



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

“In the End We Produce Weapons and Not Candy”

Employee Perceptions and Responses of Organizational Core-Stigma
surrounding the European Defense Industry

by

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21st May 2021

Master’s Program in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

Word Count: 23 520

Supervisor: Jens Rennstam
Examiner: Roland Paulsen

Abstract

Title- “In the End We Produce Weapons and Not Candy” - Employee Perceptions and Responses of Organizational Core-Stigma surrounding the European Defense Industry

Seminar Date – 31stMay 2021

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Course – BUSN49 Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

Key Words – Defense Industry, Stigma, Coping Mechanisms, Sociocultural Differences

Purpose – The purpose of the study is to further the understanding of how core-stigma is perceived and responded to by employees in stigmatized organizations. To fulfill this purpose, we examine the following question:

How do employees of the defense industry respond to perceived stigma?

Literature review – We focused on three different areas in contemporary literature that serve as a basis for our research, namely: stigma, consequences of stigma on individuals and the structure of the defense industry.

Methodology – The data set consisted of interviews with employees of Swedish and German organizations within the defense industry. The data was analyzed following the interpretative tradition with a qualitative method and abductive approach.

Conclusions – Variances in stigma perception and responses result from cultural differences that are shaped and manifested in social contexts. The participating employees experience two types of stigma - empty and valid stigma. For valid stigma, opinions are often understood or even shared by the employees, entailing the utilization of coping mechanisms to avoid self-discrediting.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has supported us in writing this thesis and assisted us in any way possible. We are truly thankful for the support. We would like to especially show our appreciation of the support from the following people:

First and foremost, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to our supervisor Jens who has helped us so much during the process of writing this thesis. He has been incredibly helpful and provided us with valuable information that has contributed to make this thesis possible. Your flexibility, easiness and yet focused guidance has helped us to maintain calm during troubling times.

We would also like to say thank you to Katharina and Jürgen, who have introduced us to the world of the defense industry and made these valuable insights possible.

Furthermore, we are incredibly grateful to all participants of the study who have shown us so much trust with their honesty. It was a pleasure to listen to your stories and experiences and you made it possible for us to ask the most personal questions that all of you have answered without hesitation.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our family and friends for mental support and encouragement during this thesis writing process. We could not have done it without the welcome distractions.

We hope you enjoy reading our thesis!

Jonathan Pedersen & Hanna Schuller

Lund, 21st May 2021

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1 Introduction

“I sometimes have to be ironic and ask them whether they need a tank in order to fight me because I would have one at hand. [...] If your last resort is to use violence, or just randomly yell without reflecting upon what it is, then you are in the wrong. Usually, the one that yells the loudest is not always right.”

- Elizabeth, employee in the German defense industry.

The interplay between external audiences and organizations is an important topic that is frequently explored in organizational science (e.g. Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Smidts, Pruyn & Riel, 2001; Hudson, 2008). Companies in today’s society rely on external validation in order to thrive and negative evaluations from outside in the form of stigma have remarkable consequences for both organizational performances but also individual employees of the company (e.g. Tracey & Phillips, 2016; Vergne, 2012). Organizational core-stigma can be seen as an attribution of discrediting characteristics from external audiences in regard to the business operations of the organization (Hudson, 2008). Organizations that are stigmatized are often viewed as illegitimate in the eyes of stigmatizers and generalized through an exaggeration of the stigmatized attribute (Hudson, 2008). The consequences of stigma can be massive for an organization’s performance, because ultimately revenues are reliant on the valuation of stakeholders (e.g. Vergne, 2012).

Organizational stigma does not only have effects on the organization itself. Secondary stigma (or stigma transfer) is a phenomenon that occurs regularly for members of stigmatized groups (e.g. Tracey and Phillips, 2016; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). An organization that is stigmatized because of its core-activities or products is often generalized (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Therefore, the stigmatized attribute is ascribed to all members of the organization, including employees. This stigma transfer results in the direct stigmatization of employees of core-stigmatized organizations and has severe effects on their positive self-view (Kreiner, Ashforth & Sluss, 2006).

One multitude of organizations that are severely stigmatized in today's society is the defense industry, which comprises companies that manufacture all types of military products such as arms and ammunition (e.g. Vergne, 2012). Bearing in mind the size and economic importance of the defense industry, it can be stated that defense companies (also called arms dealers or weapon manufacturers) play a crucial role for many countries in Europe (e.g. Mantin & Tishler, 2004). National economies benefit from exports of weapons to other countries which grows the economic wellbeing and contributes to a stable employment rate (Golde & Tishler, 2004). But despite the national benefits for the country, parts of society view the defense industry and weapon exports as highly critical, for above stated reasons. The defense industry is a business sector that is frequently targeted by public criticism due to its connection to death, war and violence (Vergne, 2012). Products of arms manufacturers range from armed vehicles to machine guns and grenades and cause reasons for public concern, raising questions about the moral legitimacy of the industry (Hudson, 2008; Vergne, 2012). Especially the export of military equipment to non-democratic countries has been a heated political debate in many European countries and puts the defense industry in focus of polarizing media articles and news (Byrne, 2007).

Previous literature has shown that stigmatization is an external threat that bears consequences for individuals (Kreiner et al., 2006). In order to maintain a positive self-view, literature positioned within Social Identity Theory (SIT) has shown that stigma necessitates coping mechanisms that counteract external criticism (Kreiner et al., 2006). Coping mechanisms are crucial for individuals that are criticized about their membership of a stigmatized group, otherwise potentially resulting in personal crisis (e.g. Tracey & Phillips, 2016; Kreiner et al., 2006).

Our study supports existing findings on stigma and its consequences but also contributes to specify the consequences of stigma surrounding the defense industry. With a focus on individual stigma perception and responses, this study contributes to concurrent theoretical literature on organizational core-stigma and its relation to the individual members of the organization.

1.1 Research Problem

The process of stigma transfer on employees of stigmatized organizations is far from being fully explored. The focus of organizational stigma research on organizational consequences and responses has primarily been done in the dimensions of occupational stigma and or event stigma (Sutton & Callahan, 1987; Ashforth, Kreiner & Clark, 2007), which has resulted in a lack of knowledge on employee perceptions in core-stigmatized organizations. Although it has been researched that organizational stigma does have effects on employees (e.g. Tracey & Phillips, 2016), their perception, understanding and response to it has been unexplored. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the concept of dirty work, which focuses on the occupational tasks of individual employees and the stigmatization thereof (e.g. Hughes, 1958; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Löfstrand, Loftus & Loader, 2015), and secondary stigma, whereas employees are not stigmatized for their work tasks but the organization they work for (Tracey & Philips, 2016; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Thus, the perceptions of secondary stigma on employees that result from their employers has not been explored fully.

Literature on stigma consequences and the defense industry are seemingly separated so far. Although the stigmatization of the defense industry has been focused by some scholars (e.g. Vergne, 2012), the consequences of it on the employees have not been shown. Therefore, the defense industry is often used as an example for stigma categorization but the meaning of the industry's stigma on an employee level has not been picked out as a central theme. The special circumstances of the defense industry evoke a dilemma between necessity and illegitimacy, which becomes a central aspect for the social construction of stigma (Hudson, 2008). It is yet to explore how these different variations of stigma are perceived by employees of the defense industry.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to further the understanding of how core-stigma is perceived and responded to by individual employees in stigmatized organizations. We aim to contribute to existing stigma literature by conducting research in the area of the defense industry. The industry presents a special case, whereas it is perceived as necessary on one hand, but

condemned on the other hand. In contrast, other stigmatized sectors such as the gambling or tobacco industry are not as idiosyncratic, as they are not necessary for society.

We use a qualitative research approach by interviewing employees working within the industry, as the study focuses on perceived secondary stigmatization of employees and the subsequent consequences and responses to this. By drawing on literature of organizational core-stigma, consequences of stigma and the structure of the defense industry, we attempt to contribute to concurrent stigma literature with our findings and possibly provide a nuanced image on the employees of the defense industry in particular. To fulfill this purpose, we developed the following research question:

How do employees of the defense industry respond to perceived stigma?

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into 6 different parts that frame the structure of this paper. Within the **first chapter**, an introduction to the topic is given that shows an overview of the problematization of the topic and purpose of this research. The **second chapter** provides a review of the literature that is relevant in the scope of this study. Here, existing theories are presented that our study contributes to and can be positioned within. In **chapter three**, we present the methodology of the study whereas we carefully describe the process of data collection and analysis. Here, we also position the study within its philosophical background. **Chapter four** provides an overview of the empirical findings that the qualitative research has identified. These findings are then related to existing literature in order to discuss similarities and contradictions of our findings in relation to **chapter five**. Here, connections between the findings and literature will be shown and the contributions of our study will be identified. **Chapter six** serves as a summary and conclusion of our study. Additionally, it contains suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

The literature review of this study focuses on three chapters that provide the basis and theoretic background of this study: Stigma, consequences of stigmatization and the structure of the defense industry. The individual concepts are going to be presented so that a broad understanding of the theories are given. Due to the limited scope of this study, the presentation of literature is purposefully restricted and adapted to the research question, providing the reader with necessary relations to key topics and theories. After illustrating findings from previous literature research on stigma and consequences of it, the particular characteristics of the defense industry are going to be outlined and the stigmatization of the industry will be demonstrated. Within the review regarding consequences of stigmatization we are going to digress into Social Identity Theory that has shown to be strongly connected to stigma in previous literature. Although not focusing on identity in this study, literature on this topic provides us with necessary insights about the consequences of stigmatization on individuals. These theoretical findings from previous literature are going to serve as a basis to answer the research question.

2.1 Stigma

The topic of stigma has been explored in scientific literature for a long time and is greatly influenced by the researcher Erving Goffman. Within current stigma literature, the concept can be differentiated between several types of stigma such as personal stigma, organizational stigma, event-stigma or core-stigma. This literature review is going to provide an overview of the term stigma in general and then focuses on organizational core-stigma, which applies to the scope of this study.

Stigma as defined by Goffman (1963) is the external ascription of characteristics and features to a certain group of people or individuals. If these ascribed characteristics are severely discrediting, the categorization can be referred to as stigma (Goffman, 1963). Stigma can thus be seen as an external attribution of negative or discrediting characteristics to a group or person (Goffman, 1963).

The stigmatizers, who we further on are going to call the people who ascribe the negative attributions to the respective group, distinguish between the so-called normal and the stigmatized (Goffman, 1963). Someone who does not possess the stigmatized attribute is considered normal, whereas someone with the particular attribute is automatically categorized with the stigma (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, it is important to differentiate between the discredited and discreditable, whereas the former describes a situation where the stigma has already happened and the latter provides potential for stigmatization (Goffman, 1963).

In order to remain within the scope of this study, it is appropriate to focus on organizational stigma, which is a certain form of stigma that refers to the attribution of negative characteristics of an organization. Devers, Dewett, Mishina and Belsito (2009) define organizational stigma as a “label that evokes a collective stakeholder group-specific perception that an organization possesses a fundamental, deep-seated flaw that deindividuates and discredits the organization” (Devers et al., 2009, p.157). Therefore, it is important to note that organizational stigma is generated in the same aforementioned way as general stigma through different external evaluators who believe that the organization beholds a certain attribute that discredits it (Hudson, 2008).

When focusing on the organizations themselves, Hudson (2008) identifies two different forms of organizational stigma, where the so-called event-stigma is a stigma that follows scandalous events or actions of the organization, for example defective manufacturing of a product (Hudson, 2008). Core-stigma on the contrary is related to the core business and attributes of the organization, where the stigma is not able to be changed over time due to this nature (Hudson, 2008). The latter is the form of stigma that is relevant within the scope of this study.

2.1.1 Stigma as a Social Construct

The concurrent literature, as Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) point out, has a tendency to assume that the opinions are stated as social facts (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). However, the ascription of certain attributes is seen as relationally discrediting and not generally speaking (Goffman, 1963). An attribute that is discrediting in one context, does not necessarily have to be so in another. This reliance on external evaluation bears the effect that stigma is a social construct that differs between varying evaluators. Hudson & Okhuysen (2009) state that in literature, stigma is often depicted as a “monolithic opposition to organizational activities” (Hudson &

Okhuysen, 2009, p.135), which we in this context are going to distance from. Indeed, stigma is quite the opposite whereas the opposition is not monolithic but comes from certain audiences only. Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) argue that this monolithic scope fails to encompass that the social standards of these negative evaluations are in reality fragmented, reflecting upon different levels of concern on parts of society (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). This is an important element in line with the scope of this thesis as the stigma thus can be explained as highly dependent on the external evaluation. One and the same attribute can therefore be viewed as discrediting and stigmatized by one evaluating audience, yet completely value-free or even praised by other audiences (Hudson, 2008).

Whether an organization is regarded as legitimate is highly dependent on its evaluator. Several industries and organizations, including the defense industry, are regarded as legitimate by a large proportion of society, whereas there are always certain groups that regard it as illegitimate and therefore stigmatized (Hudson, 2008). This means that the negative evaluation of stigmatizing audiences should not be taken as a matter of principle but be put into context. The questions that should be asked in regard to core-stigma as described by Hudson & Okhuysen (2009) are “stigmatized by who”, “legitimate to who” and “endorsed by who” (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009).

