

# Heteronormativity at Work

A case study of the workplace experience of queer employees

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# Acknowledgements

*"The big change can only be achieved by changing the culture. As homosexuals we are used to having to fight for our rights all the time, but the real big changes come when everyone is participating, not just us who are part of the community."*

Quote by a lesbian participant in a manager position.

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# Abstract

Queer employees are experiencing heteronormativity in the Swedish workplace. The aim of this thesis is to examine how queer lives are limited at work by the social norms regulating sex, gender and sexuality. The object of this study is an international Swedish industrial company where I have conducted interviews with queer employees. From a poststructural standpoint I am conducting queer research to analyze the workplace experience, guided by the concepts of heteronormativity and subversion drawn from Judith Butler's theories. Data was viewed through thematic analysis and the coding process was assisted by NVivo. I find heteronormativity is limiting queer lives within the workplace mainly by a lack of visibility of queer in discourse, foreclosing the possibility to exist outside of heteronormativity within this workplace context. Being queer is articulated as incompatible with high performance and a prosperous career and limiting identity categories are constructed by the attachment of stereotypical meanings to queer sexualities.

*Key words:* heteronormativity, subversion, LGBTQ, queer, labor rights, NVivo  
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# 1 The Current State of the Workplace

While the Swedish government claims to be the first feminist government in the world (Government Offices of Sweden), it is clear that Swedish society is failing in ensuring equality for all citizens. Widespread discrimination is reported in all different areas of society, such as health care, social services, housing, education and labor (DO 2020). Reports of discrimination have increased during the period 2017 to 2019 and work-life is by far the most exposed area (DO 2020). While modern society is organized in a way that obligates most citizens to perform paid labor, current policies are failing to protect us from discrimination while we do.

## 1.1 Discrimination at Work in Sweden

The Swedish Discrimination Act should act to protect employees from discrimination while performing labor. The law includes the seven grounds for discrimination stated in the quote below (SFS 2008:567).

“The purpose of this Act is to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.”

Accountability to protect employees from discrimination at work is largely placed on employers. The law state employers are obligated to continuously take active measures aimed at preventing discrimination and promoting equal rights. Despite this, 40 per cent of the yearly reports on discrimination in 2019 took place in the workplace (DO 2020). Structural discrimination in the workplace have been reported on the basis of gender, race, body, age, sexuality, religion and nationality (IFAU 2007:28; 2011:21; 2017:17). In addition to a higher percentage of unemployment among Afro-Swedes, data shows respondents from this group

experience their education and skills are generally questioned in their work-life (Mångkulturellt centrum 2015). Previous research further shows Muslim women wearing headscarves are discriminated in the Swedish labor market (Oxford Research 2013). Several employers have been willing to employ women wearing headscarves only on the condition that they do not wear the scarf during work hours (ibid). The same study shows employers' prejudices disadvantaging Muslim men in the labor market. The global social media movement #metoo highlighted among other areas the widespread threat of sexual harassment women face in the workplace. Regarding the focus of this study – heteronormativity in the workplace – the Discrimination Act legislates equal rights on the base of sex, gender identity and/or expression and sexual orientation in the workplace. Previous studies show structural discrimination towards queer applicants in the labor market (IFAU 2011:21).

Despite numerous reports of discrimination in the workplace, knowledge about the situation for queer people in the Swedish labor market and workplace is insufficient. This is stated by a previous case study on LGBTQ in the workplace (Björk & Wahlström 2018) as well as the state investigation on the trans\*<sup>1</sup> population's living conditions in Sweden (SOU 2017:92). This is the only state investigation carried out on the situation of queer people in Sweden, not only in the context of labor but on the lives of queer people in Sweden in general. The investigation reports the proportion of unemployed and low-income earners is greater in the trans\* population. Furthermore, the results indicate a relatively high proportion of trans\* Swedes not living in accordance with their gender identity and suggests ignorance about trans\* as the main reason (SOU 2017:92).

