts, 2) spatial

practices that involve various engagements in and with environments, 3) personal biographies and histories, 4) social architecture of the ‘natural’ setting of workplaces, and 4) social realms of interactions. Walking and talking can also affect the researcher/researched relations, something I will delve further into below. Of course, in ethical considerations, knowing where to walk is entirely up to the informant, where I encouraged them to seek spaces where they feel safe and can exert comfort in their stories, which I believe they did. Perhaps because of this, the informants opted to stay inside and have regular interviews rather than go-alongs.

Another method was forcefully enacted due to the coronavirus pandemic that is at the time of my writing globally wreaking havoc. The situation has brought new challenges as well as experiments in doing research. My standard methods of longer work interviews and go-alongs have obviously been strained by a quasi-lockdown, and my solution has been a combination of interview and diary writing. I gave the informant a modified version of my interview guide, which is suited for longer written answers. I was reluctant to abandon both the structures of my interviews and the flowing monologues the informants would appreciate.

Finally, I realised that creating a visualisation of the informants’ workplaces could assist their storytelling and my understanding of them. I asked each informant to draw their workspace as well as they could and as detailed as possible. They responded by giving me drawings and we went through the workspaces together. Although the maps do not directly feature in any analytical points, I found them to be useful tools in their movement and relationship to rooms and people within these rooms.

### **Intersectional readings**

To make sense of the transcribed interviews, I use *intersectional readings*. Similar to Ljungcrantz’s (2017) use of the method, I want to move towards how processes of norms “are described, formed, and cocreated” (Ibid: 62, my translation). That is, how hetero- and cisnorms intersect with other norms (such as whitenorms), and how these are expressed through the perspectives and work stories of queer workers. I believe this way of reading can grasp the complexity of work experiences, likewise the emotional intensity in experiencing work-related spaces. More concretely, it allows me to look at how their embodied experiences in workspaces relate to their nonnormative genders and sexual orientations and other lines. I look at expressions, words, and their emphasis put on emotions in instances when and where they experience work-related spaces. How structures of gender, race, migration status, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation play out and intersect for each informant, either through their own words or in the readings of how they express themselves.

The analytical strategies here can also be informed by intersectional thoughts about categorisations, identification, subjectivities, and difference. The latter is particularly important in how I analytically approach informants' work stories, my own included. The work stories are thematically analysed through intersectionality as an analytical tool. My working in this way follows a string of authors on intersectionality, e.g. Dhamoon (2011) who highlights key considerations of intersectional work. These include to decentre and scrutinise any given group in refusing normative and natural subject positions. Something I find is similar to Raun's (2014) argument on gender revolutionaries and gender traitors, i.e. rejecting generalisations of identity groups. Furthermore, an intersectional approach also involves questioning the given lines that separate theory and practice, and dominant epistemologies. Dhamoon explains:

an intersectional-type research paradigm serves to not simply describe and explain complex dynamics of power in specific contexts and at different levels of social life but also critique or deconstruct and therefore *disrupt* the forces of power so as to offer alternative worldviews. This disruption entails a self-reflexive critique of the analyst and [their] own implication in the matrix of meaning-making, specifically [their] relationship to knowledge production and research subjects. Dhamoon, 2011:240, original emphasis.

This "self-reflexive critique" can serve as a marker for doing research differently. Thus, intersectionality is not only a form of research method but also a fundamental part of this study's epistemological standpoint. Whilst this approach may seem broad and complex, it suits the complexity of life writing and telling.

My concern is not only to address differences that arise in informants' work stories and reflexivity, but also the epistemic violence that is deeply rooted in inquiries of knowledge. This has been addressed both in and outside works of intersectionality. Epistemic violence exerts a repressive sanctioning of the possibilities of knowing; Spivak (1988) discusses its malice in constructing the colonial subject as Other; Bilge (2013) interrogates it in the depoliticization of intersectionality indebted to neoliberal culture of diversity, i.e. a whitened and hegemonic academic feminism. Similar to what Tomlinson (2012) refers to as "colonizing intersectionality". Bilge describes it as such that intersectionality, with its genealogy of meaning-making originating in Black feminism, "has been commodified and colonized for neoliberal regimes" (2013:407). Epistemologically, I wish to construct a research that mutually

combines empirics, theory, and aim without creating an inquiry that undermines the position of the informants or intersectional organising of differences and subjectivities.

I argue, as I have stated previously, that naturalising groups and identities are not only incorrect but also dangerous. However, I believe that this hetero- and cisnormative notion of, say, gender binarism could be useful due to the existing axes of power that rely on and reproduce such categorisations. For instance, the informants in this thesis approach categories and experience normative forms, such as heterosexuality, cisnormativity, racism, and so on, differently. However static categorisations are, the complexities and point of analysis lie in how we stand in relation to these categories, and how we emotionally experience these positions. Although such an approach can be deemed anticategorical, it is nonetheless, what McCall (2005) calls, an intercategorical approach I tend to move towards; to “provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (Ibid:1773). That is not to say that I am only fixed on points of inequality, but to apprehend informants’ complex subjectivities construed by normative categorisations as per their understanding and reasoning. This in turn allows for an inquiry into the varying degrees of privileges and penalties (Dhamoon, 2011).

### **Queering methodology**

Here I commence a discussion regarding arguments and suggestions on how to approach a queer and feminist methodology with roots in certain epistemological and ontological thoughts. I start by invoking the intricate intimacies in research relationships. As such, queer and feminist inquiries do not shy away from such an approach. Instead they welcome the queries that explicitly revise and address the power relations that exist in doing research. Thus, I find *reflexivity* to be a key word here, corresponding with England (1994:80) to “demand greater reflection by the researcher with the aim of producing more inclusive methods sensitive to the power relations in fieldwork”. Because my own positions affect the fieldwork and the relationships that reside there, creating spaces in the research process for reflexive thinking is essential. This includes my own personal feelings, standpoints and emotional states that revolve around my doing research, and how this in turn relates to the informants. I therefore see myself as a queer worker and include myself in the group of informants in the empirical part.

I consider this study as a queer work. Of course, queerness has its roots in flexibility and destabilising normative regimes, something Raun (2014) has criticised as celebrating those who destabilise sexual and gender regimes, and demonising queer subjects who do not. I agree

with Raun (2014) in that viewing the flexibility and fluidity in queerness can have tendencies to essentialise queer work as subversive. Here, trans\*people can be seen to possess potential of disbanding rigid cisnormative and heteronormative gender regimes and being scolded when they fail to do so; “gender revolutionaries” versus “gender traitors” (Raun, 2014:25-26). Raun suggests the individual story – in this case the work story – “to breathe”, exploring different narratives in these stories as well as following a “dialogical interpretive practice”, imbued with ethical reflections and particular interests in the stories told. We must then have particular focus on the “embodied experiences of the speaking subject” (Stryker & Whittle, 2006:12).

This form of inquiry has undoubtedly affected me and my doing research. It encourages my curiosity in a research field that is somewhat unknown and creates a sober feeling of washing away predestined conclusions and taken-for-granted answers. I therefore tend to give way to the “empirical breathing” (Raun, 2014: ) I think is required to advance a so-called queered, intersectional inquiry that does not foreclose complexity or differentiation in the work stories told and written.