Moreover, the degree of stigmatization and illegitimacy differs between different audiences, creating a broad distribution of stigmatizations of the same organization. The organization may perceive the stigmatization to be more or less severe, depending on several factors (e.g. Hudson, 2008 or Vergne, 2012). Hudson (2008) identified three factors that are determining how intense a stigma is experienced by the concerned organization. This is dependent on the distance between stigmatizers and organizations regarding values, beliefs and ideologies, the awareness that stigmatizers have of an organization’s core attribute and the size and power of the stigmatized audience. The relative distance between the stigmatizers’ and organization’s values can vary and has influences on the strength of the stigma. If the organization’s core-activities contradicts with the audience's values, the stigma is likely to be stronger. The second aspect is about the awareness of the audience that the company exists, an audience that is less exposed to the organization's operations and therefore not aware of it, is unable to stigmatize it. Last but not least, the stigma is experienced less if the stigmatizing audience is smaller or has less power. If the stigmatizing audience is the majority of a society, the stigma is therefore

experienced to a higher degree compared to if the stigma comes from a small minority (Hudson, 2008).

2.1.2 Stigma as a Source for Stereotypes

As depicted by Goffman (1963), it is of human nature to categorize all people and groups that are associated with the same attribute. In case this certain attribute is regarded as discrediting, as in the case of stigma, it is a natural process that stigmatized groups are generalized, meaning that observations lead to the assumption that everyone that possesses the stigmatized attribute is the same (Goffman, 1963). This generates a stereotype whereas the stigma is viewed as the single and most prominent attribute of the stigmatized group (Devers, Dewett, Mishina and Belsito, 2009). A stereotype as depicted by Moore (2006) is: “the tendency to categorize individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardized image and attribute certain characteristics to all members of the group” (Moore, 2006. p.36). Moreover, stereotypes often stem from the different institutions of society, such as schools, family, or media, and have a tendency to become embedded within societal consciousness. Therefore, they are part of the reason as to why many people have predetermined images of, for example, minority groups (Moore, 2006). Furthermore, the institutionalization of stereotypes serves for reasons as to why they can be very hard to abolish, even when confronted with evidence that disapproves them (Moore, 2006).

The generalization that occurs within stigma results also in the stereotyping of stigmatized organizations (Devers et al., 2009). This means that organizations that are attributed with discrediting characteristics are defined by it and thus discredited as a whole (Devers et al., 2009). An organization that carries a stigma is thus generally viewed as negative and its whole legitimacy is questioned (Hudson, 2008). In other words, and according to the definition of Hudson (2008), stigma is a severe form of illegitimacy that occurs from social disapproval of the organization by a certain audience (Hudson, 2008). Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) point out that although an organization may be regarded as illegitimate does not mean that it performs poorly. The evaluation of external audiences that view the organization as illegitimate is therefore no indicator of the organization’s prosperity. Again, we would like to emphasize that stigma is a social construct that results from external evaluations (Goffman, 1963). Nevertheless, the negative evaluation of organizations from external audiences may have effects on its performance due to businesses’ reliance on clients’ demand (Vergne, 2012). In

summary, we thus specify at this point that we view organizational stigma as an external discrediting of an organizational attribute that taints the whole organization and thus rejects the legitimacy of the organization's existence. However, this subjective illegitimacy is an argumentation from external audiences and does not determine an organization's actual and objective legitimacy.

2.1.3 Secondary Stigma

Tracey and Phillips (2016) depicts that organizational stigma also has effects on individuals that are part of the organization, such as employees. According to the authors, an individual who is a member of a stigmatized group automatically perceives this stigmatization on their own identity. Moreover, external audiences automatically transfer the stigma of the organization to all of its members (Tracey and Phillips, 2016; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009)). This phenomenon can be called secondary stigma or stigma transfer and results from the generalization around courtesy stigma that Goffman (1963) illustrates in his work. Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) compare this to the concept of Reflective Glory developed by Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman and Sloan (1976). Here, a connection to positive attributes acclaimed by others are reflected upon the individual that is surrounded by them, even though the person has not acclaimed these positive attributes themselves. In the case of core-stigmatized organizations the negative attributes tend to be reflected on the individual (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Because members of an organization are also tainted with the stigmatized attribute, all members are generalized and stigmatized, creating a stereotype (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009).

2.2 Consequences of Stigmatization

Stigma can be viewed as an external threat to the positive self-view, according to Tajfel & Turner (1986) positive reaffirmation from external audiences are part of human needs (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, coping mechanisms are needed to maintain this positive self-view which have previously been researched in connection to social identity theory (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2006). It is therefore appropriate to provide an overview of these coping mechanisms, although our research is not going to contribute to identity related literature.

2.2.1 Stigma as a Threat to Social Identity

SIT demonstrates a social phenomenon where individuals position themselves and others in groups in order to create a positive unique distinctiveness of the self in comparison to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to SIT, a social group is a plurality of people who share a common set of characteristics or ideologies and thus perceive themselves as a group or are categorized as a group from external evaluators, so called outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Edwards (2005) describes the occupation of an individual as an important source for social identity. Therefore, organizational membership constitutes a meaningful proportion of the social identity of an individual (Edwards, 2005).

The topic of social identity serves as a basis for the human need of generating and maintaining a positive self-view, which is why it becomes relevant in the scope of this study. Individuals use their social identity in order to create a positive self-view, whereas they compare their own group to other groups and compete against them (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Hereby, the goal of the comparison is to win against another group on a certain dimension and thus create a positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). External threats to this positive distinctiveness need to be overcome and fought, so that the positive self-view is able to be maintained (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Organizational core-stigma can be viewed as an external threat to the social identity of an individual. The core-stigma questions the legitimacy of the organization (Hudson, 2008) and because the occupation is, according to Edwards (2005), a key component of social identity, core-stigmatization can function as an external threat for the positive self-view of individuals. Furthermore, as previously shown, the stigmatization of organizations has a direct effect on its employees (Tracey & Phillips, 2016).

Another important facet is that as depicted by, Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) who argue that “the psychology of social identity theory is powerful because it implies that members may change their behavior by merely thinking differently about their employing organization” (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994., p. 256). Furthermore, the authors also state a change in external evaluation - positively or negatively - is likely to also change the behavior of its employees (Dutton et al., 1994). As such it is important for the individuals to be able to cope with the subsequent personal stigmatization. This so-called secondary stigmatization calls for

coping strategies in response to stigmatization that help individuals to maintain a positive self-view despite the external threat of stigma. Literature within SIT provides a categorization of coping strategies that shall be introduced in this context, due to the direct interconnection of stigma as an external threat to social identity. If stigma has such a strong effect on the individual that the individual starts thinking negatively about their own employer, as shown above, then the social identity is not regarded positively anymore and moreover threatened. In order to avoid the external threat of stigma, many individuals turn to strategies that help to cope with the stigma (Kreiner et al., 2006).

2.2.2 Strategies to maintain a positive Self-View

In order to generate or maintain a positive self-view, group members tend to compare themselves to other groups with the goal of scoring better than the competing groups on a certain dimension (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This type of Social Comparison is called Downward Social Comparison and is often utilized as a strategy to combat external threats to self-esteem (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). It is therefore likely to be used as a response to stigmatization. Social Comparison serves as a means in order to maintain distinctiveness as a positive self-view, because the comparing dimension is freely chosen and thus likely to be won. The social group scores better than the other group and is therefore viewed positively (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the context of stigma as an external threat, the stigmatized occupations are compared to other possibilities that are seen as “even worse” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

In case that the social comparison is not successful and the social group loses, Tajfel and Turner (1986) illustrate additional strategies that members of the threatened group turn to in order to maintain a positive distinctiveness. These strategies can be consolidated under the name Social Creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social Creativity is established through ideologies, whereas the occupation concerned is positioned into a different understanding or positive light through Reframing, Recalibrating, and Refocusing. Reframing transforms the meaning of the stigmatized attributes and reexamines it as a positive value (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Recalibrating accepts the stigma, however diminishes its weight. Lastly, Refocusing shifts the attention away from the stigmatized aspects to non-stigmatized aspects of the occupation (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

A further appearance of Social Creativity is Social Weighting, whereas the concerned groups focus on the support they receive and question the credibility of the criticizers (Kreiner et al., 2006). The supporters of the group are concentrated on whereas the critics are diminished or ascribed less credibility (Kreiner et al., 2006). This coping mechanism results from the social construction of stigma that has been shown in the previous chapter. We therefore reminisce about the questions by Hudson & Okhuysen (2009): “stigmatized by who”, “legitimate to who” and “endorsed by who”, which this theory can be connected with.

Although usually successful to a certain degree, Kreiner et al. (2006) describe that Social Creativity as a defense strategy to stigmatization is finite. The authors state that the stigmatized individuals have a certain degree of exposure to this external threat, where the discrediting attributions are accepted and believed to be valid. Kreiner et al (2006) position this acceptance within System Justification Theory (SJT) (e.g. Jost & Banaji, 1994; King, Hebl, & Heatherton, 2005), whereas the stigmatization of an individual results in the belief that their own features are discrediting and the lower social status is ascribed to oneself.

As a consequence, to System Justification, the stigmatized individuals seek a possibility to either exit the stigmatized group or disidentify with it (Kreiner et al., 2006). The exit of the group is called Social Mobility and refers to leaving the organization in case of organizational stigma. However, this exit often bears high costs and is seldom an option. For this reason, many individuals disidentify with the stigmatized attribute of the organization, and identify with other attributes, resulting in a state of ambivalence (Kreiner et al., 2006). The ambivalence may be shown in the form of contradictory statements of the concerned group and hence there is a simultaneous identification and disidentification with the occupation (Kreiner et al., 2006).

The previous distinctions are of utmost importance when looking at the industry focused in this thesis, the defense industry, an often heavily debated industry, where many people see it as a necessity for the survival of society and others see it as the root of all problems.

2.3 Stigma & the Defense Industry

The defense industry is the economic sector that develops and produces equipment and technology for armed forces and the military. The product range of companies within the

defense industry includes, among others, weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and aircrafts, and electronic surveillance technology. Although the defense industry itself provides scope for a deep analysis, we remain rather superficial in this literature review and limit the description of the industry to particular features that are relevant to this study.

The stigmatization of the defense industry often serves as an example in literature on stigma (e.g. Grougiou, Dedoulis, Leventis, 2016; Zhang, Wang, Toubiana & Greenwood, 2021), yet, few scientific articles use the defense industry as a focus. The connection of military products to violence and death make the defense industry a target of stigma, which is shown by its referral to as the business of death or killing industry, often wished to be avoided (Vergne, 2012). Providing a deeper insight into this industry, it can be noticed that the stigmatization of the individual organizations within the defense industry are dependent on several factors (Vergne, 2012). For example, an organization is regarded as less prone to stigmatization if the customers they sell to are considered responsible and trustworthy, as in representing democratic values (Vergne, 2012). Although there are varying dimensions within the defense industry that distinguish the individual organizations, the companies share several general characteristics that are specific for the industry and distinguishable from other markets. It is therefore appropriate to illustrate a basic understanding of the defense industry as such and point out its distinctive features.

2.3.1 Consequences of Military Products

The key characteristics of the defense industry that is targeted by stigma is the products, due to their direct connection to violence, war and even death (e.g. Vergne, 2012; Byrne, 2007). The foreseeable consequences of the defense industry's products cause concerns about the moral legitimacy of the whole industry (Byrne, 2007). As Vergne (2012) states, anything that has a connection with death is systematically stigmatized, thus including the defense industry (Vergne, 2012). The products of the defense industry do not solely include safety equipment such as surveillance technology but also comprise arms and ammunition that can be used by armed forces. These products range from armed vehicles to grenades and machine guns. The ultimate use of the product can cause the death of a person, which naturally evokes ethical concerns and puts the industry in the light of being the driver for violence and war. Simply put, products that kill people cannot be socially responsible (Halpern & Snider, 2012) and thus serve as targets of stigmatization.

2.3.2 Dependency on Governments

The defense industry is highly influenced by political developments and thus strongly interrelated to the government. The industry saw its peak during the Cold War, where countries invested great expenditures into military equipment in order to be prepared for a potential war or attack (Golde & Tishler, 2004). In the following years starting in the 1990s, the defense industry underwent significant changes that stamped the industry as it is today (Mantin & Tishler, 2004). Since the Cold War, military expenditures have decreased significantly for most countries, although several events such as the terrorist attack, 9/11, on the world trade center have once again heightened its relevance and gave the defense industry a renewed perception of necessity (Golde & Tishler, 2004). These developments have slowly resulted in several mergers of defense companies, which led to an oligopoly of private arms manufacturers that resemble few super-companies, mainly situated within Western Europe and the United States (Golde & Tishler, 2004). Hence, almost every country has its “national champion” in weapon production which controls the national market (Golde & Tishler, 2004, p.677).