It is clear current policies as well as employers are failing to ensure equality for queer minorities in the workplace. There also seems to be a lack of qualitative research on the area within Sweden, and with that I claim a lack of in-depth

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term trans\* with an asterisk to assert that I am not attaching pre-determined attributes to this term. In the purpose of not reproducing binary and fixed identity categories, I am not defining what is and is not trans\* experience. This term is further developed on page 20.

understanding of the issue at hand. For this reason, with a focus on social norms, I am investigating how we can understand the situation of queer minorities in the workplace using a case study. With the purpose of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for queer employees in the workplace, the question and sub question guiding my analysis are:

*How is heteronormativity limiting queer lives within the workplace?*

- *How are queer employees experiencing possibilities to subvert heteronormativity within the workplace?*

## 1.2 Previous Research

While the knowledge within this area is deemed insufficient in Sweden, multiple scholars beyond Sweden have published alarming reports on the situation of queer employees in the workplace. The last survey on LGBT conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights report LGBT people are more likely to experience discrimination in employment than any other area of social life covered by the survey (FRA 2014). 19 percent of the EU respondents had experienced discrimination in the workplace during the past year, the trans\* population was overrepresented (ibid). Within that group, 17 percent of the Swedish respondents had experienced discrimination during the past year, placing Sweden alongside Hungary on the 8th place of the 28 EU countries included in the study. Among the 7 countries reporting less discrimination towards LGBT employees than Sweden were Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland. A third of the overall EU respondents had never disclosed an LGBT identity at work during the five years prior to the study (FRA 2014).

The Swedish Public Health Agency report poor general health more common for gay and bisexual people, compared to heterosexuals (FHM 2014). Furthermore, a study on the health of the trans\* population in Sweden shows only half of the respondents report good general health (FHM 2015). Only a minority of the trans\* respondents report being able to live fully according to their gender identity and “impaired mental health in the form of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts were

prevalent to a high degree” (FHM 2015:14). Regarding workplace well-being, Elizabeth Grace Holman (2018) argues queer minorities experience additional stress than what is typical in the workplace. She further argues queer employees who experience discrimination in the workplace report “decreased job satisfaction, stronger intentions to leave the position, and withdrawal from the workplace” (2018:168). A USA based quantitative study (Yoder & Mattheis 2016) further confirms decreased job satisfaction among queer employees and reports being part of a minority group can hamper career success within STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) field workplaces.

Yoder and Mattheis (2016) further argue a stereotype of the White male “scientist” is associated with the male-dominated STEM fields. Because of the masculinity associated with these fields, the authors hypothesize and conclude that workplaces with a better representation of women provides a better climate for queer employees (Yoder & Mattheis 2016). A more recent study of how queer employees navigate their identity in STEM field workplaces in the USA state queer people of color experience an overlap of multiple identities (Mattheis et. al. 2019). This leads to “additional societal pressures in the form of implicit and explicit racism, xenophobia and stereotyping” (ibid:1851). A participant identifying as a trans\* woman further means navigating different identities is a cause of stress and the authors conclude that trans\* employees are particularly vulnerable in the workplace (Mattheis et. al. 2019). Another USA based study of trans\* employees’ experiences of transitioning in the workplace report almost all of the participants (80-100%) met nonacceptance and hostility in the form of discrimination or harassment and experienced a feeling of distress because of their transition (Brewster et. al. 2014).

The Swedish state investigation into the living conditions for trans\* people in Sweden conclude a great shortage of educational material about trans\* identity aimed at employers (SOU 2017:92). While the law clearly states discrimination is illegal in the workplace and places the responsibility to ensure equality on the employer, the government seem to fail in providing employers with the educational material necessary to ensure equal treatment. Law scholar Dean Spade (2015) questions the efficiency of legal rights strategies to address crimes against the trans\* population. He means the victim-perpetrator model is insufficient in understanding



the complex “systems of meaning and control that maldistributed life chances” (2015:50). Spade identifies the disciplinary power of social norms as a prominent mode of power in understanding discrimination against queer minorities. Heterosexuality as a social norm is commonly termed heteronormativity, a term rooted in concepts developed by Gayle Rubin (1975) and Adrienne Rich (1980) (two concepts further developed in the next chapter). Heteronormativity is commonly defined as “a term used to expose and highlight how institutionalized heterosexuality is consciously and unconsciously accepted and reproduced” (Yep 2005:395). It can be expressed in a taken-for-granted assumption of heterosexuality where all are assumed to be straight.

Samsita Palo & Kumar Kunal Jha (2020) study heteronormativity in the workplace in the case of India and highlight how this heteronorm is causing an expectation on non-heterosexual people to “come out” in the workplace. The authors mean heterosexual employees are not expected to publicly reveal their sexuality since heterosexuality is considered to be “normal” and taken-for-granted. To exist as a non-heterosexual employee in a heteronormative workplace is therefore a constant process of “coming out”, reinforcing queer employees’ minority status in the workplace (ibid). Robert C. Mizzi (2013) uses the term “heteroprofessionalism” to highlight how discourses of professionalism are used to articulate the oppression of homosexuality in international development workplaces. He means “professionalism desexualizes workers by asserting “proper” identities devoid of sexuality and through this process relocates lesbians and gay men to the social periphery” (Mizzi 2013:1608). Through a heteroprofessional discourse, homosexuality is perceived as “unprofessional”. Mizzi (2013) further argues this erasure of sexuality and the oppression of homosexual employees originates from heteronormativity.