Following Stryker (1993), I tend to see emotions as having material effects, something that also has been downplayed in previous debates on emotions (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2012). Thus, I aim towards “an understanding that emotions are situated within, and co-constitutive of, our working (as well as social) lives” (Ibid:2). Furthermore, I consider Ahmed’s (2014) explication of emotions underlying both how I approach emotions, and how informants experience emotions stuck on their bodily dwelling.

Influenced by anthropologist Ruth Behar (2011) in *The Vulnerable Observer*, I intertwine my own personal experiences working on this project with the analysis. Instead of moving away from the study to achieve so called objectivity, I instead move closer to the study and closer to subjective researching. Indeed, I feel that offering emotional insight is counteracting the more dominant and positivistic forms of inquiry and the illusion of a god trick; gazing without embodied perspective (Haraway, 1988). I see knowledge and work stories with emotions; “our feeling states and our thinking are closely intertwined” (Bondi, 2012:234). Working with work stories can elicit multiple feelings as a researcher and human being. For Nicolazzo (2017), it brings deep kinship in trans\*community and affection towards their participants. For Doan (2010), approaching the tyranny of gendered spaces brings heartache, but is somewhat relieved in an affirmative community.

My own queering ways have no doubt been impacted by the work stories, sometimes temporarily and at times permanently. For instance, one informant expressed mental issues and deep emotional worry that triggered similar experiences for me. At one point I had difficulties



transcribing and had to abandon the work several times. But the study is also home to laughter, solidarity, and communication, which at times felt like it could only appear right here and right now. Even if we have our differences in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, class and so on, it did not shy us away from addressing these critical points, nor did it leave clumps in our hearts upon departure, at least not for me. I believe being “emotionally reflexive” (Bondi, 2012) throughout the research process, from beginning to end, has enriched the research in so many ways that I do not see a research without it.

Finally, the informants in this thesis are not *queer workers* because they are working with queerness or have fixed queer working ventures. Instead, their nonnormative genders and sexual orientations tell us how they may negotiate norms; how their emotions, derived by queering these norms, stick in spaces and to objects and other bodies whilst performing work duties.

## Experiences

The next chapter, *experiences*, is the main analysis of the empirics. This chapter is structured into three themes to which the informants’ stories have all to some degree related. In other words, I interpret these themes, with guidance from my research aim, as standing out in the informants’ work stories. In *Clothing*, I discuss the many ways the informants approach and use clothing and other relevant materials in relation to their work, work-related spaces and their nonnormative subject position. Importantly, I explore how emotions, and their stickiness, attach to clothes and are perceived in hetero- and cisnormative spaces and circumstances.

The second theme, *Safe place within*, is concerned with how the informants negotiate work-related spaces and what they deem safe according to levels of comfort and the ability of being themselves. Finally, accounting for the dynamic, emotional range that reside *Between home and work*, this third theme pinpoints the diffused area of private and public, and how it affects the informants’ movement in this area. After each theme I end with a summary to highlight the findings and main analytical points.

## Clothing

Prior to a meeting with one of my informants, I am sitting in a group room at a university library. It is somewhat closed off from public space, with two or three people sitting outside the room. I am waiting for my informant when I then take off my beanie. My thoughts have been on the beanie and my hair since I left home for this interview. Especially now when the windows

behind me make it even more apparent. This is one of my first times out and about with my hair dyed pink-red, and whilst it may not be of great concern to the next person, it is for me a way of queering my style of clothing. Whilst I sit there, I come to think of different circumstances my hair can be perceived. In this (queer) context, my hair could be a sign of affirmation that this interview is safe and the spaces around them safe too. When the informant first spots my hair, perhaps they will feel comfort in knowing that this is not some random, normative person who wants to explore the so-called queer spectacle. It can perhaps be a sign of a queer community and solidarity, or just a calm feeling before what will come. Whatever style, it can affect the informants, which is something I constantly think about.

Retrospectively, looking at my fieldnotes, materials that clothe the naked body matter deeply. “Materiality is an active factor in processes of materialization”, Barad explains (2003:827). I understand clothing, then, to have agency and is continuously intra-acting in the dynamic relations between the social world and the body (Barad, 2003; Twigg, 2007). Importantly, following Twigg (2007:301), “clothes are one of the principal means whereby we present and see the body”. My dyed hair, being a part of my clothing, intra-acts with corporeal and social dwellings imbued with normative expectations. This is what I mean when I invoke *queering*, when expectations between body and clothes are not met, and nonnormative lines unfold. As Warkander (2013) argues, bodies are defined both by how they experience and how they are viewed by others. What happens when we queer or twist the clothes or materiality on our bodies in workspaces? How do processes of queering and non-queering clothes on our bodies unfold in workspaces? Importantly, how do we feel towards these processes?

### **Introducing queer clothes**

Introducing Dem, a coffee shop worker who identifies herself as a lesbian ciswoman. She is in her late 20s, having migrated from her English-speaking country a couple of years ago. Dem cannot wear whatever she wants at work since the coffee shop provides the workers with matching uniforms. However, she says that she has found a way to make her uniform: “[look] a little gay in my own little way”. In a conversation at her work, Dem explains jokingly: “I’m gonna wear it backwards like this so I can look like as much of a dyke as possible”. In this way, she has twisted her hat to make her uniform resemble something different. The hat, now more visible compared to other workers’ matching uniforms, does not elicit negative response at her workplace. The twisting of the hat makes Dem more comfortable, both with herself and towards other workers. The open and comedic effects of the queered hat comprise an extension of the

body. Something she attributed to the group dynamics and feelings of community amongst the workers.

Such possibilities have also been apparent to Blaize, who is bisexual, living in Denmark after migrating from Eastern Europe several years ago, and both work and study. For Blaize, it was about introducing new material on the body that resulted in certain emotional experiences over time. Amidst the time for Pride parades, Blaize started wearing a Pride wristband to work, which had certain implications when working in formal environments. At the office, for example, whilst wearing the wristband, Blaize felt a sensation of wanting to show her queer identity, or at least her support for the freedom of sexual and gender expression, at the same time feeling a bit reluctant. She would at first cover her wrists as not to overtly put her “skin on the table”, a phrase she mentioned when feeling insecure or too exposed about her nonnormative identity. After a while she felt more encouraged to wear it.