First and foremost, it is this national champion’s task to provide the local military with appropriate equipment. Despite the privatization of the companies, the industry remains highly controlled by the national government (Golde & Tishler, 2004). This governmental regulation not least originates in the interest of the nation to defend the country against potential enemies and therefore be equipped with better military technology (Mantin & Tishler, 2004). Governmental regulations in the defense industry hence include the close monitoring of trade partners, for example as in restricting the exports to non-member countries of joint venture organizations such as NATO (Mantin & Tishler, 2004). To summarize, the defense industry is particularly characterized by its interplay with and restriction through governmental regulations and monitoring.

Due to its close coherency with the government, it can be argued that the defense industry is thus equally dependent on public approval as other markets that directly sell their products to society (Vergne, 2012). The society in democratic countries votes on the existence of the defense industry in the country and thus determines whether the government spends expenditures on military equipment. If the society has a negative stance towards the industry, the government decreases investments in the products and thus risks the proficiency of arms manufacturers (Prieto-Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2011).

2.3.3 Justifiability of the Defense Industry in times of Peace

Due to the ongoing monitoring and regulation of the defense and military within individual nations, and organizations such as NATO, governments are the defense industry's primary clients. They pay high expenditures on military equipment and army training to prepare for potential future attacks or wars (Mantin & Tishler, 2004). Because of the unpredictability of war and current absence of such in Europe and the USA, the benefits of these expenditures are difficult to measure and many countries have heated debates in politics about the validity of military equipment expenditures (Mantin, & Tishler, 2004). On the one hand, the investments are argued to be better made in other social needs such as education or health; on the other hand, a country makes an easy target for attacks if not equipped with a proper defense (Mantin & Tishler, 2004).

In times of peace, which we can call the 21st century in Europe, the expenditures are hardly justified because the equipment remains unused (Prieto-Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2011). The financial investment in the defense industry is argued to be invested rather into other social or economic purposes that serve the society (Mantin & Tishler, 2004). However, arguments from pro-defense stances are stating that a good equipment of the military serves as a deterrent effect which prevents potential enemies from attacking the country. This makes the measurability of the benefits of the defense industry impossible (Tishler & Mantin, 2004).

2.3.4 Exports

Apart from national governments, defense companies go into trade with foreign governments and companies (García-Alonso & Hartley, 2000). Not least is the reason for these exports the pure economic survival of the company as they could not remain profitable without commerce with other countries (García-Alonso & Hartley, 2000). This trade of military equipment causes a dilemma between security and profits, whereas a government has to decide whether it remains independent or risks security by providing potential enemies with its own equipment (García-Alonso & Hartley, 2000). Whilst, the equipment of the national government with military technology is prioritized, the exports are an indispensable undertaking for many enterprises in order to provide these products to the own government (Golde & Tishler, 2004).

This reliance on exports of the defense industry is heavily criticized (Vergne, 2012; Byrne, 2007). Whereas the production of weapons in a country that is not involved in war can be seen for purely preparatory reasons, other countries that are involved in war might actually make use of the products and therefore contribute to war and misery and thus to the death of people. Especially in countries that are not based on democratic values, the decision to import weapons is not made by people who are ultimately affected by it and therefore the export decisions seem unjust or even unethical. The export of weapons to non-democratic countries thus represents a violation of human rights (Byrne, 2007).

Another concern connected to the export of military products is the loss of monitoring the moment the products leave the country (Callado-Muñoz, Hromcová, Sanso-Navarro, Utrero-González & Vera-Cabello, 2020). Whereas the defense industry within democratic countries in Western Europe is heavily regulated through bureaucratic measures, other countries that import military equipment might be less regulated and therefore run the risk of corruption, which potentially leads to the misuse of the products (Callado-Muñoz et al., 2020). An ethical and responsible use of the products within the importing countries cannot fully be guaranteed and the products may be taken to the “wrong person”. However, it is also appropriate to mention that the heavy export regulations of many governments take this problem into account by carefully assessing the trade partner nations (Callado-Muñoz, 2020).

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

In summary, the literature on stigma has shown that the phenomenon of stigma is socially constructed and often generalized to affect the whole organization and its members (Goffman, 1963; Tracey & Phillips, 2016). As a consequence of stigma, individual members of the stigmatized group perceive stigma as an external threat to the positive self-view which has consequences on their social identity (Kreiner et al., 2006). As a response, this external threat through stigma is counteracted with several coping mechanisms that are positioned within literature of SIT (Kreiner et al., 2006). The particular case of the defense industry shows that the business sector of arms dealers represents several features that are targeted by stigma (Vergne, 2012). Drawing together these two research fields, this study is going to make a connection between stigma and the defense industry and research the consequences of organizational stigma for employees of the defense industry.

Literature on the defense industry and stigma shows that defense companies all over the world are targeted by stigmatization and are often regarded as illegitimate from external audiences (Vergne, 2012). This core-stigmatization of the defense industry is among others caused by the sensitivity of the companies' products and its affiliation to violence and death. Several other characteristics of the industry make it a target for core-stigma, especially for the reason of its high interconnection with politics and spendings during absence of war and terroristic threats (Tishler & Mantin, 2004).

Consequences for individuals who are targeted by stigma have been largely explored within the scope of SIT. In this context, stigma is viewed as an external threat to a positive self-view, which requires several coping strategies to counteract. Kreiner et al. (2006) therefore identified several coping mechanisms, positioned within social identity theory, that have been observed as individual responses to stigmatization as a threat to positive self-esteem. This review of existing literature has shown that stigma does have severe effects on concerned individuals. On the basis of this knowledge, our study aims to find out how employees respond to the organizational stigma of the defense industry. This particular case presents a gap in scientific literature that we aim to research in the scope of this study.

3 Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methodical process of this research, serving as a foundation for the construction and execution of the analysis in chapter four. The methodology is concerned with the philosophical grounding, research design, data collection and analysis and limitations.

3.1 Philosophical Grounding

This study has the aim of understanding employees' perceptions of the organization's core-stigma in the defense industry, which is why we chose to research the study based on a qualitative approach. The study aims to find out "what is going on" and "what does it mean", making words more important than numbers, so that a qualitative approach was chosen (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015, p.13). With a primary source of qualitative interviews, the subjective insights were able to be explained in a personal setting that gave us the possibility to ask clarifying questions and understand the exact social setting of explained situations and reactions. Moreover, the method of interviewing employees provided a possibility of getting to know the participants better personally and position their subjective views in context to their personal lives and circumstances. This aim suggests an orientation within the interpretivist research tradition, because it enables us to view employees in their sociocultural environment (Wilson, 2014). Although the interviewees have thoroughly explained their insights and feelings, it remains up to us as researchers to interpret these findings. Moreover, the interpretivist approach gave us the possibility to put findings into social and cultural context and make connections between the varying statements (Wilson, 2014). Within the interpretivist tradition, our study focuses on symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2018). By understanding the perception of stigma by employees of a core-stigmatized organization, we explore "the role of the *self* in the construction of reality" (Prasad, 2018. p. 19).

3.2 Research Design

As commonly done within the interpretivist tradition, this thesis is solely focused upon a qualitative research method. As we attempt to gain insights into the social worlds, understandings and subsequent actions of employees of the defense industry, it is a more suitable method than basing the findings upon numbers as commonly done in a quantitative method (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Furthermore, the thesis is based around the individual perspectives of the interviewees, where we as researchers receive insights into their world. Thus, it enables us to answer the research questions in a purposeful way.

The study was conducted in an abductive nature. Abduction as such is based upon theoretical frameworks that interprets and explains the phenomena (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Furthermore, as the collection of data and literature research happens simultaneously and in adjustment with one another, the abductive approach enables us to adjust and realign the framework with the findings. This served as an enlightening way of working in regard to the topic of our study, as the defense industry is a less commonly researched area, in particular from within the context of individual perceptions and reactions towards stigmatization. By using an abductive approach, we could compare concurrent literature with the data from our study and compare, and identify new findings.

3.3 Data collection

To gain better insights into how employees within the defense industry deal with the stigma, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This data collection method is another way for us as researchers to dig deeper into the world of the defense industry and in turn see how our interviewees themselves describe it (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Firstly, we made initial contact with a German based defense corporation with the initial approach of making a case study together with the company. Due to problems in finding sufficient amounts of interviewees and regulations of the work union, we simultaneously approached individuals also working within the defense sector from other companies on LinkedIn. In total, the 13 interviewees come from a number of different defense-companies all

located within Europe, more specifically in Germany and Sweden. The locations of the companies have been chosen randomly and later appeared to be of importance later during the process. This aspect is of inductive nature, as it shows a theory that developed during the data collection process. The exact number and location of the firms are not going to be named here in order to guarantee the anonymity of the companies and interviewees. The companies are given pseudonyms that stand representative for all organizations we have been in contact with. Therefore, we give all Swedish companies the name Viktorsson Defense and all German companies the name Schmidt Defense. Moreover, city names, locations and products were also given random names to protect the company's anonymity. The interviewees were from various departments within the companies with a majority in a managerial position. The participants were fairly young with ages ranging between 27-60 years of age. Moreover, the interviewees were almost evenly split between men and women. 10 of the interviews were conducted in English whereas three were done in German and translated afterwards. Following is a table presenting the participants and their coded name tags:

Pseudonym	Company & Country
Isabella	Viktorsson Defense, Sweden
Chloe	
Maya	
Henry	
Sophia	
Alice	Schmidt Defense, Germany
Charles	
Elizabeth	
Olivia	
Amelia	

Jack	
Mitchell	
Oscar	

Due to the COVID-19 situation we had no other choice than to conduct our interviews over the internet via communication applications, such as via Zoom, Cisco WebEx, or Skype. Bell et al. (2019) describe that there are problems with conducting interviews over the internet rather than face-to-face such as conveying accurate motivations and responses to the questions. In order to try and combat this as much as possible, we tried to participate in as many interviews as possible together and to conduct them via a semi-structured interview set-up. Thus, the interviews were conducted in an informal way to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible, enabling a natural conversation between the researchers and the interviewee (Bell et al., 2019). The conversational nature of semi-structured interview questions enables the researchers to show greater interest in the interviewee's answers and to a further degree understand what they identify as important (Bell et al., 2019). A further benefit of semi-structuring the interviews is that it enabled us to be more flexible and ask follow-up questions if there were uncertainties or further interest about a certain subject (Bell et al., 2019).

Robson (2002) explains that interviews regularly follow an interpretative path as the focus is on understanding the interviewee's thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, the questions related to the perception of the merger itself and the integration process. The focus was on "how" and "what"- questions in order to gain the interviewees' sense making perspective (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The interviews lasted between 45 - 60 minutes, depending on the interviewees time and data saturation; the point in research where we discovered no new information (Bell et al., 2019). During interviews, we wrote down our thoughts and perceptions in the form of field notes.

We have conducted the interviews with the consent of the interviewees and ensured absolute anonymity of their names, job titles and the companies itself. Through the assurance of anonymity, the interviewees communicated freely and shared positive and negative stories, showing trust in us as researchers' and our integrity (Bell et al., 2019). By conducting one

interview after another, we gained more insights into the context of the situations the employees mentioned, which influenced the quality of the subsequent interviews positively. Our holistic interpretation considering the nature of the data to be more valuable than the codification (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009).

In order to guarantee the anonymity of the companies, we decide to not go into detail about the companies' operations, products or activities. Nevertheless, we can state that all companies that play a role in our study have a product range that can be categorized in the defense industry.

3.4 Data analysis

In order to make the data representative, the analysis focuses on sorting and reducing the data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). The analysis was thus conducted in three steps. The interviews provided were analyzed by drawing upon grounded theory and coding (Bowen, 2009). The statements were characterized and put into categories of similar topics, so that several codes were identified. That way, the statement's content was sorted and clustered. As a following step, the data was reduced to make it more feasible (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). To reduce the data, we used categorical reduction by counting how many times the categories appeared. Then, we chose the categories with the most counts. In the third and final step "Arguing" we chose the method of excerpt commentary units in order to argue for our analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Hereby, we choose to represent each category as an orientation. All the excerpts and orientations below come from the interviews done during the data collection period.

As an initial step, it was decided to fully transcribe the interviews to text format. This was possible thanks to the possibility of recording all interviews on tape, with the exception of one interview. Insights from this interview were recorded through careful note-taking during the interview. The transcriptions were carefully read and individual statements were then cut out and put into a table, together with all statements. First, the interview statements were categorized using first-order categories that gave the researchers a first orientation on what was said in the statement. These first-order categories were stating whether the statement was about general job descriptions, company operations, the understanding of the defense industry's role within the country or experiences with stigma confrontations. Then followed a categorization

of second-order categories that built more detailed categories resulting from the first-order categories. These categories clustered how the individuals described situations or answered questions. For example, we categorized the type of ethical concerns that interviewees had, what kind of reactions they received when mentioning their employer to others and how they describe the role of their employer for society. In order to ensure objectivity and reliability of the codes, the process was done by us two researchers separately and then reconciled (Mayring, 2004).

3.5 Reflections and Limitations

Although within the possibilities and resources of conducting this study, we have tried to apply methodological strategies to the best possible performance, the methods imply natural limitations that need to be kept in mind. As Bell et al. (2019) highlight in their study, the quality of qualitative study is the dependency on subjective interpretations, which we are bound to. Especially the interpretivist tradition that we position this research in shows a great dependency on the researcher and is thus limited in the aspired objectivity (Bell et al., 2019).