Studies of heteronormativity at work can be found within the fields of sociology, psychology and management. There seems to be a lack of research within political science. In light of current discrimination, queer employees’ inability to live fully as themselves in the Swedish workplace and the lack of knowledge and educational material on the area, this study aims to reach a deeper understanding of the impact of heteronormativity to understand the situation for

queer employees in the workplace. The purpose of this study is to contribute to efforts towards ensuring labor rights equality.

### 1.3 Previous Case Study

In 2017, the City Council of the City of Gothenburg decided on a plan to improve the living conditions for LGBTQ people, leading to a mixed methods study of LGBTQ employees' work environment within the City of Gothenburg (Björk & Wahlström 2018). Knowledge about the work environment of LGBTQ people in Sweden was deemed insufficient since previous research at the time of the study dated ten years back (2018). The aim of the study was to shed light on heteronormative ideas and practices in the workplace and their consequences for LGBTQ employees. Since LGBTQ was the term used in the study, it is also used here to report the results of the study. Heteronormativity was defined as "LGBTQ people are made deviant because of the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality among participants in social interactions" (Björk & Wahlström 2018:9).

The study reports more than 20 percent of the LGBTQ participants had been subjected to harassment or discrimination by colleagues in the past year (ibid). While intentional harassment, derogatory words and hate did occur in the workplace, unintentional harassment such as reckless speech was more common and experienced regularly by 40 percent of LGBTQ employees. The results further show that LGBTQ employees feel safe in the workplace to a lesser degree than non-LGBTQ employees. Half of the participants had at least one colleague expressing negative comments about LGBTQ and the quantitative results of the study indicate non-LGBTQ employees not noticing or acknowledging the occurring harassment towards LGBTQ. The authors link this to heteronormativity and argue that offensive treatment towards LGBTQ might be less visible to non-LGBTQ employees because of norms presuming heterosexuality (ibid).

Half of the LGBTQ participants disclosed their sexuality to all or most of their colleagues, while ten percent did not talk about this to anyone in the workplace (Björk & Wahlström 2018). Only 31 percent of the participants with trans\*

experience shared their gender identity with colleagues. Common reasons given to concealing a sexuality or gender identity in the workplace was to avoid curious or personal questions and not to be reduced to being “only” a representative of the LGBTQ community. One participant explained: “then that is all I become” (ibid:47). Other reasons given were fear of rejection, other negative reactions and harassment. Several participants shared that their negative expectations were not realized when they chose to share their LGBTQ identity. Despite this, the mere expectation of possible reactions led to the decision to conceal parts of themselves. The results show that LGBTQ employees are subjected to discrimination in general and sexual harassment in particular to a greater extent than non-LGBTQ employees. Non-binary/trans\* people are overrepresented in both cases (Björk & Wahlström 2018).

This previous case study indicates a substantial number of queer employees are not able to live as themselves while performing paid labor. They are subjected to derogatory comments, harassment and negative special treatment in the workplace. Queer employees are more likely to experience discrimination and less likely to feel safe in the workplace, demonstrating inequality in labor rights. As stated by the authors, understanding LGBTQ employees’ situation in the workplace should not be sought in LGBTQ or in the acts of individuals, but in the cultural structure of heteronormativity (Björk & Wahlström 2018), which is also the focus of this study.

Though heteronormativity was stated as the subject of the previous case study, exploration of the social construction of the norms that make up heteronormativity was limited. The analysis focused more on description of the lived experience rather than deconstructing heteronormativity. Emphasis seemed to be on a predetermined understanding of what heteronormativity is, investigating to what extent LGBTQ employees’ experiences confirm this definition, rather than exploring what heteronormativity could be in the context of the workplace. While contributing with thorough and critical knowledge on the situation of queer employees in the workplace, I argue the previous case study is also participating in reproducing coherent gender and sexuality identity categories, which I in the next chapter will argue are inherently exclusionary and limiting to queer lives. The term LGBTQ is used and limited to the four identity categories homosexual, bisexual, transgender and queer (Björk & Wahlström 2018:18). The categories are further restricted by a

set definition of attributes attached to them. The operationalization of this study is further exclusionary, and partly contradictory, in defining heteronormativity as only taken-for-granted heterosexuality, despite including trans\* experience in the analysis. I argue for a need of further research, and specifically queer research, studying the workplace with the aim of liberating queer lives from the limitations and oppressions of identity categories. For this reason, I use the term queer to refer to employees who do not fit the norms of heteronormativity. My use of the term and (non-)operationalization of it will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

## 1.4 The Case of this Study

In an effort to reach a deeper understanding of the situation of queer people in the workplace, I am interviewing queer employees working in Sweden within a Swedish large international company. The company operates within the industrial industry and employs over 10.000 people globally in several affiliated companies.