[...] you know first I was a little bit insecure about wearing it, but still I was like, “I want to wear it! I want people to notice I support, even if they might think I’m not queer myself, but just so they know that I’m showing my support”. But you know, I kept the sleeve down so it could sometimes hide, you know, but then at some point I was actually, and it was also August, so let’s say warm, in the Scandinavian context (chuckle), so I was sometimes wearing short sleeve, you know, so, or like a shirt with a short sleeve, or something. So, I kind of liked that it was visible, also in the corporate environment. I don’t know if there is anybody else or also when I look at me being in different departments that there is gay or queer, so I don’t know about anybody else. But I just wanted to show like, “okay, if there is anybody, I want them to know I’m fine or that I support”, you know. [05/03/2020]

Whilst Dem wanted and succeeded in extending her queer expression, for Blaize it required feelings of support, whether they came from her or others. She wanted to feel solidarity with a queer community in an otherwise heteronormative, corporate environment. The wristband, this piece of agency between the body and the social (heteronormative, corporate, and formal workspace), becomes an emotional site of risk, insecurity, solidarity, and pride. Of course, feelings towards materiality can be complex and affect anyone, albeit differently. Ahmed explains that “bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force” (2006: 145). Breaking from this repetition is also breaking from compulsory heterosexuality and its enforcing norms. Thus, queer lives labour in measures of non-fitting and in failure of

reproducing normative lines (Ibid: 154-155). Indeed, Blaize relishes this failure, albeit with some feelings of discomfort.

Sella, a non-binary trans\*person who works at an elderly care home, expressed feelings of “coming home” when starting to use prostheses and feminine coded ways of clothing. Coming home in their body, for Sella, suggests a homey feeling of comfort and being largely perceived as a woman. The job roles of elderly carers are predominately constituted of women, with matching uniforms. Though there is no way around these uniforms, feminine-coded prostheses complement the uniform for Sella. And whilst their colleagues have grown used to the proper pronouns and Sella’s identity as transwoman<sup>1</sup>, the residents have not. “They still see me as a man, those who live there”, Sella told me. They described the homey feeling of comfort and their acceptance of their body as “coming home”. For Sella, it has meant to accept who they and being largely perceived as a woman, which sometimes goes awry. For instance, Sella has been misgendered multiple times, but not all of them have generated feelings of negative proportions. The following encounter between Sella and a resident happened during a tender embrace.

**S:** There was a resident who asked, “are you a boy or a girl?” And it made me so happy that there was someone who asked. Then that she forgot it a second later, that’s a different story. But that she actually asks and wonders.

**T:** Why is that something positive?

**S:** Because it is affirmative.

**T:** Affirmative of what?

**S:** That something doesn’t seem right.

**T:** Mm, that you are between something?

**S:** Exactly! And it made me happy!

[16/02/2020]

Ahmed (2006) suggests that orientation, in which ways we face the world, involves an alignment of body and space. “We only know which way to turn *once we know which way we are facing*” (Ibid:7, original emphasis). Which way Sella is facing is towards what they term as coming home in their body; trans\*feelings of ambiguity and being so-called between

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<sup>1</sup> Sella has told their colleagues and other parties that they are a transwoman to both simplify explaining their gender identity and expression, as well as to get gender treatment. Because “then you only get hormones and not what you really want. So, I say to people, “she”, because then I get what I want”.

something. This tender encounter was a site of happiness because it confirmed Sella's ambiguous and nonnormative identity, through their clothing, prostheses, hair, and make-up. The resident, in a tender embrace with Sella, gave an affirmative affection towards Sella, despite being confused of their gender expression. Thus, the binary norms and expectations of what constitutes a man and woman left Sella feeling in-between, which in turn granted Sella feelings of affirmation. The space in which the embrace took place was in the resident's private room in an elderly care dorm. It is shared with the working carers. Working in this private space is a requirement for Sella and their colleagues. In some ways, the embrace can be seen both as a private matter and a form of work duty. Here, a work duty resulted in feelings of affirmation, albeit rather unexpectedly so. To account for this outcome, a network of space, objects, and bodies intra-act (Barad, 2003).

Clothing can swiftly change perception and emotional state when stepping in and out of rooms. The experiences above show introductions to twisting or queering outfits at work. However, there can also be workspaces that limit these options.

Plea, a migrant growing up in the Middle East, who is gay and queer of colour, and has been living in Sweden for a couple of years, has felt a lot of adversity towards his gender expression at his study- and workplaces. For instance, when entering the study area, he feels that the relationship he has with fellow students and teachers are generally positive,

[...] because I'm dressed like this [t-shirt and pants] and I'm not acting as myself. I didn't show those attributes, of myself, I haven't shown it yet, but if I show it, if I go with kind of signs showing, "he's like this or he's like this", then maybe I would have negative point of view. [24/02/2020]

Clothes that let Plea express feminine attributes that reflect his sexual and gender expression act as site of fear and risk. Introducing queered clothes could risk what he considers positive relationships. How clothing skews normative notions of gender brings feelings of fear. Something I attribute to "the tyranny of gender" (Doan, 2010:635). Queer subjects and bodies are monitored, and in turn self-monitored. Making them cling to rigid, normative models of gender (Doan, 2010). Or, in case of breaching prescribed norms, becoming hateable bodies (Ahmed, 2014). Clothes, here, act as what Ahmed describes orientation devices, which give the body direction when moving. That is, they constitute objects towards which we orientate. Things that soothe our dwelling and the lines we tread (2006:11). Importantly, we can see clothes and materials constrain and enable movement through how they are perceived in hetero-

and cisnormative spaces, “how they are viewed and categorized by others” (Warkander, 2013:213). This, in turn, can render clothes as straightening devices, something Ahmed attributes to heteronormative lines that keep bodies in check. Those who stray are deemed deviant. I see then the T-shirt and pants Plea feels bound to in order to avoid risk as straightening devices. They conceal Plea in the name of normative expectations.

### **Context and time**

Sella’s embrace with the resident, as I mentioned above, generated a happy encounter. It affirmed Sella’s feelings of being ambiguous. However, it does not mean that all encounters that address Sella as ambiguous will be sites of happy feelings.

**S:** [...] if we say it like this, if someone on the street had asked me, it would have been a completely different thing.

**T:** Mm, context..

**S:** Yeah, because [the resident] was so tender, we were in the middle of an embrace and then I get, “are you a girl or a boy?”, and so it was a completely different context.

**T:** How do you feel the contexts are different, do you think?

**S:** On the street it’s an unknown person who screams.

**T:** Feels a bit provocative...

**S:** Yeah! Because I know that person out there cares. But the person in bed who gets a hug doesn’t care. So the context does it all.

[16/02/2020]

As Sella suggests, the caring on the street, through means of screaming, has negative connotations. Sella attributes this to context. The unknown person cares in a way that bodies must meet binary and non-queer expectations, likewise the materiality that mediate hetero- and cisnormative lines. Comparing the loud open street and the private room at work, the contexts facilitate different emotional attachments. We can further see how space, materiality, and bodies intra-act (Barad, 2003) differently depending on context. For instance, the street is chaotic and unpredictable, whilst Sella’s workspace is somewhat inhabitable. Sella has worked there for many years. Time has given Sella emotional and working experiences along with comfort. Whilst the street shifts and changes by traversing bodies, the workspace has been more manageable for Sella. Both for their emotions and bodily transition. Corresponding with Ahmed (2006), spaces extend bodies. The street Sella refers to renders the queer body as uninhabitable.

Indeed, hetero- and cisnorms block and inhabit bodies. It blocks Sella from the streets, but also grants Sella space at work. Sella's adherence to binary forms of gender, despite identifying as non-binary, is a consequence for coming home at work. They negotiate and reason that colleagues and people – and the Swedish medical service for male-to-female transitioning – simply cannot fathom the intricate identity processes. We can then talk about a network of relations where agency is intricately linked between human and nonhuman forms, i.e. time, space, and clothing (Göransson, 2012). It is also here I understand this agency to be dynamic, processes without ends (Barad, 2003).