Moreover, this research aims to understand the perceived reality of employees of the defense industry, which has the presupposition that multiple realities are able to exist simultaneously (Bell et al., 2019). However, Prasad (2018) criticized that symbolic interactionism, which this study can be allocated in, often ignores the societal pressures that are not taken into account when viewing reality pluralities (Prasad, 2018). We thus accept this limitation as a natural side-effect of this study that is important to be aware of.

Moreover, as we as researchers are part of societies that play a role in the stigma perception of the employees, we accept that our own interpretations of the defense industry are unable to be completely discarded. Although we tried to perform the interviews as neutral as possible and without any judgmental views, we are aware that this neutrality is only maintained to a certain extent.

Last but not least, the Covid-19 pandemic that is present at the time of this thesis construction restrained the qualitative interviews to be held online, limiting potential insights that come from body language and non-verbal communication.

4 Empirical Findings

The empirical findings that were identified have been categorized into three main sections. First, we show how the stigma is conveyed to employees of the defense industry and what differences could be determined between Swedish and German interviewees. In the second section, we show differences of perceived stigma and how these are responded to by the interviewees in social interactions. The last section shows coping mechanisms that the employees often turn to as a response to valid stigma. These are expressed through an emphasis on security, bureaucracy or a comparison to other industries.

4.1 Awareness and Perception of Stigma

The stigmatization of the defense industry is understood by the participating employees of our study. Even if all the participants do not agree with the stigmatization, they all have a thorough understanding of why the stigma exists within some audiences. The industry is seen as a delicate topic that is highly criticized in politics and society, making it an easy target for stigmatization. In the interviews, many employees show this awareness in their responses despite not directly being asked:

Schmidt Defense as a company surely is a company with a lot of history. It is very diverse in its enterprise structure and operates worldwide. It operates within an industry that is very relevant on a global scale but also targeted by controversial discussions. [...]. I have to say that if someone told me two years ago that I would work for Schmidt Defense, I would have laughed really loud and thought “never”. [...]. I grew up in Berlin, where the values stances are a little... I do not want to say alternative but let us say open. Also my friends view things like this rather controversial and see Schmidt Defense as a red flag. The public opinion definitely plays a role and it just

seemed surreal to end up here because one is somehow affected by the social environment. - Jack

Jack's statement shows that he is aware of the stigma of the industry. He did not picture himself as an employee of the industry before he started, because he was influenced by his social environment and upbringing in Berlin. He also hints at the fact that the common attitude in Berlin towards the defense industry is rather negative, as the values of Berlin are less conservative than other parts. Elizabeth provides more detail as to why the industry is criticized:

So we do export our products. Basically anywhere, which is sometimes a bit strange to many people. If we talk about Algeria, for example, where people talk about human rights not being completely integrated to the degree that it is not ethically responsible to sell them there. - Elizabeth

This statement picks up on the exports of Schmidt Defense, which often is seen in negative light and as a target of stigmatization. Many employees have expressed this aspect as a factor that receives much criticism. On top of that, Sophia shows that there is a derived stigmatization of the employees themselves, who are assumed to represent and agree with certain values of the industry:

That is quite controversial and I have had comments from friends who do not agree with the values that one assumes one has when you go into this kind of work. - Sophia

The statement above shows the frequent confrontation that employees of the defense industry are opposed to, because they are stigmatized with having certain values and stances.

To summarize, the interviews have shown that employees of the defense industry are not only aware of the stigma surrounding their employers, but are also frequently targeted by it. There is not only a discussion about the legitimacy of the industry itself, but the individual people that work within the industry are often stigmatized and confronted with criticism about their

personal values and stances. As an employee you are assumed to fulfill a stereotypical role as conceptualized by the stigmatizers.

4.1.1 Stereotypes

Due to the nature of the stigmatization, some interviewees depicted how they were stereotyped by stigmatizers. There seems to be a pronounced image of how stereotypical defense industry employees should be, often described as weapon-freak's or walking around in army clothing. These findings were mostly depicted in the German accounts. Olivia explains that she had a predetermined image before starting to work within the industry:

Because of course from the outside you always have one perception and then from the inside it is another. In the end we in the organization are a cross section of society. I am sure there are people here who burn for our products, who have been in the military and then there are also people like me who never had a connection with it previous to their jobs and also have little touchpoints with the products in their work. [...] I do not know, just as in society there are a lot of opinions, generations and standpoints, it is the same here. I think that also changed my viewpoint because previously I probably had the prejudice that only stereotypical weapon-freak's work here. But it is not like that. - Olivia

As Olivia explains there is an often associated stereotype in regard to the industry, which she herself had before entering the organization, where all employees of the defense industry are believed to be weapon fanatics. As she depicts, the nature of the industry is quite diverse, both in terms of the people working within the industry but also in terms of what projects they work with. She draws upon the fact that within the company, there are as many different perspectives and variations as in society. Amelia shows how she encounters this stereotype, even within the company:

I think as an addition it is important to mention that we are all very normal people here at Schmidt Defense. I would have almost said like you and me but I also work here. But we are not weapon fanatics or hot for war. [...]. I think that is interesting and important to know because people have certain prejudices and put us in boxes. They think we are all freaks and walk around with our weapons.

I noticed that when the [civilian] and defense division were merged and a big celebration took place to celebrate Schmidt Defense. I stood in line for the buffet to get a burger or something and it was raining and we stood under a roof. I started talking to the person next to me and asked where he worked and he said in Franklin in the [civilian] factory. Then he asked me and I said I work for the defense division and he took a step back and said: oh. And then another colleague of the workers' council turned around and asked what he expected, that we would walk around with gold in our pockets dressed in camouflage? And he said yes, I expected I would recognize you. But I want to say that you do not. We are normal people and many who work here have no history in the military or so. - Amelia

Amelia reimburses the already depicted and often occurring stereotyping of the industry, as the industry seems to invoke heavy generalizations from certain audiences, sometimes even from within the same company. She highlights that despite the controversy of the defense industry, the employees are not embodiments of the stereotypes. She refers to an encounter with an employee from the same company whose expectation of stereotypes was so strong that he believed he would see visible indicators of the defense division's employees. Furthermore, Amelia emphasizes that the industry consists of just normal people to assert that there are no big differences between people within or outside of the industry. Elizabeth depicts her reality of not fitting in with the stereotype herself:

There are some that really find it brave or good that I took the job. There are also other people that still do not understand it and that constantly want to talk about it, where I just refrain from that. There are also people, it is quite funny when you talk to people, people are trying to make excuses for you. I do not need an excuse to work. I know what the products are doing and they start to say: "Oh, that is because you are the head of HR because you do not have anything to do with it." No, I do. I do. I do have a direct impact. I am the one training the people to be able to build the products. I have the same responsibility as the person sitting there and actually screwing it together. That is something you need to consider. - Elizabeth

By saying it is brave or good that Elizabeth took the job, the commenters accept that there is a stigma but they do not draw the connection to Elizabeth as a person, as the stereotyping

suggests. It seems that there is a mismatch in the prejudices that people have with the reality that they encounter as with Elizabeth. She does not symbolize or strike stigmatizers as the typical defense industry employee.

4.2 Stigma and Cultural Contexts

Differences in how the stigma is perceived and responded to could be noted between the German and Swedish accounts. In general, the stigma of the defense industry has a greater effect on the German employees than on the Swedish employees that were interviewed. Our interviews show pronounced differences between the two countries' respective accounts, as in how much individual employees are confronted with critique and stigmatization. Oscar provided an example for this:

I hesitate to tell everyone at a party. I am a little bit reluctant to tell them because the general, overall, or common mindset in Germany is that the defense industry is bad. They do not know all the details that I learned meanwhile. But in general everyone says the defense industry is bad [...]. So I do not tell this in front of big groups that do not know what I am working in. [...]. It is a different thing for example when you go to the US. At first I was thinking I cannot tell the policeman on the border control and customs officer that I work in the defense industry because again, people think in Germany, that it is dangerous. But at the end it came up that all the officers and officials are pretty pro defense industry, and when you tell them you are supplying products to the United States Marine Corps, which is pretty well known, they have a good opinion about that. Then they like you and have a "hohes Ansehen" [good reputation] of you working in the defense industry. - Oscar

Oscar emphasizes that some of his previous experiences ended with confrontation when talking about his employer in Germany. He also believes that the defense industry is stigmatized in Germany because there is a general mindset that views it negatively. Therefore, he tries to avoid the topic altogether. However, he experienced a completely different mindset in the United States of America, where he recounts an encounter with border control. There, he

realized that the officers were impressed by his work and praised him for it, which is in contrast to aforementioned experiences. Amelia has had similar experiences:

I talked to a British girl and thought: “Oh god now she thinks you are the weapon retailer”. But she did not even bear upon it as much and it was not as uncomfortable as I thought. She also did not judge me. Apparently the topic in Great Britain is not as stigmatized as in Germany. [...] Therefore, it is not such a big topic when I talk to international friends or colleagues. When I meet people in Germany, I am more likely to be confronted and accused of killing people. - Amelia

This statement shows the social and cultural construction of stigma. Germans interviewees seem to be more careful about revealing their employer when talking to other German citizens. When they talk to people outside of Germany the stigmatization seems less present. Some of the employees related this cultural difference to the historical context of Germany:

It just shows you how different people have a look at it, and how important defense and security of the nation and the people is seen in different nations. Also, how different the perception of threat is at the same time because that is very much linked. This is completely different [in different countries]. Because of our history in Germany then for example, compared to the US, which is probably the other extreme. We had a high level career diplomat of the US Embassy as a visitor. She explained to us: “You know, in the US, we give up everything. If we get short of money, [we give up] everything except our ability to defend ourselves.” - Charles

As Charles emphasizes the historical contexts are largely dependent on the general outlook that the population has on particular topics, which could be a likely denominator in the case of Germany. Germany in particular is a country who has had a strained relationship towards the military, after the two world wars in the 20th century. He mentions a meeting with a diplomat from the US that says that the ability to defend themselves is the last thing that they give up in a shortage of money. Highlighting that in some countries, defense and military has a higher value than most other dimensions.

In comparison, as explained by Swedish employees, it can be noticed that working in the defense industry is a personal choice that everyone is eligible to make, although not always understood by others:

I am a Viktorsson Defense ambassador for students. And it is a question we get a lot. What does it feel like to work in the defense industry? That is quite controversial and I have had comments from friends also who do not agree with the values. [...] Essentially, they say, I would never be able to work at a defense company. And I also had some colleagues or consultants telling me that they could not work with certain products. - Sophia

The conversations Sophia had were based on personal values but free from accusations. Her dialog partners were showing interest in her perception of what it feels like to work for the defense industry even though as Sophia states the industry as a topic can be controversial. They further commented that they could not personally do it, as some core-products collided with their values. This highlights that the stigma on Swedish accounts is not directly targeting the employees. Furthermore, there seems to exist similarities in interest with Swedish audiences but not to the degree as on the German accounts. No Swedish employee said that they had been directly confronted and accused on an individual level. Maya as a Swedish employee is mainly asked about the products:

They think the product is cool, but I have never actually got a follow up question about my values, or how I feel about working in the defense industry. Most people just think like oh cool products. Also a lot of people inside the company think that we are doing some really cool stuff. - Maya

Maya has never experienced a negative reaction about her employer choice. Her personal beliefs and values are not questioned or brought in connection to her employer. People are interested in the products of her company and prefer to have conversations around them. She also highlights that this fondness of the products seems to be shared at company level. Isabella has had reactions towards her employer, however they were mostly positive:

The reactions I receive are positive. I have not been confronted with much negative criticism since I started working at my company two years ago. Many reactions are from people who are pro-navy or pro-armed forces. Opinion polls also show that this represents the majority of the public opinion in Sweden. - Isabella

During the two years Isabella has worked in the industry, she has not been confronted with accusations about her employer choice. She believes that this represents the general Swedish opinion, who according to her, have a positive stance towards the industry. Furthermore, she also highlights that most of the reactions are from people who have a positive opinion about the defense industry. Although there are some Swedish interviewees that have been confronted with criticism, these negative reactions are rather seldom and less confrontational in nature.

In summary, the participants show that they are confronted with critique and stigmatization to varying degrees. The differences are especially prominent in different countries. Swedish employees seem to be confronted less than German employees. Moreover, multiple German employees have independently stated that they are confronted and often criticized in Germany, whereas in interactions in other countries such as the USA they are perceived differently or even positively.

Apart from how strongly the stigma was perceived by the employees, cultural differences could also be identified regarding ethical concerns of the interviewees. Not only was the stigma perceived stronger on German accounts, we could also see that ethical concerns regarding the defense industry's products were given more attention by the employees in the interviews.