The company is male-dominated with about 34 percent women employed in 2020, two employees' gender identities were not declared, and the rest were men. Only 22,5 percent of the manager positions were held by women in 2020, the rest by men. The majority of the employees' ages are found, and equally spread, over ages 30-60 years old. The company is in the process of developing a global diversity and inclusion strategy aiming for increased equality. At the time of the interviews no equal rights strategy was in place. This case study can be seen as part of the diversity and inclusion initiative. Incidents have been reported to the HR-department suggesting a need to address the issue of discrimination against queer employees within the company. The results of this study can inform further development of strategies towards equality for queer minorities in this workplace.

This workplace, an international male-dominated corporation within the industrial industry, is not representative of the Swedish labor market at large. It could be seen as adding a case of the private sector to the previous and only other case study of this kind conducted in Sweden, focusing on the public sector of Gothenburg City (Björk & Wahlström 2018). I chose to do a case study rather than interviewing queer employees from different workplaces to be able to thoroughly

situate the findings in a social, cultural and locational context. The purpose of this study is to reach an in-depth understanding of the situation of queer minorities within this workplace, rather than generalization. The theoretical framework guiding this understanding is presented in the next chapter.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will outline the theoretical framework guiding the analysis of the interviews. I present Judith Butler's deconstruction of identity categories and the concepts of heteronormativity and subversion. I end the chapter by connecting to the Swedish case and a discussion on the term queer.

### 2.1 An Anti-identitarian Turn in Queer Politics

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2006) sets out to deconstruct the idea of coherent gender identities. The book was first published in 1990, contributing to a current debate on the "subject" of feminism within feminist research. The notion up for debate was whether or not feminism should rest on a unified female identity, "woman", as subject of the social movement (Lloyd 2007:44). Perhaps the most prominent contribution to this debate came from black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her essay on the intersection of racism and sexism in the experiences of women of color. Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, now playing a fundamental role in feminist research, highlighting how different structures of power intersect. She means the experience of oppression cannot be understood by focusing on a single structure of power, such as gender (Crenshaw 1989). Her essay served as a critique of the so-called "white feminism", articulating universal goals for women while only serving the needs of a particular group of (white) women.

While not naming intersectionality, Butler (2006) suggests the political assumption of a unified identity in a "woman" representing feminism can only be viable if we avoid other constituted identities such as race, class and sexuality. Only through ignoring an intersectional perspective can we talk about a "female experience" unifying feminists around a common goal. Adhering to a poststructural

perspective, Butler directs our attention to the construction of the category of “women”.

“(…) the domains of political and linguistic “representation” set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject” (Butler 2006:2).

Butler not only challenges the notion of a category in “women”, but further the notion that there is such a thing as “subject” at all. Since representation can only then be extended to those meeting the predetermined qualifications of a “subject”, identity categories are inherently limiting and exclusionary (Butler 2006). Some inevitably will not qualify or will have to adjust. Butler (2006) further suggests the category of women is limited and regulated by the very system where it seeks political representation and emancipation. In this argument, Butler draws on Michel Foucault’s (1982) theory on subjects being both produced and represented by the juridical systems of power.

“This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects” (Foucault 1982:781).

Foucault suggests the meanings attached to the “subject” both subjugates and makes the subject (ibid). From this standpoint, Butler (2006) argues it is time to free feminist research from the necessity of a constructed unity in the identity category of “women”. She argues “the identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics” (Butler 2006:9) because the juridical and political power constructing this female “subject” is also the source for its exclusion in juridical and political power. I propose this is where Butler’s critique of identity politics, a critique which Slavoj Žižek (2000:132) called “an anti-identitarian turn of queer politics” by, is most prominent.