Time is important to consider in processes of materialisation. For instance, Sella experienced positive emotional attachments towards their clothes and workspace. They felt coming home in their body after some time at work. Whilst Sella felt an advantage with time, Plea is less likely to establish such a timeframe at his studyplace. Plea explains to me that relationships with students and teachers have a certain deadline – when term is over, or studying is complete they move on. We must then note networks of space, bodies, and clothes together with time.

Finally, I return to contexts that constrain and enable gender and sexual expression by means of clothing and its emotional stickiness. Everton describes himself as asexual and biromantic, as well as white and cisman. He has two quite different jobs, both in terms of what one might consider to be care work: a significant role in a queer youth centre, and a smaller job role in a substance abuse treatment centre. At the latter, Everton has experienced emotional intensity, mostly by pressing moments where he felt fear and insecurity regarding his sexual orientation. To avoid experiencing uncomfortable questions, ridicule and harassment, Everton must dress according to normative and so-called neutral codes. That is, to satisfy hetero- and cisnormative expectations, alike the hegemonic gendered expectations that are “an artifact of the patriarchal dichotomization of gender and have profound and painful consequences for many individuals” (Doan, 2010:635). This, in turn, contrasts Everton's other work, which is explicitly a queer workplace, aiming to assist and support young LGBTQIA people in their endeavours. Clothes, here, are therefore significantly different. Everton can enjoy trying out different outfits that both satisfy his own gender expression, as well as presenting alternative ways to normative masculinity for other queer youths. Something he has been working towards since a younger age.

Performing work under a normative gaze affects how clothing becomes a part of one's body. Everton expresses reluctant feelings towards wearing anything that challenges gender norms at the substance abuse treatment centre. It requires specific spatial terms that can

facilitate positive emotional attachments between clothes, body, and the social world. “It’s probably going to take some time before I dare to go there with nail polish or something similar”, Everton wrote. Working from home due to the current quasi-lockdown in times of the coronavirus, I note that my clothing is close to home, which of course does not always guarantee feelings of comfort. But a home-place it is, nonetheless. Most of the time I can don the nail polish and alternative clothing without being subjected to the tyranny of gender. Everton, on the other hand, notes the workspaces where the materiality collides and where it can give the sinking feeling (Ahmed, 2014). That is, where clothes can generate the feelings of comfort and fitting in. The LGBTQIA youth centre as a workplace explicitly fails to reproduce queer subjects as acknowledgeable to the ideal sexual and gender order. Instead it creates different directions away from normative lines. This space in turn extends Everton’s body, as it is imprinted by the space and vice-versa by means of nonnormative clothing.

### **Summary**

In this empirical chapter I have shown how clothing is imprinted on our bodily dwelling. Emotions that are stuck to clothes, items, and miscellaneous objects affect both the perceiver and wearer. Whether as signs of queering identity or as deviancy. The experiences I gathered to tell the stories of how one is affected by one’s (nonnormative) clothing are diverse to say the least. It involves risk, solidarity, fear, and imagination. But what roles do clothes and accessories play in queer workers’ embodied experiences in workspaces? If we think of cisnormative assumptions of subjectification, for queer workers clothes play a part in queering styles that allow one to both challenge and adapt to normative spaces. However, there are certain privileges attached to these efforts. On the one hand, some of the informants could pursue a risk-taking that allowed them to stand by their clothing. Here, workspaces accommodated their pursuing nonnormative clothing, affirmed through objects, colleagues, and time at work. Their emotional attachments to workspaces could be refurbished by positive emotional attachments to materiality introduced in these spaces. On the other hand, rigid notions of gender conformity at the workplace could be detrimental for those who do not have the privilege to undergo these nonnormative efforts. Indeed, clothes intersect with social categories that are also imprinted on bodily dwelling. As the wearer attests to emotions that involve clothes, space, and other people, so does the imaginative perception of others.



## **Safe spaces within**

This theme is seemingly leading in that it assumes that there are safe spaces. However, putting certain emotions to spaces that feel safe is an inquiry into other spaces that are not necessarily safe. I noticed that my informants had to varying degrees safe spaces at their workplaces. They expressed feelings that alluded to comfort and security. I see the concept of safe as something that brings feelings of sinking. Something that brings feelings of comfort and fitting in with their nonnormative genders and sexual orientations in the world (Ahmed, 2006). In the informants' work stories, I found that expressions of safety and comfortability derived from workspaces, amongst other places.

I have, to some extent, feelings of comfort in my apartment. Where I sit and read, write, and work on this thesis, feeling that I can escape the “surveillance of identity” (Saunders, 1989:184) and be “in control of [my] immediate environment” (Ibid). Regarding my queerness, I feel more comfortable when moving around these familiar points: the sofa, the table, the sink, the books spread out on my sofa. More comfortable than, say, sitting in public. At home I can express myself, feel and act differently compared to when I go outside. Doan suggests that private spaces can be places of refuge, “to have some say in activity within that domain” (2010:647). However, it does not mean that invasions of home space are negligible. Doan explains that the telephone can be a site of intrusion. That is, unsolicited calls that assume a gender based on voice timbre. For me, intrusion can sometimes appear on my computer or TV. Sites of social media, surveys, news and even TV shows and movies can bring unease when they ridicule, ignore, or even lambast gender and sexual expressions and the emotional attachments to which I cling. Thus, working from home (especially in times of the coronavirus) has also its sites of intrusion regarding my sexual and gender expression. The supposedly safe space at home whilst working can therefore become unsafe and uncomfortable.

If we understand orientations as “about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” (Ahmed, 2006:8), moving from home and homey feelings towards work-related spaces means to be able to extend the reach of one's body. How are queer workers able to extend their bodies in their workplace and how do they feel safe?

## **Extending and stopping**

As I have discussed before, not everyone can extend their bodies. For queer workers, orientating through intersecting lines, encountering rooms and the dynamic relations within can bring about different emotions to spaces. Extending the reach of one's home, as Plea attest, can be difficult.