4.2.1 Ethical Concerns

Multiple interviewees were stating that they sometimes have ethical concerns about the defense industry. The type of concerns differed between the participants from the end usage of the products to what kind of countries they were sold to. It was noticeable that German interviewees showed more signs of ethical concerns and they were willing to go more into detail with them. One interviewee Amelia expressed her concerns about the end-usage:

I have [ethical concerns] quite regularly. The use of our products is always dependent on the person. Even if someone is trained extremely well, mistakes can always happen. Or it can happen that a product is taken advantage of because of lack of knowledge or ends up in the wrong hands because of carelessness. When thinking about how this may contribute to the harm of people, it really affects me. - Amelia

Amelia is affected when thinking about the use of Schmidt Defense's products. She is aware that the products are ultimately designed to kill or hurt people. She also states that it does not matter how well trained a person is or how well grounded the selling of the product is, there is always the off-chance that the wrong person gets their hands on the product. Furthermore, she says that this potential harm actually impacts her well-being, showing ethical concerns in regard to the industry. Thoughts like this were voiced by several participants throughout the interviews, for example by Elizabeth:

I talk to service employees all the time. Service employees are those that repair the products on site. So actually, we have had a couple of losses there as well. So that is quite hard. If you hear those stories, and you know, when you have to send people out to war zones. That is something where I believe sitting here, it is very hard to completely avoid the topic, even if you want to. - Elizabeth

Elizabeth depicts that her work relationship with service employees made her think about the problems that the defense industry entails. She finds it hard to accept the delegation of service employees to war zones, as she knows about the potential risk that it entails for her colleagues. The death of her colleagues makes it hard for her to ignore or avoid the topic. Furthermore, Charles shows how he deals with his ethical concerns:

But nevertheless, we are aware about our responsibilities, and therefore, we operate and want to operate at the highest ethical standards. But we do make mistakes. I mean this is part of human behavior. But clearly, our objective is to really operate against the highest ethical standards. And so far, we are doing well in this. And I think that also helps. At least it helps me knowing that we as a company are taking care of all these

aspects. The ethical and compliance side to conduct this business and being active inside of this defense environment. At the end of the day it is about life and death when our products and weapons are getting used. - Charles

Charles shows that he does have ethical concerns about the products, because they are ultimately deciding about life or death. However, being aware of this responsibility makes it possible to deal with obligations, which the company takes seriously and makes sure to decrease any form of danger that the products might entail. The company therefore applies the highest ethical standards, which help him to lessen the ethical concerns that he has.

On the contrary, the negative aspects of their employer was not necessarily focused on the products by Swedish interviewees. Sophia elaborated on a specific set of values that were important for her:

Sometimes you feel like you would like to especially as a feminist, and someone who really thinks that the world should strive towards democratic values. And it kind of feels difficult to stand up for it when you have a customer that pays. So that is one of the times when you have reflected on it. I have never thought that that would be something that would make me want to quit. - Sophia

Sophia describes a situation where she as a feminist is having a hard time working with customers that do not share the same ethical values. To her, democracy and equality are regarded very highly, as is, in many parts of the world. Still there are countries where both are severely diminished. She continues that her beliefs are hard to stand-up for actively when there is a paying customer on the other side, even if they do not share the values as her. It makes her reflect but is not something that would make her take action and quit. This concern was expressed by other Swedish participants as well, where most of them acknowledged the clash between ethical values but did not perceive the clash to be as focal as to make them quit. Chloe elaborated further on this by emphasizing her position within the company:

It is hard, perhaps, to be agreeable with everything that a company does. You think that they do good but you also maybe see that, okay this was not so good or something that

I would not do if I were in the board, perhaps if I was the CEO of the company, I think, but in the most part I have no moral concerns working in the defense industry in the biggest parts, otherwise I would not be able to do it. - Chloe

Chloe states that it is hard to agree to everything that a company does. Further on she elaborates that she would probably not make the same choices if she was in charge of the operations but also acknowledges that due to her role she cannot do much about it. For the most part she has no bigger ethical concerns about working in the industry. Other Swedish interviewees have stated that they do not have ethical concerns at all:

I am not more concerned with ethical questions here than I would be working for any large international company. It is always important to know your employer has a code of conduct in place. In the end, we face the same challenges as all companies do. - Isabella

Isabella states that her job does not bear more ethical concerns than any other job. As a big company, her employer does not stand out against other big enterprises of different business sectors. Her ethical concerns do not target the products of her specific company.

In summary, we could notice cultural differences between German and Swedish interviewees regarding the ethical concerns. Whereas on the German accounts we could see many reflections about the use of the products and the ethical questions that these evoke, Swedish interviewees seemed to have less concerns and their worries were less concentrated on the products, even though these products of the German and Swedish firms were almost identical.

4.3 Stigma Categorization & Responses

Many of the participants have stated that they were directly confronted with stigma and critique regarding their choice of employer in a variety of situations. How these confrontations are experienced and perceived by the employee depended on the type of confrontation and reasonability of arguments. Therefore, we could identify two types of perceived stigma that leads to different behavior and actions of the employees. We identified two types of stigma that

the interviewees reported to encounter. These are (1) empty stigma, which is conveyed through confrontational accusations and based on uninformed knowledge. Common response to this type of stigma is avoidance of the stigmatizer and discussion. And (2) valid stigma, which is perceived as conveyed with respect and based on thorough reflections and knowledge from the stigmatizer. This stigma leads to fruitful discussions where both sides value the other's opinion even if they do not agree with it.

4.3.1 Empty Stigma & Avoidance

It was especially apparent on the German accounts that they had experienced accusations in regard to their work. These accusations were targeted at employees of the defense industry with arguments that believed working for arms manufacturers makes them direct contributors to war and violence. Often, employees said that the direct accusations were not based on factual information or reflective thoughts, but rather empty and aggressive. Oscar provided an example of a situation, where he was confronted with empty stigma:

I started to try to explain to that person how we work. But unfortunately they did not really want to listen, as you now are carefully listening to me and giving me time to say and lay out my thoughts. But he was refusing this discussion. That is also something that I see often in Germany. And I think that people stop talking and listening to each other. It changed in Germany, on all the topics. He just did not want to listen to what I was saying. That we are not even selling to unreliable countries or regimes in the world, we are just trying to protect our allies and our country. And obviously we are living in democratic country where the majority chose to have an army. But he was, he did not really listen. He said that if we just stopped producing weapons, then we will end, you know, all the problems in the world. And he asked me, why I do not stop working for this company and I said, well then probably someone else is doing it. And he is like well no, that is not an excuse, you should stop working for them and do something else. But, yeah, that was an unpleasant situation. - Oscar

The description of the situation above shows that discussions with stigmatizers can be frustrating. Oscar says that he had a discussion with a person who had many prejudices about the industry that were not actually true, however the confronter did not want to listen to him. It

was frustrating for Oscar since he felt that he could not make the stigmatizer listen to his arguments, as someone from within the industry who could provide him with facts from inside the industry. He says that situations like this happen quite a lot in Germany, where someone starts a discussion but is actually not willing to listen to your arguments. Oscar also makes a comment that many stigmatizers believe that wars can simply be stopped altogether if no more weapons are produced. Amelia explains this “ignorance” of stigmatizers further:

Not everyone perceives defense the way I do. Many people have a more superficial view and see the defense industry as a driving force for war. They view the defense industry as a scapegoat. That always sounds as if I want to soften what it actually is, which I do not. I have previously said that the responsibility is high, maybe the highest one can have. But it is not as simple, the defense industry does not equal war and we have to acknowledge that political situations, different opinions and ideologies are also contributing to war and I always say that someone who would like to hurt a person only needs to hit someone with a glass bottle. You do not need high technology for that. This is something that is often forgotten. - Amelia

This statement shows that the stigmatization of the defense industry often develops because people believe that weapons are the only reason for war and violence. However, she emphasizes that war and violence do not occur because of weapons but because of different factors such as differences in socio-economic conditions, lust for power and a willingness to hurt someone, to name a few. In the end, violence can be performed with any other material, such as a glass bottle. She argues that the defense industry therefore is not the driver of war and therefore cannot be accused of it. Stigmatizers view the industry as a scapegoat and forget about the actual reasons for hostile conflicts.

A reaction to situations where empty stigma typically occurs, such as meeting with new people at parties for example, was to try and avoid the conversation or topics through controlling the amount of information that they revealed about themselves as can be seen in the statements below:

I highly think about who I talked to about it. I probably would not be saying it at a party. [...] So it is basically more or less an avoidance strategy. – Elizabeth

Generally, everyone says that the defense industry is bad. And we will solve all the problems in this whole world when we stop producing weapons. So I do not tell this in front of big groups that do not know what I am working in. - Oscar

Both Elizabeth and Oscar approach these kinds of social situations in the same way: they do not tell everyone that they work for the defense industry, in order to avoid being stigmatized. They are both often confronted with opinions that view the defense industry as a driver for violence and war. In order to avoid one-sided arguments, they sometimes prefer to withhold certain information about their job.

To conclude, we call this categorization of stigma empty stigma because it is seen to not be grounded on valuable information that needs to be taken seriously. Empty also refers back to that there is an empty void in the hearts of everyone involved

4.3.2 Valid Stigma, Fruitful Discussions & Reflections

In case that arguments were held in respectful and well-grounded manners, the interviewees have shown that they do not generally refrain from discussions. Contrariwise, they even viewed the critique as reasonable and the discussions as important to have. We can note that there is no general disengagement from stigmatizers in case the discussions about the industry's legitimacy are well-grounded and respectful. In addition, some interviewees even stated that critique about the defense industry is necessary, because the sensitivity of the products shall not be forgotten and concerns are valid:

When the discussion is respectful and grounded on funded arguments, I like to engage in the discussion because I think one has to be aware of the controversy of the industry and these discussions have to be withstood. One has to accept other opinions, also those that are against the defense industry. I listen to them and think they are acceptable but then try to argue why the company is pertinent, may it be because of security reasons in society or because of confederations.

Security is an important factor but different opinions have to be accepted and one should not be afraid of discussions as long as they are respectful. If one reaches an agreement that you cannot agree, that is fair enough. But one has to have the discussion. - Jack

The argument shows that Jack is not afraid to engage in discussions if they are based on respect towards one another and well-grounded on reliable facts. The discussions show that the defense industry is a delicate topic that many people have an opinion on and which should be respected. He tries to understand why the industry is stigmatized and to bring a different viewpoint into the discussion. A problem that occurs often with the stigma is that many critics are uninformed or have wrong stereotypes and prejudices about industry. The employees try to understand where this image comes from. By providing insights about the industry, the stigma is challenged because it attempts to challenge untruthful prejudices about the industry. However, Jack also takes the chance to argue for the defense industry. Yet, if the dialog partner does not agree with his opinion, that is okay for him, too. Charles makes another stance and emphasizes even stronger, that the critics are necessary for a fruitful discussion:

Besides my strong belief in the necessity, I fully understand that there are also negative aspects that are connected to it and particularly when it comes to the use of the weapons. And I think, a population in a democracy needs to have a say. But for this you need to have a discussion, you cannot simply make a decision, or come to an opinion without having to inform yourself and really have discussed, developed an opinion, rather than open social media or whatever we use to connect and having one guy saying well this is a great idea or this is a bad idea. Again, I think defense is really important because it has such high impact and high risk because life is at the end at risks. - Charles

Charles states in the previous paragraph that he believes the discussions are very important to have. He understands that there are many critical and negative aspects about the defense industry, even though he also strongly believes in the necessity of it. For him it is important that the discussions rely on facts and well-sourced information instead of social media sources, for example. Furthermore, this is due to media often polarizing pictures of reality, where

opinions often are depicted as facts without any sources. Elizabeth appreciates critics because of other reasons, which are for her not to forget about the sensitivity of her job:

We have a week here, not in times of Corona, when there is a week of peace protests here for example. They always make the headlines and the people are sitting there and they are trying to provoke you as an employee of the company. They are yelling at you, you know, sometimes I have had colleagues thrown stuff at and stuff like that. It is something you need to kind of ignore, but it is impossible to always fully ignore it. Either you take it with humor and make fun of it, just in order to cope with it, or you deal with it by actually stating the facts for you. And that is not just the Schmidt Defense-facts. Sometimes it is good to talk to people who are against the system in order to not lose scope and focus on what you are doing. - Elizabeth

Elizabeth explains that the peace protests are directly criticizing her and her colleagues, sometimes even becoming physical. She explained that there are many possible ways of dealing with the confrontation. Even though she tries to ignore the critics, she does not always manage to fully do so. The protestors evoke an inner discussion within her where she lays out the facts and includes the protestors opinion. Even though the stigma itself is not seen as valid by her, there is a form of appreciation, because the protestors remind her of what company she works for and it is important for her not to forget the seriousness of her job. A similar stance is taken by Jack towards media that criticizes the defense industry:

There are media that want to polarize and do so in a certain political direction. I think that should be taken with care. I am sure there are reports that have some truth to it. I do not want to negate that. But that has to be weighed up. Of course that affects you to a certain degree because one thinks there is a certain truth in it. But it is important to differentiate here because in the end we produce weapons and not candy and the effect of that is that people die. One has to be aware of that and find a way to deal with it. It does not affect my worldview or my work, however one has to see how to deal with it and whether that has an effect on your own values. But that is something I have to weigh up and ask myself whether I can represent that, even after I checked an article for facts and know that the sources are legitimate or illegitimate. Based on that I have to decide.