Firmly establishing her view on the notion of a unified coherent identity in “women”, Butler sets out to further “trouble” gender identities. Another prominent

feminist thinker on this topic is Gayle Rubin and her theory of the “sex/gender system”. Rubin (1975) understands gender as a cultural construction imposed upon the biological sex; a social organizing which transforms biological male and females into “men” and “women”. She further argues the notion of binary mutually exclusive gender categories requires repression: “in men, of whatever is the local version of “feminine” traits; in women, of the local definition of “masculine” traits” (Rubin 1975:180). In this way, one is a “woman” or a “man” to the extent one acts in accordance with the socially constructed definitions. The sex/gender system thus suggests an opportunity for liberation from the regulative gender categories if one can escape the transformation from a sex into a socially constructed gender. Rubin’s understanding of sex/gender therefore rests on a distinction between sex and gender. Butler (2006) argues this distinction proposes sex as a pre-discursive entity, prior to gender and therefore prior to language. She means that “this construct called “sex” is rather as culturally constructed as gender” (Butler 2006:9). The notion of a pre-given sex is a juridical conception and should not be viewed as anymore “natural” or pre-given than gender. Both gender and sex are discursively constructed through social norms, or what Butler calls the *regulatory practice* (ibid).

Butler (2006) identifies a repetitive process of regulatory practice producing coherent gender identities. She refers to this as “norms of intelligibility” (Butler 2006:23), meaning gender categories can only be intelligible (comprehensible) through a repetition of practice conforming to these norms, an “ordering of attributes into coherent gender sequences” (ibid:23). Similar to Rubin’s theory, we are male or female to the extent that we act in accordance with this regulatory practice of norms. Butler further argues we only become intelligible as subjects by becoming gendered in conformity with the regulatory practices that are recognized as the norms of gender intelligibility (ibid). We can only understand people as long as they are gendered, they become understandable to us by becoming gendered.

If gender is constituted through a repetitive regulatory practice, it is a doing rather than a noun. Butler argues gender is performative in the way that it “is a set of free-floating attributes organized through a repeated regulatory practice that we recognize as gender” (2006:34). Gender is a doing because the “subject” (man/woman) does not preexist the deed but is constituted by the deed itself. In this way, there “is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is



performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (Butler 2006:34).

### 2.1.1 Heteronormativity

Connecting the understanding of sex/gender to sexuality, Butler (2006) presents the heterosexual matrix to explain how the very notion and viability of the binary sex system is constituted and sustained through heterosexuality. Butler argues intelligible gender identities “are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire” (2006:23). She means the regulatory practice rendering gender identities intelligible is disciplined through a “compulsory heterosexuality” (2006:43). The term compulsory heterosexuality was popularized by Adrienne Rich in 1980. Rich (1980) argues heterosexuality should be recognized as a political institution enabling male dominance. She means feminists need to address the disguising and distorting of possible options through “the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economical, and emotional access” (Rich 1980:647). Rich means that compulsory heterosexuality forecloses homosexuality, or specifically “lesbian existence”, as a possibility: the only viable option is heterosexuality, thus compulsory (ibid).

Butler (1990) too suggests the binary understanding of the male and the female gender works to foreclose possibilities by mutually excluding sex and desire: “one either identifies with a sex or desires it, but only those two relations are possible” (ibid:333). Rubin (1975) understands sex as being transformed into gender through cultural institutions such as family, kinship and compulsory heterosexuality. She conceptualizes the oppression of women and sexual minorities by arguing that the organization of sex builds on gender and heterosexuality, as well as the constraint of female sexuality (ibid). Rubin clearly influenced Butler’s (2006) heterosexual matrix in articulating that “gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex” (Rubin 1975:80). Butler (2006) further argues the regulatory practice of gender identities not only forecloses possibilities such as homosexuality, but all possibilities excluded by the binary gender system.

“The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary result in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire” (Butler 2006:31).

In this way, the heterosexual matrix mutually disciplines the three – gender, sex, sexuality. The construction of gender bounds the notions of masculinity and femininity to the bodily shape of men and women and further reinforces their mutual exclusion through opposite-sex desire; “one either identifies with a sex or desires it” (Butler 1990:333). Butler (2006) means sexuality, or desire, is distinguished through an oppositional relation to the other gender it desires. Heterosexuality is thus a prerequisite for the binary understanding of sex/gender; the policing of sex/gender in a binary system works to secure heterosexuality (ibid). Butler (2006) argues this constructed relationship between sex/gender and sexuality not only limits gendered possibilities in a binary system but also suggests desire reflects gender and vice versa. A subject in whom gender does not follow from sex and gender is not reflected in desire (heterosexuality) is therefore not recognized as a viable subject. A subject position beyond the identity categories deemed intelligible by heteronormativity is not possible, it is an unthinkable position. For this reason, as eloquently put by Moya Lloyd (2007) in her careful reading of *Gender Trouble*, “exposing the regulatory and fictive nature of compulsory heterosexuality is central to a gender politics (...) that seeks legitimation for non-normative sexual minorities” (Lloyd 2007:35).