He explains that at his studyplace can be both feelings of restraint and solace amidst the heteronormative spaces. The recreation room, an area where people socialise, produces unsafe and uncomfortable feelings,

[...] because in general I'm trying to avoid having any contact with any person in this school, I don't wanna show them myself enough. Yeah, I'm trying to put a barrier, because I don't feel as safe to show them who I am. So I feel, yeah, I feel it could be when you don't try to show yourself, or you know when the person doesn't know you enough, all those small chats will be something about, "oh, have you watched the football game", something masculine, it's like, "what do you do, I'm lifting and I want to be bigger", something that should need to be about hard sport, lifting sport, or sports in general. [24/02/2020]

The inability to "show yourself" takes its toll on Plea, knowing that a barrier must be set to ward off feeling unsafe. In contrast, a place where other people must constrain their leisurely behaviour that align with normative expressions, the classroom can make Plea feel, as he states, "less complex". There is less talk and more focus on the subject. "You don't need to deal with people, face to face, you're focusing on what you have [in front of you]". However, Plea expressed concerns at one point in the classroom when he felt incorrectly portrayed as a hypermasculine Muslim and person of colour. The teacher deemed Plea's cultural origin as incorrect. Something Plea wholeheartedly challenged. The altercation affected Plea to the point of not being able to attend the class. Eventually, he had to repeat the class after trying to gain support from the principal of the school. Evidently, the teacher's racist Othering left Plea feeling both humiliated and stuck. Although Plea reckons that there still lies hope in these classrooms, they could never be reached by the safe spaces of home. That is, being open about their sexual orientation and avoiding the implications of the racialised body in a society of whiteness. Fanon (2008) accounts for the demonisation of black masculinity in a white world and how it is always-already read as dangerous. It is imprinted into bodily movement and dwelling. Ahmed, inspired by Fanon, explains that to be non-white one is to be diminished at the expense of others' bodily extensions (Ahmed, 2006:160). When questions or situations arise that make bodies stop short, it is by means of stopping devices (Ahmed, 2006). These devices stop rather than move bodies which are out of place. For instance, the teacher demonises Plea's Muslim culture, and does so on the backdrop of western ideals. This in turn diminishes him into an object beside the white subject. He is stopped by devices that signify white, western, and sexual

norms. These in turn force Plea to traverse between on the one hand the risks of being negatively read as queer and on the other hand as a dangerous Muslim of colour. I believe it is especially exacerbated in the power relations between teacher and student. Plea suggests being stuck in repeating the classes due to their altercation. The teacher invokes the language of incorrect and correct cultures, and by doing so stops those ascribed to incorrect culture.

As I mentioned earlier, private home spaces can be intruded whilst public spaces can be regarded as safe and comfortable. For instance, Plea felt safe at his studyplace when hiding his gender expression, albeit suggesting that over time, hiding his sexual and gender expression could have severe psychological consequences. Thus, words like safe and comfort can have very different meanings, spatially and temporally. In contrast to Plea, Sella has been able to be more open with their nonnormative expression. But not without spatial challenges. The washing rooms can give uncomfortable feelings due to Sella's negative and stressful emotions stuck to mirrors.

I don't look myself in the mirror (laughter). I actually don't do it at work. Instead I just wash my hands, I don't like mirrors at all. It doesn't reflect who I am. [16/02/2020]

Mirrors reflect a wrong portrayal of what Sella sees themselves. This leads to spaces inhabited by mirrors being uncomfortable and stops them. Emotions of disappointment and comfortlessness are stuck on mirrors and what they reflect. Of course, such emotions can change if mirrors start to reflect correct images of Sella after a time of transitioning. Elsewhere, safe spaces within the workplace can be found in private resident rooms. One of the key reasons is Sella's emotional attachments to others' vulnerability. Like on the street, outsiders can bring unpredictability into the workplace. When they arrive to the workplace as relatives to residents, they are focused on the residents rather than on the workers, which suits Sella. That is, Sella can feel calm and at times hidden when the focus is on others' vulnerability, whether that of the residents or residents' relatives.

### **Openness and safety**

Being open and accepted with their trans\*identity is key for Sella to feel safe at work. Here writing boards with staff names on them have implications of comfort and affirmation. Sella's changing their name from a masculine coded name to a feminine coded name attached positive emotions towards the writing board and the spaces these objects inhabit. Safe spaces, for Dem, includes the requirement of being open about her sexual orientation. "Yeah, I typically, I mean

if I were ever in a workplace feeling like it wouldn't be safe to do that [being open] then I probably wouldn't, but uhm, for the most part I haven't worked in any places where I should hide that". Like Plea, if it does not feel safe to be open then it is not worth taking the risk. Dem has for the most part worked in places where she has not felt the need to hide it. Even for Sella, being open has in many ways resulted in their workplaces consisting mostly of comfort and tranquillity. Dem expressed the ability to hide at work as being within safe spaces. She can have different work duties than her colleagues and is therefore fixed to certain spaces within the workplace. When she goes beyond this room, the counter is seen as an invisible wall that makes her work easier. It can mitigate other uncomfortable spaces, such as the sitting and service area where customers can behave "strangely or inappropriately". Dem recalls several sexist and racist incidents in these areas, all of which did not involve Dem but still affected her emotional attachments towards these open and exposing spaces. It is also here that she acknowledges the privileges of being white and older than her colleagues, as some of these incidents have concerned younger women or younger women of colour.

Blaize also recalls being hidden to have comforting attributes. This can take place at both of her workplaces. In the corporate office, Blaize can use a computer to hide behind. In her other workplace, a small café, she uses the counter to keep distance or remain hidden. Blaize told me that this does not necessarily mean that wanting to hide has anything to do with her nonnormative sexual identity, rather her mood. She also told me that her mood could sway due to her nonnormative sexual orientation. Still, being open about her sexual relationship with another woman to her eventual boss at the corporate office during a job interview was a moment that contributed to Blaize's feeling safe at her current workplace. The sudden changes in management and colleagues at her workplace, though, made it all a bit more challenging and it cabined Blaize's personal life at the office. In contrast to the office work, the café involves a close friendship with the owner and the inclusive, informal, and close-knitted atmosphere. Here, Blaize attaches mostly positive emotions to the workspaces. The formal, corporate office is a bit more chaotic with people "coming and going". Blaize have had to comply with a new approach, saying "people are changing [...], it's a new person I have to understand how they are and where they stand". Putting your skin on the table – a phrase Blaize would use to explain exposure – can then be more frustrating and more difficult to handle on a larger scale of assembly. Furthermore, trying to figure out where the person stands regarding being open, Blaize tries not to be, in her words, "a spectacle", where she would be the queer in the room. Likewise, Dem would "sneak in" that she is a lesbian, insofar as not making such a fuzz about it.

I feel that being open can stand as an own chapter in this study. It permeates other chapters and is expressed in many ways by the informants, whether as “coming home” or “sneaking it in”. However, I also feel that being open is latched onto the notions of safety, comfort, and risk. The requirement of being open in the workplace garners negotiation and active control over its destiny. I find it similar to conditioned openness and to choose when, where and how to present oneself to one’s surroundings due to not knowing what the response will be (Siverskog, 2016). Here, being open is conditioned on safety and assessing the consequences that may unfold if one chooses to be open. Siverskog points to how being open is contextually based, as there is no knowing how one will be met by others (Ibid:137). As we see above, openness is constantly negotiated. The informants scour work-related spaces to find sites of risk that may harm or expose them. Furthermore, safety becomes a precondition for openness. Not feeling safe for the sake of survival or shame comes at the expense of being open (Siverskog, 2016).

Blaize told me of her fondness of smaller rooms where feelings of comfort lie in the room’s intimacy. Everton, on the other hand, has found the largest and most open area in his queer workplace at the youth centre to revolve around positive emotions. The “big room” grants such emotions due to his (and others’) participation in purposely creating it as a safe space.