I think that is the most important, critical analysis and whether that has an effect on me or not. - Jack

The statement shows that Jack is rather cautious when it comes to the media, because it is sometimes trying to polarize readers into a certain direction and not presenting all information that is necessary to form an opinion. However, he also believes that the facts that are stated are not necessarily incorrect. The information needs to be taken with care because they sometimes leave out important facts. Nevertheless, the articles make him reflect on whether he would like to be part of that industry and whether he can cope with the public descriptions and his own values. The most important aspect for him however is to critically analyze the presented information that the media publishes. It was also emphasized by many that this was something positive, a need when working in the industry as stated by Alice:

I think it is our responsibility, if you are working in the defense industry, to question and reflect on our daily business ethically, every day. And if there is something that does not match with our values. Then we have the opportunity to stop but only then. - Alice

As Alice states, ethical concerns should be seen as a responsibility for people working with defense. Questioning the ethicality of the operations, and value-matching with the company values is something that can actually impact the operations if they find that the values do not match.

One example has shown that the stigma can be seen as valid and therefore makes the employee uncomfortable in her job decision. The employee [name and country will be kept confidential, due to privacy reasons and referred to as they used for gender inclusive language] felt that the clash between values was too much for them to keep working within the industry. They express the clash that they felt between their values and that of the industry:

I want to go hide somewhere. And I do not, I do not like it. I think the headlines are fine, the headlines are just, they usually just say, how it is. I usually feel bad because I have not really taken a stance, because I know how I feel and I am not. A lot of businesses have deals with other countries, I do not support them, and somewhere down the line

you have to take a stand for what you believe in. And I know what I believe in but I have not taken a stand yet. So when I see headlines like that, I kind of panicked a little, and I feel stressed because I really have to take a stand now. - Anonymous

This answer is in response to a question of how they react towards negative headlines on the news or in the newspaper. Their initial response is that they wanted to go and hide. Which indicates that they feel guilt or displeasure. They believe that every person has to take a stand for what they believe in. In this case, is stated in the interview that their views have changed over the years. They feel that their views have changed to the degree that they do not represent those of the employers Thus, making them have to take a stand:

I would say it is a value-based decision. I do not feel comfortable being a part of the defense industry anymore, and supporting that kind of business, I would rather put my skills to use somewhere else where I can help people or make the world a little better. - Anonymous

The interviewee explains as they believe that this is due to a value-based decision. They would rather try to focus on helping people in the world, and making it better. This also indicates that they do not believe the job in the defense industry makes the world better. Although expressed by many other employees, this value of the defense industry is not seen by the interviewee.

4.4 Coping Mechanism to Compromise Stigma

Despite the ethical concerns and frequent discussions about the controversy of the defense industry, the employees have stated that they believe in the necessity of the industry, because the positive aspects are predominant. This shows the way the employees view the defense industry and how they interpret the role of it in the world, as well as its most important characteristics.

4.4.1 Emphasizing Security Aspect

The majority of the participants were stating clearly that the company they work for has the purpose and role to provide internal and external security for the country. This emphasis stands in contrast to the stigmatization of the industry, which attributes the individual organization with contributors of war and violence. This form of protection was highlighted from two sides, one which aimed at the protection of a country through the preparation in case of war; or the equipment of the military as a deterrent effect for potential attackers. Amelia stated that she sees her company as a contributor to the protection of privileges within her country:

[The defense industry] serves the purpose of protecting what we have built here in Germany and what we regard as important and want to protect. For example, the right of speech. The privileges we have in Germany, where we can all do whatever we want and are proportionally rather open compared to other countries. These values are worthy to be protected. I think in the end, the defense industry protects that. - Amelia

With this quote, Amelia shows that she believes the defense industry plays an important role in the protection of privileges in Germany. She gives the industry a new meaning which goes beyond its products but serves a bigger picture. The legitimacy of the defense industry is therefore owned through the protection of certain values, for example freedom of speech. Another quote by Chloe highlights this aspect even more:

The industry is really important for us to keep feeling this safe feeling. That we can go to school with our kids in the morning and we can go to a job and we do not have to think of anything. So I think it is really important that we have a defense or that this industry is here in Sweden and providing these products to our defense. I do not know the bigger political aspect as there is a lot of money going through the defense industry but I think that if you are looking at the industry, we need more money. We do not get enough money that we actually need to have a safe defense if anything happens to us here in Sweden. To summarize, I think it is an important part for our safety. – Chloe

Chloe is talking about the feeling of being safe that many Swedish citizens have. She believes that this feeling is a privilege that the defense industry is responsible for and succeeds at. In her opinion, the defense industry is important to maintain this privilege of security and she

states that in order to maintain this safety, the defense industry needs and should be provided with more financial resources. In comparison to Amelia, Chloe makes the statement more specific by touching upon the military of Sweden, which is provided with equipment by the defense industry. In case of an attack, it is important that the industry can provide suitable equipment for a proper defense of the country. Despite the necessity of armament that the employees have named, many of them also say that the products are solely manufactured for worst-case scenarios, and that no one is looking forward to starting an actual war. Oscar emphasizes another related aspect, which is the provision of the best possible safety for those who have to utilize the products:

I wish I was living in a world where we had no wars, where we have no struggles between countries, where we had no terrorists and so on. Obviously we are not living in such a world right now. I think it is very important in my opinion that someone is providing the armies with very good equipment, and very precise equipment. Also very important is safety. When it comes to weapons and ammunition, they are dangerous. Not just when using them and when shooting at targets, but also when handling them so you definitely do not want your own soldiers to be killed or injured by poor and unsaved ammunition. There is a really high focus to increase the performance of the ammunition but also increase the safety and the protection of the soldiers to enable the army. - Oscar

This statement by Oscar serves as an example whereas the employee wishes for a world where the industry was not necessary, however needed due to the circumstances of today's world dynamics and politics. Similar views were expressed by several participants and show that there is a strong belief that the defense industry is needed for keeping countries and people safe. Moreover, Oscar believes that it is the defense industry's responsibility to protect the soldiers who use the products and to make the utilization of them as safe as possible. This view was further stated by Elizabeth, who however did not focus solely on soldiers but also on other organizations who serve in crisis areas:

One of my close friends is actually working for an NGO. Let us put it this way, we actually go along really well [...]. And, you know with him it is fairly easy to talk because he is one of our customers more or less. Because also NGOs prefer to drive

through war zones with armed vehicles. And so he has a fairly realistic picture about what protection might be. - Elizabeth

This statement shows that the aspect of security is not only aimed at the citizens within a country but security and protection in general, also regarding people within areas of crisis and war. Elizabeth points in the direction that the products manufactured by the defense industry are not only for protection of the country but also for protection of individuals who help to prevent war and misery. Oscar made a statement that summarizes the equation that many employees expressed:

Sometimes I believe that the defense industry is making the world more safe. As I said, because it is an "abschreckende Wirkung" So it has a chilling effect or deterrent effect. In the end, states or countries pay many millions and billions in tax money to invest into weapons they will never really use. So it is quite a lot of money for not really using something. I think for part of it makes the world at least where we live a lot more safe. There are less soldiers getting killed and less enemies because no one is approaching and I think there are less terrorists that are approaching us. There are a few, but they know how we are equipped. That is something I also learned. Now I think when carefully handling and selling weapons, it may also to some extent make the world more safe than actually unsafe because just the amount of weapons increases or so. - Oscar

In summary, the statements presented above show a different perspective on the defense industry that is shared amongst all participants in this study. There is a clear focus on the positive aspects of the defense industry which is in fact the necessary provision of defense equipment for means of protection and security of all kinds. Instead of viewing the defense industry as a driver for war and violence, which is the cause for its stigmatization, there is another focus that views the defense industry as a contributor for safety and protection from war and violence.

4.4.2 Emphasis on Bureaucracy

A common description of the defense industry as well as individual organizations was the highlighting of the strong governmental regulations that the industry is liable to. Many participants pointed out that stigmatizers are not aware of these regulations and therefore

believe that the practices of the industry are illegal or unmonitored. The close interaction with the government of the organizations was regarded as an important factor to counter immoral business activities, that stigmatizers often seem to attack. This can be seen in the statement provided by Chloe:

But it is a special industry in that case that, we have so many requirements on us, that is, that we need to go through all of these from the defense here in, in Sweden and we also have requirements from the States and we have requirements for export control when we are working outside of Sweden as well. When I think of the industry that we are working in, that is the first that comes to my mind. That we are having so many requirements and so many security requirements on us as our employees working with this information and also on our projects. - Chloe

As Chloe states the defense industry is a special case because it is heavily regulated, not only on the national market, but also from other governments and in terms of export control. She also states that the control also impacts the employees in how they are able to act, in terms of how they share and use certain types of information. These insights were emphasized by many of the other interviewees as well. The stricter regulation of the market proved to be a comforting aspect for many of the participants when faced by questions surrounding the legality of the sales. Charles summarizes the interplay of legal regulations, security and the benefit for society:

I am really convinced that what we do is for the benefit of society. It is a needed capability we are providing. Obviously it is a serious capability and that is why we have to take care how we conduct our business and why we have all the ethical and compliance standards. But in the end, it is a good purpose and we are beneficial for society. It is very clear there is a triangle between stability, prosperity and security, which actually are three dimensions depending on each other, and we need to provide security to our society and it is not only internal security it is also unfortunately external security. I think everybody would dream of a peaceful planet without any weapons so it is clear but we are not in that state and in order to come there and to provide this field of security needs. Companies like us need to exist to provide those capabilities to our armed forces and to do that in a manner so that our governments can really decide in a sovereign way how to use and how to act. - Charles

As Charles depicts it he sees the industry as part of a bigger picture. He understands the thoroughness needed when operating within the area as he describes it as an interplay of different parts of society. The three dimensions that he mentions are all part of a long term perspective, with security and stability there is room for prosperity and vice versa. Furthermore, he also believes that the utopian view where no weapons or war exists only exists as a dream. As the world is structured there is a need for companies that conduct business and provide equipment to governments over the world in a good way. As this enables countries to act sovereignly, a view stated by other participants also. The export of weapons is contrary to what stigmatizes believe it makes the world more unsafe, but rather safer since it enables the countries to act sovereignly as expressed by Charles. Another important facet of this can be seen in what Henry states:

And we are not. And I want to emphasize that we do not try to twist the arm of the politicians, to get them to change their stance. The only thing we want to do is have them make a stand because in the end of the day, what is really bad for business is indecisiveness. If we know that it is a no-go that is good. If we know that is a go that is good. It is when it is undecided that is when it is bad for business. And of course we are sluggish, all the processes, all these entities being involved, makes it really challenging, but we do our best to keep the government in the lead in as early a stage as possible, but not too early to use up their time on things that are not really relevant. - Henry

As Henry describes there is no lobbying or trying to impact the decisions of the government to heighten the export or sales. By having the authorities involved as early as possible there are benefits to be had both from the business aspect as well as from the perspective of legitimacy of the operations. He also mentions that the surrounding processes and regulations makes the operations rather slow. Which in turn can be seen as beneficial in that everything goes through the correct legal procedures.

In summary, many participants feel safe due to the high regulations the defense industry is subordinate to. Despite many concerns of both in-group and out-group individuals, the industry is highly controlled and thus the employees feel that it is impossible to make immoral deals. Moreover, the seriousness of the products requires the high degree of monitoring.

4.4.3 Comparing Industries

The comparison of the defense industry with other industries was made by many participants. Here, the defense industry was compared on an ethical dimension with, for example, the textile industry. An industry that has faced criticism surrounding its use of sweat-shops and negative climate impact for example. It was highlighted that many other industries are less regulated by governments and therefore more prone to illegal or immoral actions. Moreover, the awareness of unethical operations of other industries seems to be less present and therefore providing more freedom for unethical operations. In the end it was stated by many that the defense industry is not necessarily better or worse than other organizations, however there is less attention to their operations due to the nature of their industry:

Yeah I would lie if I would say that I do not see any ethical or moral concerns working in the defense industry, but I think that when I am comparing if I should work in the gambling company, perhaps with money, I would have the same concern, or even more moral concerns. I think that applies to any job that I would be on. It is hard, perhaps, to agree with everything that a company does. You think that they do good but you also maybe see that [something else was] not so good or that I would not do it if I were the CEO of the company. I think for the most part I have no moral concerns working in the defense industry in the biggest parts, otherwise I would not be able to do it. - Sophia

The statement above by Sophia shows that the defense industry does not bear more moral concerns for her, despite its stigmatization. She says that other industries are more questionable to her, for example the gambling industry. She also states that everything always has negative sides to it and that it is not possible to always agree with the operations of your company. However, that does not make her quit because the concerns will not go away if she worked somewhere else. Elizabeth compares her organization with other companies that also have business to war, however do not show this openly:

If you look into the German industries, look into the DAX 30. You know, they are the biggest companies. And find five companies that have nothing to do with war. The only thing that we are doing is, we are standing for it. There are telecommunications companies that help us with our GPS systems. And you know, the biggest ones in Germany, so you know who they are. There are people who are building trucks or, you

know, all kinds of stuff. Where we are not a minority. That is what people do not see. Other people just don't like talking about it. Look at Aero Circuit [pseudonym]... It is always nicer to project pictures of tourists flying into, you know, wherever. But it is part of the reality. And that is why I think there is truth in it, that a lot of people are avoiding it. But I think if you work here, you really should not. - Elizabeth

Elizabeth says that there are many companies that make business with the defense industry and the military, however that the society and even employees do not have an awareness of this connection because the products themselves do not directly relate to war. In some cases, it is not the product in itself that is being used but rather parts of it that serve multipurposes. Therefore, she says, the defense industry is stigmatized because of its clear connection to the military. However, other companies contribute to the industry and could potentially be stigmatized for it, too. Amelia elaborates on this double standard:

Another aspect that people do not think about is that there is a plurality of enterprises that do not have a clean slate either. Let us think about Water Inc. [pseudonym] or so who steal drinking water in South Africa or so, so that people die of thirst. Or the textile industry that provokes child labor in Taiwan or Bangladesh or wherever. There are many other industries that might even be less responsible with their liability than we are. Maybe they are less regulated and no one pays attention, I mean in a positive way pay attention. There is a definite disproportion about how the defense industry is viewed. Many say that they have no trouble working for example the automotive industry but they do not think that a tank is also a vehicle and built of the same parts. Or the iron and steel industry that supplies us. It is often ignored that this industry is a supplier of ours. - Amelia

The statement by Amelia serves as an example that many participants used. She says that the industry is not worse than others, if compared on an ethical level. She explains this by using the examples of the water providers who privatized water springs and led to the death of local citizens due to thirst. Another example she provides is the textile industry that is often responsible for child labor. Despite the immoral operations that other industries undertake, the defense industry is one of few that is highly regulated and therefore less responsible in their actions. In her opinion, other industries should be equally regulated and monitored. She regards

this imbalance of stigma as unjust. Moreover, similar to Elizabeth, she mentions the connection that many other companies have with the defense industry, however there is no awareness of this connection.