We bring out our own lamps and switch off the light in the evening for an emotional lighting, we have a selection of different pride flags that we hang up and take down, and more things that we use and do to over and over build up and tear down the room again. I can’t really describe the feeling that I have towards the room, but it is connected to that it is a room I continuously am with to physically construct.  
[13/04/2020]

Constructing their own spaces, building up and tearing down over and over, is led on by their nonnormative orientations. This large room reflects Everton’s queerness. By participating in physically creating this room, it has implications of comfort and safe emotional attachments because the room is directing and directed by Everton’s dwelling. This room, and the work in general, speaks great volume of queer community and solidarity. It is actively constructed out of disorientation when creating nonnormative feelings of sinking and fitting in. But as Everton warns, just because he is within an officially queer place does not mean that it will be a comforting place for Everton’s sexual orientation and gender expression. He has faced hardships in being accepted within the LGBTQ community, namely for asexuality being

something controversial and meaningless. Seeing that the asexual flag had been delivered to his workplace, Everton expressed happiness. Seeing the flag, he recalls: “made me happy more than I thought it would”. Raising it together with another person who is also asexual and had similarly experienced adversity elsewhere, Everton says, “made the room welcoming and affirmative not only for me, but also for others”. Working at a queer site can have homonormative conditions but participating in creating the spaces you will personally feel connected to, and working in, can be rewarding. Indeed, creating such a room actively strays from normative lines to create own sidings (Ahmed, 2006). The flag now present in the room revives feelings of comfortability that stem from the positive emotions attached to the object.

### **Summary**

Safe spaces in the workplace can imply that safe spaces exist. For the informants, they did to a certain extent. I find that safe spaces within workspaces involve a great deal of negotiation and risk-taking. Because safe space assumes that there are unsafe spaces. Safe and unsafe – comfortable and uncomfortable – spaces existed for the informants. Of course, it does not mean that all who fail to conform to normative models of gender and sexual orientation have similar setups at work. Spaces could be relied on inasmuch as they mitigated feelings of uncomfortability and unsafety. Once they failed to do so, safe spaces changed. Thus, emotions stuck to spaces could change with time, from comfortable to uncomfortable and vice-versa. Some of the informants felt a positive change when being open about their nonnormative genders or sexual orientation. Some relied on objects and their functions as devices of affirmation. And some were affected by others’ bodily dwelling. Here, intersecting social categories with gender and/or sexual orientation affected the informants’ orientating workspaces. Thus, bodily dwelling and its emotional stickiness rely on how queer workers can negotiate how, where, and when they dwell, likewise with whom they dwell. These negotiations can be emotionally intense, which impress on spatial experiences. Ultimately, negotiations of safe and unsafe – comfortable and uncomfortable – spaces for queer workers hinge on ideal, normative others’ dwelling.

### **Between home and work**

Spaces between home and work evoke different feelings for informants, whether it is on their way to or from work, or if they are in other ways connected to work. As for me, I mostly work from home. Spaces between home and work tend to be scarce. The comforting and safe feelings

that originate when I am at home are similarly felt whilst I am working. However, when I do move in spaces between home and work – say, from the university to home or from home to an informant – there are certain emotional attachments to these spaces that are not felt at home. When discussing spaces between home and work with the informants in this study, I noticed dynamic relations regarding the approach towards these spaces. I come to think of Doan's (2010) explication of certain spaces that seemingly abide by the dichotomy of public and private. Here, Doan uses other complementary categories such as quasi public spaces, mixture of public and private, and semi-private spaces. As I mentioned earlier, the comforts and safety of home can be felt elsewhere, which challenge the dichotomy of private and public. Although work is just work for the informants, feelings of safety and comfort can stick to other spaces, objects, and bodies. Influenced by Göransson (2012) I argue that the extension of these positive emotions is aligned with the extension of bodily dwelling. Hence, not being able to extend the feelings of safety and comfort towards workspaces is aligned with the failure of extending the body. If we understand the private home as coveting a sinking feeling (Ahmed, 2014) and the possibilities and limitations in extending one's bodily dwelling towards workspaces, what lies between home and work and how does this space feel?

### **Being neutral and in/visible**

Plea spoke earlier about barriers and how these function as protection against scrutiny and exposure. These ways of protection apply also to spaces between work and home. On his way to school, for instance, he explains:

I just go there, soulless (chuckle), I don't put myself right now when I go to my schools, I'm gonna act as me, but when I show them me it's neutral. [...] I try to, you know, to lower my hand gestures, make my voice a little bit harder, uhm, yeah. I think, with time, you feel used to it. [24/02/2020]

Plea's way of enacting so-called neutral behaviour in workspaces also renders spaces between home and work as similarly in need of behavioural change. In fact, Plea only really feels safe and comfortable at home. This is due to the scrutiny or, in Plea's own words, the "spotlight" that is shone on Plea's body, as a queer and person of colour. Being "neutral" is therefore harder for Plea due to the ever-shining spotlight on his racialised body. Even though he can hide with gender-conforming clothes, visually treading heteronormative lines, lines of whiteness stop his path. He is disorientated when, what Ahmed explains in "A Phenomenology of Whiteness",

losing his seat (Ahmed, 2007:65). Here, notions of racism, gender, and sexuality intersect. Fanon asserts,

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a *black man*.

[2008:86, own emphasis]

The intelligibility of the white world accounts only for white bodies, as they are so-called neutral. For instance, white bodies are not seen as racialised, such a term usually only applies to people of colour. Importantly to note is the expectation of behaviour. A man and black man being separated and the concept of these two predestined. Thus, when Plea enacts neutral behaviour it is to a certain extent of his power to do so accordingly. But the honourable white world, as Fanon explains, designates his bodily dwelling beyond Plea's control, simmering in normative notions of race, gender, and sexuality. It is similar to what Sayna Behdadi (2014) explains about white spaces. As a non-white transman, Behdadi writes about the time when he realised how different he was to normative expectations of race and gender, and how racialised, queer bodies enter white spaces. How these spaces accommodate ideals and norms of whiteness that render people who do not fit these norms as unintelligible for a so-called modern and civilised society. Likewise, racialised bodies are sealed in objecthood and rendered hateable. A hate that Ahmed describes as involving an intensification of emotions that "produce the effect of surfaces and boundaries of bodies" (2006:194). Thus, hateful bodies are subjected to corporeal distancing, as a bodily response to the dwelling of said bodies. The emotional stickiness that are bound to these racialised bodies arouse signs of hate that associate them with notions of heterosexuality, hypermasculinity, danger, and uncivility (Behdadi, 2014; Ahmed, 2006; Fanon, 2008; Göransson, 2012). The racism that Plea experienced when being processed in the Swedish Migration Department and the looks and stares he is given when traversing the "between" spaces in the small village in which he currently lives have influenced Plea's choice of acting "neutral". This does not mean that he becomes "neutral". Plea explains that there is "micro-aggression-racism", which is hard to detect but is felt whenever his presence is noted. "Especially here where I'm one of the few black people, it's like, oh, they're surprised like I'm an extra-terrestrial creature". We speak about the differences of being black and queer in villages and cities. And of course, we can speak of rural areas as consisting of largely white spaces. It does not mean that rural areas are predominately anti-queer. Whilst there is a



difference between villages and cities for Plea, dwelling in cities does not equal safe and comfortable spaces:

[T]he moment that you maybe you want to be in drag, or the moment that, you know, you're having as example, in Pride and wearing Pride flags and walking in Stockholm's central stations, people were looking, like, and you don't know if they're positively or negatively looking, even in those big cities, you don't feel safe.