In summary, the interviewees compared the stigmatization of the defense industry with the external views on other companies and illustrated an imbalance of evaluation of the industry. As the industry is under scrutiny by media and by different audiences, many of our interviewees believe this makes the industry become portrayed as a black sheep, while other industries in many cases are equally as bad. This aspect does not hide the fact that there are problems within the industry as portrayed by some accounts. A majority of the interviewees furthermore stated that they fully believed in the necessity of the industry, that it was legitimate and needed. They phrased this by emphasizing mainly on key points. This can be viewed as a form of coping strategies that employees turn to in order to legitimize the existence of the industry and explain their view towards the stigmatization of it.

5 Discussion

We believe that our findings contribute to existing literature and theory in a multitude of ways. Our study engages with literature on organizational core-stigmatization which is adapted to the circumstances and characteristics of the defense industry. Although this industry has been used as an example of core-stigmatized organizations, there is a gap in literature on this industry and its special circumstances and prerequisites. Our research stands out due to the focus on the defense industry and the adaptation of theory to it. Moreover, we focus on consequences for individuals instead of organizational responses, which are the focus of the majority of literature articles (e.g. Tracey and Phillips, 2016). By applying the theory of organizational core-stigma to the defense industry, this study makes contributions that cannot only be adapted for the specific case of stigma in the defense industry, but furthermore be generalized to literature on organizational core-stigma and consequences.

5.1 Stigma Perceptions & Sociocultural Differences

Our findings showed that the interviewed employees of the defense industry have a clear understanding of the stigma that their employer carries. This is not only because we have found that many employees viewed the industry as problematic before entering the job themselves, but many participants of the study have also directly been confronted with stigmatized dimensions of the industry.

From the findings of our study we could identify the most stigmatized attribute that the defense industry is discredited with. Unsurprisingly, this attribute was the direct evaluation of the industry's product as drivers for violence, war and death. This finding confirms previous literature on the stigmatization of the defense industry and represents the general negative association that external audiences make with arms manufacturers (e.g. Vergne, 2012). Drawing on Hudson's (2008) factors that influence the perceived strength of stigma, we reiterate that one of the factors that determine a stigma's strength is the relative distance between personal values, beliefs and ideologies and the organization's core-activities. It can

therefore be concluded that the stigmatizers discredit the defense industry because they equalize weapons with war and violence, thus seeing the defense industry as a driving force of such.

The stigmatization was most often depicted by the interviewees reporting direct accusations and confrontation regarding their choice of employer. The accusations were addressed as to making contributions to the defense industry. We therefore find that there is a direct link to Tracey and Phillips (2016) and to Hudson and Okhuysen (2009), who have illustrated in their respective studies that organizational stigma is directly transferred to members of the organization. This form of secondary stigma could be directly seen as many employees were accused of contributing to war and violence in the world. The tainted attribute of the organization is generalized onto all members that share this commonality (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, Devers et al. (2009), argue that this attribute often becomes the most prominent characteristic that defines the organization, or as we argue also the individual. A clear example of this can be seen in the multitude of accounts mentioning “*weapon-freaks*” as description for defense industry employees (Devers, et al., 2009). This finding provides the base for our study, as it explores the response of employees to this secondary stigma or stigma-transfer from organization to individual.

We have found in this research that many interviewees try to understand what part of the defense industry is stigmatized and thus generate responses that avoid this secondary stigmatization. By withholding specific information that have evoked accusation in previous experiences, the interviewees show responses that diminish the secondary stigma transferred onto them. We can therefore conclude that secondary stigma is no coercive consequence of being a member of stigmatized organizations (as shown by Tracey & Phillips, 2016), but that it can be avoided through adapting the form of self-presentation and information disclosure about the self.

As highlighted in concurrent literature, the stigmatization is a social construct and is therefore dependent on the characteristics that the evaluator focuses upon (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Moore (2006) emphasizes that institutions or social groups such as schools, family or media represent the stigma and ingrain it in the specific societal consciousness of a cultural context (Moore, 2006). This inheritance of stigma could be confirmed by Jack, for example, who feels influenced by his upbringing in Berlin: “*I grew up in Berlin, where the values stances are a*

little... I do not want to say alternative but let us say open". Berlin in this case is a specific cultural context where certain views and stereotypes have been inherited. A side-effect of stigma is the generalization of the stigmatized dimensions on all involved parties, which goes so far that the resulting stereotypes and generalizations are very common within specific audiences, even to the degree that they still sometimes persist despite being proven false (Goffman, 1963., Moore, 2006). Thus, the sociocultural context can be seen as to be a crucial influencer of the stigma strength and further strengthening of the theories presented by Goffman (1963) or Hudson (2008). Jack's example about the cultural context of Berlin shows that he is confronted with the stigma more than others from different cultural contexts, as was depicted within the findings of this study.

The social context that stigma is shaped in and Jack's example provided evidence that can be taken further when looking at the cultural differences our research has found. In our study we have observed severe cultural differences in stigma perception and consequences between Swedish and German interviewees. These cultural variations are a form of social context, whereas culture in this case represents a wider social context and thus causes differences in stigma perception.

On Swedish accounts, it could be observed that the stigma surrounding the industry is rather distant to the individual employee level. When talking with stigmatizers, the discussion resulted in more of a curious nature with questions such as "*How is it to work within the defense industry?*" as depicted by Sophia. Although the stigmatizers often had a clear perception and feeling towards the industry, which was shown through their emphasis on not being able to work there, they seemed to not attribute the stigmatized characteristics of the organization onto the individuals. This is portrayed by the fact that none of Swedish interviewees had experienced direct accusations about their employer or were confronted about actively contributing to violence and war.

Focusing on the German participants of our study, we can see clear signs of severe core-stigma and secondary stigma. In contrast to the Swedish accounts, they all reported experiences of direct accusations and stigmatization as contributors to violence and war. Although the perception of the industry stigma has been clear before entering the job, the secondary stigma was experienced by all interviewees from German organizations. The difference to other countries was additionally mentioned by many interviewees, as they explicitly say that

confrontations are no issue when talking to people outside of Germany. The interviewees themselves identified the origin for the severe stigma, in the historical context of Germany and in particular Germany's role in the second World War. Germany's abuse of power and violence between 1933 and 1945 has had great influences on the country's culture until today and taints Germans' perception of arms and the military. This highlights even further how much the interplay between social constructs (e.g. Goffman, 1963) and inheritance of stigma (e.g. Moore, 2006) is largely responsible for the general outlook on certain characteristics.

As Charles mentions by saying "*The US is the other extreme*", he highlights a country where the arms manufacturers supporting the military are seen as patriots that help their country make the world a safer place. In the USA, the military, and in turn weapons, are to a greater extent seen as something to defend your safety, which in turn is related to USA's military activities in the past - seeing the USA as the protector of world peace. This attribution of characteristics is the opposite of what has been described in our accounts and stand more in line with Vergne's (2012) findings. Furthermore, these cultural differences are yet another confirmation of the social construction of stigma (Goffman, 1963; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). Whereas the perception of stigma seems rather unsubstantial in Sweden, it can be assumed that the German mindset towards military force is directly put into relation with the nation's role in the second World War. The topic is continuously present within German society and can thus be seen as a potential reason for the immense stigmatization of the defense industry.

Apart from a greater stigma perception of the interviewees in different cultural contexts, the insights above also relate to the ethical concerns expressed. Although the ethical concerns by employees have shown to be deliberately present for most interviewees, we have seen a stronger connection of ethical concerns regarding the products in German interviewees. This finding is an especially interesting observation because it hints at a consequential aftereffect of stigma perception of the individual. Due to the cultural differences that have been described previously, we can assume that a greater perception of and more frequent confrontation with stigma leads to deeper reflection about the stigmatized dimension. To make this supposition more feasible, we conclude that our findings indicate that the German accounts show more signs of ethical concerns regarding the defense industry than Swedish ones, as they are more regularly confronted with the problematization of their industry.

The cultural differences between the countries serve as an example that illustrates the social construction of stigma. This example of the defense industry contributes to stigma literature as in showing that secondary stigma is no coercive consequence of organizational stigma (e.g. Tracey & Phillips, 2016) but also dependent on the presence of stigma within a social context. Moreover, whether the stigma of an organization directly transfers to employees of it is dependent on whether the employer is seen as part of an individual's social identity.

Naturally, our study is qualitative and some Swedes may perceive a strong stigma and some Germans may not perceive any at all related to the defense industry. But we found a pattern in our data that shows how cultural context and the strength of a stigma are related. This aspect provides scope that has to be explored further in future research, as these findings have been explored in the limited scope of this study and cannot be generalized as being an objective truth.

5.2 Stigma Categorization, Responses & Coping

A second finding of this study is that employees of the defense industry differentiate between two different types of stigma and adapt their reactions accordingly. We refer to these types as empty and valid stigma. It can be argued that the different perception of stigma results from the social construction of it. A more severely perceived stigma results in a greater presence of the stigma within society. The two resulting perceived stigmas and according responses are described as follows. It is important to note at this point that both empty and valid stigma refer to our interpretation of the perception of the employees and do not represent objective facts from our research.

5.2.1 Empty Stigma

Empty stigma represents a type of stigma that is based on "uninformed" arguments leading to blaming accusations and deadlock opinions, unable to be changed. This type of stigma has been experienced by many interviewees and often goes along with the desire to be avoided. The perceived empty stigma is experienced as frustrating and unjust by employees. Attempts to engage in discussions with those stigmatizers is regarded as unworthy, as stigmatizers are unwilling to take in counterarguments. In response, empty stigma is tried to be avoided by withholding information about the employer and job.

Empty stigma, as perceived by the interviewees, results from a generalization of the defense industry that views it as the driving source of violence and war (see Goffman, 1963 and Vergne, 2012). The stigmatizers use the discrediting attribute of the industry and generalize all operations of it to be illegitimate because of this one attribute. The complexity of the defense industry is overseen and the “killing products” are viewed as the dominant feature. This generalization is interpreted by the interviewees as ignorant and unjust, because the arguments of the stigmatizers focus on the defense industry as the driver of war, overlooking its actual complexity. Moore (2006) explained in his research article that particular opinions and in turn stigmas can be deeply embedded in society and are hard to change (see Moore, 2006). This might further explain as to why the interviewees try to avoid these discussions. Even as they try to provide evidence that stands in contrast to the stigma, the stigmatizers deem the information as invalid, presumably due to the inheriting of sociocultural views. This might be a reason why the interviewees feel that the stigmatizers are unwilling to listen to their arguments and the discussions are seen as unworthy, that despite trying to provide evidence against the stigma, it is not accepted.

Empty stigma was often described in connection with connotative accusations about the employees’ employer choice and value stance. We therefore allocate empty stigma within existing theories on secondary stigma (e.g. Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009., Tracey & Philips, 2016). The stigmatized dimension, which in this case is the defense industry as a driving force for violence and war, is not only generalized to be the central feature of the industry but it is also immediately transferred to all members of this category. In this case, the previous generalization goes over to the members of the organizations, namely the employees. In consequence, the interviewees feel to be put in boxes because of their employer choice as depicted by Amelia: “*People have certain prejudices and put us in boxes*”. As a response, this stereotyping and stigmatization is tried to be avoided by withholding information about themselves.