[24/02/2020]

I feel that the intersectional experiences are important to understand, not only how feeling safe is dependent on the perception of nonnormative gender and sexual expression and being a person of colour. But that Plea's emotions of unsafety hinges on others' feelings of safety. Plea explains that there are difficulties dwelling in these spaces because being in drag and being black and Muslim and migrant have all spotlights that scrutinise Plea in these spaces. In fact, being queer, black, Muslim and migrant offers a contradictory tale, one that ceases to exist in relation to the figure of hateable bodies (Haritaworn, 2015). As Plea noted, there are apparent contradictions in the Swedish, western society of being queer and Muslim, especially in the aftermath of War on Terror. Likewise, Plea has to time and again fend off being portrayed as hypermasculine and belonging to the so-called incorrect culture, and feels most comfortable and safest when at home, away from attentive eyes and stares. It is necessary to discuss how "queer subjects occupy very different places within the social order" (Ahmed, 2014:153), and how notions of social hierarchies intersect. For Plea, feeling comfortable and sinking into spaces are away from places that are already occupied by others' sinking feeling. It is a symptom of the white, hetero- and homonormative world that allude to the postcolonial and so-called progressive nation (Haritaworn, 2015; Ahmed, 2006). If comfort is "the effect of bodies being able to 'sink' into spaces that have already taken their shape" (Ibid:153), I believe that Plea is experiencing the occlusion of these spaces.

Whilst interviewing, I found that all the informants in this thesis were very perceptive regarding their social status and positions (not that I expected otherwise). On numerous occasions, Dem acknowledged the privilege of being white, and older than her work colleagues. When we stepped outside to commence a go-along talk through the city of her residence, I noticed how knowledgeable she was of the city. I grew up not far from this city and she had only lived there for two and half years. Still, I was the one being navigated. Our destination was to walk to her work (or rather in the vicinity) and back again. We never actually made it because

of the dreary, cold weather. But when I asked about her way to work, in how it affects her, she seemed rather indifferent. In fact, for Dem, the feelings that account for the pressures and duties at work start when she is at work. There is no pressure regarding her being lesbian when walking to or from work. I therefore ask myself why there are such significant differences between her story and Plea's story. Naturally, I do not wish to compare experiences and conclude that one is more this and that than the other. Rather, I want to discuss these queer experiences of workspaces together. Now, the answer to the differences is manifold. For instance, it could be a racial aspect; Plea is constantly reminded about being a person of colour. It could be a migration aspect; both Dem and Plea are migrants, but their journey to Sweden have been, put mildly, very different. Their places of residency are also different; Dem lives in a larger city, whilst Plea lives in a smaller village. Differences could also be dependent on the visibility of sexual orientation and gender expression. Dem's lesbian orientation is mostly hidden. Plea, on the other hand, shows an alternative gender expression to the normative masculine man. He therefore becomes hypervisible. Because he steps away from this normative and gendered expectation. In addition, I believe it becomes exacerbated due to emotions being stuck to him that resemble the antiqueer Muslim and hypermasculine, dangerous black man. Whatever the reasons for these different experiences, I argue that the reasons intersect, and the focus of an intersectional analysis has more weight than any individual reason.

Blaize has a somewhat similar experience to Dem. She can move between home and work without feeling detected for her nonnormative sexual orientation. However, she still feels that there is a spotlight that makes her more visible.

[I]f I'm going to work or from work and I'm having this blazer or shirt or blouse, or office clothes, then I have this perception that I look like maybe in my head like a lesbian, then I think, you know, probably, I can imagine that's somebody on the street sees me, which I don't know if anybody cares or looks at me and thinks about me. But like, I assume that, you know, I'm more visible. But maybe it's just in my head, maybe just really people don't see me and don't think about it, don't think about anything, you just see somebody but there is nothing, you just think about your own shit and not the person coming or passing by. But uhm, I think I feel more hidden under, you know, this coat and stuff, so I don't really, like, think about this when I'm going to work or from work if my sexuality is like, illuminating from me or something, you know. [05/03/2020]

“Just see somebody but there is nothing” allows us to think which bodies are seen but rendered as nothing. It is similar to Plea’s term of being neutral. Nothing and neutral (read normative) resemble the attributes for people who can extend their bodily dwellings in these spaces without being stopped or blocked in their way (Ahmed, 2006). They are neither questioned, looked at nor scrutinised. If they are invisible, they cannot be exposed. Thus, being invisible is desirable whilst being visible can cause discomfort. And whilst it can be all in Blaize’s head, it is still something that one thinks about. For instance, Doan (2010) suggests that this type of gendered policing takes place within oneself as well as in external spaces. It is a device that marginalises and “stops” those violating gender norms. Moreover, the weather and seasons of the year can determine comfort in between spaces. Winter requires more clothes and can hide oneself into nothingness/neutrality. The warmer it gets, the more exposed Blaize feels due to certain “giveaways” of a lesbian clothing, whether it is formal office clothes or, what Blaize referred to, lesbian haircuts.

It is Blaize’s own prejudice of what looks gay that makes her reflect on her own clothing between work and home. I agree to a certain extent that the more clothes, the more one can hide behind. However, referring to nonnormative gender expression, clothes can be quick giveaways if something does not seem right to the public – as I discussed earlier in the clothes chapter. I do not believe that all my clothes are a part of how I express myself. But I cannot avoid thinking what others might conclude, whether they think it conforms to gender norms or not. And because of it, I self-monitor my style and actions to minimise risks of exposure, which is balanced with my affirmative emotions towards alternative styles and lines.

### **Past experiences**

The feeling of comfort and discomfort in being in/visible can also be supercharged by past experiences. Whilst sometimes out and about I am met with some stares. In these moments I can feel kind of proud and a bit radical in my modest nonnormative gender expression. However, being met with hostility can be daunting, if not shameful and dangerous. Bicycling home from university, I was met with some comments which I luckily did not hear but most definitely felt. Even if I did not hear the words, I saw how they were uttered. It lacked conviction to really put me off, but it certainly kept my heart pumping. The moment I felt out of line in this between space came at the hand of another, eventually rendering the space as a shameful site. Similarly, Sella and I discussed the screaming, transphobic person in the street. The daunting feeling is that the person making the insult cares to the extent that the deed must be made. Sella has noticed, after quite a lot of abuse on the streets, that it is primarily men that

cares in this way. I ask Sella how they approach the streets when leaving home for work, and how work mitigates a feeling of comfort as a destination (as in “ah, finally there!”). My question had somewhat prematurely assessed that Sella is in discomfort when leaving for work. But Sella does not feel that it is daunting when leaving for work and vice versa. Sella explains that they commute by car to and from work and therefore the car is employed as a private space inside a wider open space. Here, the boundaries that can create skewing between body, objects, and space are mitigated. Sella can extend throughout spaces by the surroundings of a car’s interior. Sella’s car becomes a safe space within an otherwise difficult environment.

Abusive experiences can of course have many consequences to, from or around work. Plea had a friend who was attacked because he was wearing women’s clothes, which set off an alarm in Plea to be more careful about how he expresses himself at work and school, and generally in public. Everton explains that what happens in these so-called between places can have consequences at work. For instance, Everton was walking with his partner, who is non-binary, and they met a lodger from the substance abuse treatment centre at which Everton works. Nothing more than a hello was exchanged. However, at a later point, the lodger confronted Everton at work and incessantly asked about the gender of Everton’s partner. When Everton finally gave an answer that satisfied the lodger, they continued their day as usual. For Everton it was an intensive emotional experience.

This situation was even more emotionally intense, and once again I tried to hide how I really felt. This time I was afraid of this man. I have since earlier known about that he is very racist (which does not directly affect his attitude towards me, but some things go hand-in-hand), he has earlier behaved homophobic towards me, and I have witnessed both his short fuse and violent tendencies before. Here I was placed with a choice; to lie about my partner’s gender and therefore also actively choose not to come out in this situation, or choose to come out and risk a violent reaction. That he was so stubborn to have a clear answer to his question made me believe that he “suspected something”, but what did he think about that? I had not been afraid to come out in a long time. When we are holding hands in town, I meet the judging looks (which often make people look away), and if someone has “opinions”, I can choose to distance myself from that person. Here, however, there were physical, immediate risks to come out, and beyond resigning, I do not really have an opportunity to keep social distance from the person in question. I experienced the situation as being locked in, both physically and psychologically. [13/04/2020]

From a quick and friendly hello whilst passing by to a potentially violent confrontation at work brings between spaces and workspaces together. The risk of exposure is also a risk of violence, and to avoid such consequences, Everton is the one to “act accordingly” and revert to normative gender relations. Knowing that the lodger in question is the cause of previous emotional distress and has a racist and homophobic stance contributes to Everton’s reluctance of being open about his sexual orientation and nonnormative gender relationship. Here, the potential of violence underlies the emotional intensity in this situation. To reuse one of my previous points, the lodger expresses a negative and obsessive notion of care, which evokes the notion of hateable bodies (Ahmed, 2014). Everton’s diverting from normative lines attaches signs of hate to his body. From people moving away in the street, to the lodger incessantly wanting a so-called correct answer.

### **Summary**

I define so-called between spaces as constituting the space between home and work. Whilst work is work and home is home, I argue that the extension of the body in spaces can extend the implications of safety and comfortability at home. Thus, I wish to answer the question: what emotions are expressed in relation to queer workers’ embodied experiences between home and work? Here, implications of being invisible are desirable and perhaps even mired with privilege. Bodies of colour are hypervisible and the feeling of having a spotlight scrutinises how they dwell. Emotions of hate are stuck on their bodies, issuing racist, sexist, and normative assumptions of their dwelling. This, in turn, produces emotions of insecurity, self-monitoring, and stress. Experiences between home and work, even if they are not directly related to work, can still have consequences at work. Failing to follow normative lines and relationships can be more apparent in between spaces than workspaces. When this so-called failure resurfaces at work, it can imply detrimental and potentially violent confrontations. It can be imbued with great emotional stress due to the imagined experiences of confrontation. I argue that between spaces have strong connotations to how one experiences safety and comfort vis-à-vis unsafety and uncomfortability in workspaces.

### **Final words**

In this study I have set out to interrogate normative workspaces by gathering stories of emotions and embodied experiences of people who identify with nonnormative genders and/or sexual orientations. I have constructed three questions which reflect this purpose. What roles clothes,

accessories, and materials on the body play for the informants' embodied experiences were different to say the least. Whilst clothes were sources of twisting and queering that reflected queer workers' sexual and gender expressions, they were also sites of risk and hetero- and cisnormative conformity. Thus, I see clothes, as non-human actors, playing large roles in mutually and continuously transforming subjectification processes with human bodies.

Another research question regarded the spaces between home and work. Here, emotions towards these spaces were in focus. Feelings of hiding, being neutral and invisible vis-à-vis visible, generated limitations and possibilities of movement in these so-called between spaces. Confrontation of violence and uncomfortability could arise in relation to work. Thus, informants had to constantly negotiate between feeling safe and the risks of unexpected confrontations.

I wish to address my main question in this study: how are workers who identify with nonnormative genders and/or sexual orientations affected by embodied experiences in workspaces? Queer workers deviate from the heteronormative lines that dominate in workspaces. They have shown that they must negotiate how they bodily dwell in these spaces, whether they are safe or unsafe. Clothes are important components in expressing themselves, with both possibilities and challenges. Thus, emotions stuck to their clothes are expressed in their embodied experiences. Likewise, experiences in safe spaces within workspaces and the space between home and work accounted for an array of negotiations from the informants. Feelings of risk, pride, solidarity, fear, safety, unsafety, comfortability, and uncomfortability were expressed, amongst other feelings.

With the theoretical underpinnings, I focused on normative lines, implications of orientation, emotional stickiness, and materiality. I believe these guided the understanding of structural and navigational dwelling in workspace. How people create new paths that break from hetero- and cisnorms. And how the sticky nature of emotions reveals nonnormative bodies as hateable and abject. Emotions were also a way to understand the feelings of the informants, how they traversed lines and approached workspaces.

Importantly, intersectionality, as a research method, analytical tool, and epistemological standpoint has permeated this study. How queer workers are affected hinges on intersecting social categories that emerge in their dwelling. Here, gender and sexual orientation intersect with race, migration status, national identity, and more. I believe more intersections and emotions could be investigated, such as class, able-bodiedness, and more. These fell short due to lack of time and space. In addition, a larger number of informants could generate different

views and include more intersecting categories, showing the many emotions and embodied experiences that arise in workspaces.

This study has contributed to fields of space and temporality and gender scientific working life research. In the former, I have shown how normative notions of gender, sexuality, and race are attached to specific spaces that are deemed inevitable for people to navigate. That is, I consider work to be an inevitable location. The neoliberal, capitalist, and postcolonial world forces people towards work and workspaces. In the latter, I have shown that gender scientific working life research is in serious need of theoretical and empirical considerations of space and temporality. Working includes spaces, and who can move in these spaces, I argue, is set on rigid and narrow lines.

Finally, I wish to point out that different materials and methods could produce different results. The results in this study are not exhaustive. Other ways I could have approached the subject is through observation and go-alongs that could have complemented interviews or generated different experiences. Indeed, I used go-along but not to the extensive measures I wished. Interrogating and mapping spaces, the go-along technique can be used advantageously. However, it is vital to consider the ethical issues here. In addition, as an ethical approach, a deeper and established relationship with informants could be important, especially for queer workers. As I set out to account for my own personal experiences whilst working on this study, workspaces have been ever-present, ever-shifting, and impressed on my body. It is why I chose this subject in the first place.

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The interview guide and interview copies are available upon request.