The interviewees’ descriptions of this type of stigma have shown an analogy between the theory of Social Weighting by Turner and Tajfel (1986). Social Weighting is a form of evaluation of the stigmatizers whereas the stigmatizers’ credibility is questioned in order to diminish the weight of the stigma. We can see that this strategy is applied by many employees in stating that their arguments are based on wrongful information. By ascribing the stigmatizers as uninformed, the weight of the stigma is alleviated because the value ascribed to the stigmatized

dimension is based on false facts. Therefore, a consequence of this Social Weighting practiced by the interviewees is that the stigma is simply untrue and does not need to be paid attention to. This form of response also resembles the questions proposed by Hudson and Okhuysen (2009), “Stigmatized by who”, where the employees are using the distinction between the different groups as a form of redirecting the stigma. Our study therefore resembles and confirms Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) theory of Social Weighting. Furthermore, it extends the theory as in specifying it for the case of the defense industry.

The avoidance of empty stigma that often results from it is a finding that shows the strength of the stigma surrounding the defense industry. The employees have been confronted with the stigma so many times that they assume accusations and even withhold that they are part of the stigmatized organization. We therefore refer to Goffman’s (1963) distinction between the discredited and discreditable. The employees position themselves in the position of being discreditable due to their membership of a stigmatized organization, however refrain from being discredited by withholding information about this membership. Furthermore, this connection to theory is confirmed when making a connection to Hudson (2008), who determines that the lack of audience’s awareness of the organization’s existence results in lack of stigma. By not making the audience aware of the “discrediting” attribute, the employees also avoid the stigmatization. By showing this adapted response to empty stigma, our research makes the contribution that secondary stigma and resulting accusations can be influenced by stigmatized individuals, which is something that is not yet presented in literature.

5.2.2 Valid Stigma

An alternative form of stigma that was identified is valid stigma. This stigma can be seen as the opposite of empty stigma, as it is based on well-grounded arguments and fact-based information. The stigmatizers approach the employees with respect and show interest in their opinion, although they view the defense industry as highly problematic. Valid stigma is perceived as fully reasonable by the interviewees and many stated that these opinions serve as a basis for important discussions. They provide room for thought and reflections needed to not lose focus on the sensitivity of their work. Alice for example states that it is part of their responsibility to have these thoughts: *“I think it is our responsibility, [...] to question and reflect on our daily business ethically, every day.”* Simply put, the reactions of the interviewees

regarding valid stigma were open and positive. Valid stigma is understood by employees, although not adopted.

The interviewees understand the stigmatizers opinion, which illustrates an interesting link to Hudson's (2008) theory: which show that stigma strength varies according to the relative distance of beliefs, values and ideologies to an organization's core-activities. This theory has the presupposition that the employees' beliefs, values and ideologies are in line with the organization's core-activities (as seen in Kreiner et al., 2006). Consequently, stigmatizers' and employers' beliefs would be far apart. However, in our study we found that the relative distance of beliefs of stigmatizers and employees is not very far, as both agree that the industry evokes ethical concerns and war is a scenario that should be avoided by all means. Our research shows that the difference between stigmatizers and stigmatized might not be as big as assumed in the case of the defense industry, to some extent contradicting previous findings by Hudson (2008). There is a curiosity that despite having the same beliefs and ideologies - the necessity to prevent war and violence - they still stand on confrontational sides and differ as in being stigmatizers and stigmatized. We argue that the difference here is that whereas the stigmatizers believe that weapons are not means of providing peace, whilst the interviewees are convinced that a strong defense is necessary to uphold peace. In comparison to the stigmatizers, the employees can uphold their belief in the defense industry by utilizing coping mechanisms, which are crucial in order to avoid identity struggle with being part of the organization (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Utilizing coping mechanisms as a response to stigma marks the interplay of SJT and SIT, which Kreiner et al. (2006) refer to. Our study provides examples that put the differing responses and coping mechanisms to stigma in summary.

Valid Stigma & Social Mobility

One interviewee showed that she has turnover intentions because her values do not align with the company's core-activities. As presented by Tajfel & Turner (1986), Social Identity Theory shows the membership of a group serves the maintenance of a positive self-view. This includes the membership of an organization through the occupation of the employee (Edwards, 2005). In the case of the anonymous interviewee, the valid stigma was not only understood, the discrediting aspect of it was also accepted, which is a form of System Justification as presented by Kreiner et al. (2006). Because of this negative self-perception through the discrediting

stigma, it is no longer acceptable to be part of the stigmatized organization, as according to SIT it threatens the necessary positive self-view (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to Kreiner et al. (2006), the only option to regenerate the positive self-view is thus by exiting the organization.

The theories of SIT, SJT and Social Mobility show a link to theories of stigma transfer that have not been illustrated previously. Through the membership of an organization, SIT shows that it is likely that an employee identifies with their employer (Edwards, 2005). If this source of identity is stigmatized, a discrediting of the self happens, which is a form of stigma transfer (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). In the case of the interviewee who has turnover intentions, a self-stigmatization takes place by accepting the stigma of the own organization as in System Justification and performing the stigma transfer on the self. This clashes with her/his self-view as she assumes a direct correlation between her contributions and actions to her employers. We can thus draw a further link to secondary stigmatization, albeit the other way around, whereas the interviewee transfers the stigma to her/himself. This shows that stigma transfer is therefore not necessarily done by external audiences as originally stated by Goffman (1963) but also by members of stigmatized groups themselves. Moreover, this finding stands in contrast to Social Identity Theory, which calls for a defense of the own group, as it is the case for other interviewees (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Valid Stigma & SIT

Although the stigma is understood and regarded as valid, it is important for employees of stigmatized organizations to reject the discrediting aspect that stigma has. In alignment with SIT, the membership of a group needs to support the positive self-view and therefore should not diminish the positive perception of the self (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In case of valid stigma, this is especially difficult because the opinion that the valid stigma is based on is partly shared by the employees. At this point, coping mechanisms come into place that reject the discrediting characteristic of the stigma despite preserving its validity. These coping mechanisms resemble Kreiner et al.'s (2006) findings and take the following turns in the specific case of the defense industry:

The emphasis on security and bureaucracy can be allocated within coping mechanisms called Social Creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which are shown as in emphasizing alternative

attributes of the defense industry that are not stigmatized. Social Creativity is practiced by employees in our study through Reframing the meaning of the defense industry's products. In other words, they take the stigmatized dimensions and give it a new meaning, namely the provision of security and thus reframe it (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The same can be seen in the finding where the employees emphasize bureaucracy.

Social Comparison is practiced by the employees through the comparison of the defense industry to other industries. By showing that other industries are also unethical, the employees create awareness that the defense industry is often centralized as a scapegoat, although other industries should also be stigmatized. Moreover, the connection of other industries to war and the military was shown, as not only the defense industry itself has these connections. However, it was stated that the awareness of this within society is limited and the stigma is thus concentrated on the defense industry.

Although Kreiner et al (2006) state that the coping mechanisms of Social Creativity and Social Comparison are needed for stigma in general, our study shows that the stigma that is picked up by the coping mechanisms is valid stigma. Empty stigma can often be ignored. We therefore conclude that stigma has effects on employees if it is understood and regarded as reasonable - valid in other words. This contribution is proven by regarding the types of coping mechanisms in detail. Consequently, the ethical concerns that are shared by interviewees are taken into account and the applied coping mechanisms integrate the stigmatized dimension, which is weapons causing violence and war, but diminish it. Concretely this means that the emphasis on security does not diminish the fact that weapons can cause death, but that they provide a deterrent effect, even when not used. The same applies for an emphasis on bureaucracy, whereas again it is not ignored that defense equipment can come into the wrong hands, but this scenario is mostly prevented through the regulations

In summary, our study contributes to existing literature on stigma as in showing that beliefs, values and ideologies of stigmatizers and stigmatized do not necessarily have to be contradicting, which stands in contrast to previous findings around the topic (e.g. Hudson, 2008...). It shows that although the discrediting resulting from stigma may be accepted, resulting in Social Mobility, it can also be counteracted by applying coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms ultimately serve as a distancing measure that distinguishes between stigmatizers and stigmatized.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to further the understanding of how core-stigma is perceived and responded to by individual employees in stigmatized organizations. To better understand the perception and actions of the employees, a qualitative study based upon 13 interviews was performed to obtain empirical data. We used three literature topics as a basis to allocate our findings within, namely: Organizational core-stigma, consequences of stigma and the structure of the defense industry. Our findings were used to attempt and answer our proposed research question: *“How do employees of the defense industry respond to perceived stigma?”*.

Within this research we have shown that companies of the defense industry are heavily targeted by organizational core-stigma (e.g. Hudson, 2008) (e.g. Hudson, 2008) and that this stigma is often directly transferred to the employees of the organizations. The secondary stigma (e.g. Tracey & Phillips, 2016) that results from the organizational core-stigma of the defense industry has shown to be conveyed to employees through direct accusations, discussions or confrontations of external audiences and stigmatizers. The stigmatized dimension of the industry generally results from a direct equalization of the industry’s product to violence and war.

The social construction of organizational core-stigma leads to different perceptions of stigmatization (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009), whereas it could be found that the stigma surrounding the defense industry is present to varying degrees in Sweden and Germany. This finding was shown through more frequent confrontational experiences and stigmatization reported by German accounts. Moreover, more ethical concerns regarding the products were present on the German accounts. As a consequence, it can be assumed that a stronger stigma perception increases the individuals’ reflection.

Resulting from the sociocultural construction of stigma, we found out that the participating employees of the defense industry differentiate between empty and valid stigma, whereas the former represents a type of stigma that is regarded as unjust and unreasonable, partly due to the ignorance of the stigmatizers; and the latter being understood and regarded as reasonable,

although not adapted. Responses to the direct stigmatization of employees were adapted to the type of stigma and resulted in avoidance when confronted with empty stigma, and in discussions and Reframing (see Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) when confronted with valid stigma. Basing our findings on Kreiner et al.'s (2006) theory of stigma consequences, we found that employees of the defense industry turn to three major coping strategies that provide an understanding of the defense industry and its legitimacy. These were, Reframing the products into the provision of security and making the world more safe, a deep trust in governmental regulations that prevent the products from being used for the wrong manner and a comparison of industries that represented the defense industry in a better light and put their operations in relation.

A key finding of this study has shown the heavy reliance of secondary stigma on external and internal conditions. Secondary stigma therefore is no coercive consequence of organizational stigma in general as it can be avoided through withholding certain information that trigger the stigmatization. If the organization is viewed to be a core part of the individuals' social identity, the secondary stigma perception is consequently stronger and may even be transferred to the self. This influence on stigma transfer shows that sociocultural contexts but also own perceptions of the self determine its strength and affection.

A second key finding was that the opinions of stigmatizers and stigmatized can be shared and mutually understood. This however does not change their confronting positions. Whereas some values, beliefs and ideologies of stigmatizers and stigmatized are equal, the differences that put them into the respective roles may only be small. Coping mechanisms serve as a shield that prevent a threat of the positive self-view, if the stigmatized opinions are fully assumed and regarded as self-discrediting. Therefore, we conclude that coping mechanisms are needed in case the stigma is regarded as valid. This key finding shows that perceived empty stigma may be quite strong, however does not evoke the definite need to be coped with, as it has no effects on the stigmatized and can easily be ignored.

6.1 Limitations and Further Research

Due to the limited size and scope of our thesis, we interviewed 13 employees from different companies and two different nationalities. The conclusions being made on topics thus cannot be seen as definite on larger audiences. We rather sought to gain insights into how each individual perceived the stigma, and their ways of responding to it. The topic itself is a social construct that varies between different evaluators and audiences as such it is highly dependent on the person being asked. Thus, the results and hypothesis are made from the perspective of the accounts within the study. We believe that a bigger sample size could make the findings more general on population level. We therefore suggest that further research on the topic could be done on a larger scale to provide more general results. As the thesis findings show, the stigmatization of the defense industry is socially contextually dependent, so that the results on a small scale have a risk of being exceptions rather than general. This is especially apparent within the area of cultural differences, where the accounts in the study are split in half and only 4 participants were Swedish.

We had several different hypotheses that due to the scope and size of the study were not possible to include, one is related to the stronger perception of stigma on the German accounts. A possible explanation could be that Swedish people are less confrontational in nature than Germans. The questioning and follow-up from the Swedish interviewees might be their way of confronting the employees albeit in a more subtle way. In order to not lose the focus of our study, we have chosen not to further develop this point but we thought it might be worth mentioning as this fact was hinted towards by some interviewees as well.

Another possible explanation could be seen in that for many of the Swedish accounts, the work seemed more disconnected from their self-view. This contradicts the findings of Edwards (2005) to an extent but we as authors argue that this might be a reason as to why the transfer of secondary stigma seemed to be less prevalent in the Swedish accounts.

Another interesting dimension that was not emphasized in the thesis is that of identity struggle. Identity struggle is a concept that has been explored in literature (e.g. Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016), that struggle to juggle the often contradicting demands of the organization with their self-view. Furthermore, the most severe forms of identity juggle ends in the form of exiting the

organization (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016), which resembles Social Mobility by Kreiner et al., 2016. As per one participant in the study, the clash between the anonymous interviewee's values and the organization's was perceived as too large which led to as they stated a reluctant exit of the organization, we started to wonder how the stigmatization of the industry was seen by former employees. As per our findings coping mechanisms were used to create legitimacy as to align one's perception with the organization. This area would be very interesting for further research as it might provide a different set of findings that can make the area more complete.

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