Moya Lloyd proposes using the term heteronormativity to name the theory of the heterosexual matrix. She defines heteronormativity as “the institutions, modes of understanding, norms and discourses that treat heterosexuality as natural to humanity” (2007:27). She further argues that heteronormativity entails “how sex is implicated in gender, how desire is implicated in sex, how subjectivity is implicated in sex, gender and desire” (Lloyd 2007:27), thus emphasizing the heteronorm goes beyond simply heterosexuality. Heteronormativity is the term used in this study to

conceptualize the norms rendering employees intelligible or not through the mutual disciplining of sex, gender, sexuality. I too want to emphasize that my understanding of heteronormativity goes beyond sexuality and includes the construction of the binary understanding of sex/gender. Heteronormativity not only represents the foreclosing of queer sexualities but the foreclosing of all possibilities beyond the subject identity categories enabled by woman, man, homosexual, heterosexual, etc.

With this concept I aim to answer the question: how is heteronormativity limiting queer lives within this workplace? I am investigating what subject categories are made intelligible within the regulatory practices of this workplace. In other words, what is articulated as “normal”, what is taken-for-granted and what is expected within this workplace.

### 2.1.2 Subversion

The heterosexual matrix, or heteronormativity, works to restrict the relative meanings of sex, gender and sexuality. The repetitive regulatory practice limits what is possible and not, leading Butler to ask, “what kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?” (2006:44).

Gender identity, or any identity category, cannot be prior to gender because a person is not intelligible before gendered. Any notion of a subject, or a gender, is thus called into question by the very beings who appear to be a person but fail to conform to gendered norms of intelligibility (Butler 2006). Butler concludes that we cannot stop the repetition of gender itself, but “as an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (2006:45). Returning to the debate of the subject of feminism and the need for an intersectional perspective, Butler (2006) argues we should not look to expand the identity category of “women” but rather dissolve the identity as such. The critical task of feminism, according to Butler, is then to “locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions” (2006:201), meaning the performative doing of identity categories enables possibilities for intervention.

Drawing on Simone De Beauvoir’s (1973) notion of “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” (1973:301), Monique Wittig (1993) argues lesbians are living

proof that the idea of a natural group in “women” is a myth. Wittig means the category of “women” is defined by the capacity to give birth and further argues that births are not natural but forced (re)production (ibid). According to Wittig, since lesbianism cannot produce children, lesbians are not women. Similar to Butler, Wittig argues that the origin of oppression is imposed through the production of the myth of the category “woman”. In the reproduction of heterosexuality and the gender binary system, Wittig (1993) means lesbians are both accused of not being “real” women and of wanting to be men. She argues refusing to be a woman (lesbianism) does not indicate wanting to become a man. It is rather refusing heterosexuality which to Wittig is synonymous with refusing the gender binary; refusing to be neither a man nor a woman (ibid). One could say Wittig proposes a possibility for subversion in lesbianism: to be a lesbian is to subvert both heterosexuality and the gender binary system. Wittig (1980) further argues discourses of heterosexuality prevent lesbians and gay men from speaking in any other terms than the heterosexual. She means they “deny us every possibility of creating our own categories” (Wittig 1980:105). While firmly establishing the limiting, regulative and oppressive function of gender and sexual identity categories, Wittig’s strategy for subverting these norms seem to lie in the creation of an identity category in lesbianism. Butler (2006) opposes the possibility of subversion in this act and asks: if liberation is sought out in refusing the category of “woman”, then “what is to keep the name of lesbian from becoming an equally compulsory category?” (2006:173).

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (2006) never exemplifies what is and what is not subversion, which could be argued to be the very point of subversion. Despite this, she is clear on the fact that subversion cannot be achieved in a new or different identity category, since identity categories are inherently limiting (ibid). From a Butlerian perspective, liberation is rather in the possibilities of existing beyond categories, existing while not conforming to the norms of intelligibility. Proposing liberation in fixed identity categories such as “lesbian” forecloses all other possibilities beyond “lesbian”, which is the main argument for Butler’s (2006) anti-identitarian position in *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues there is no possibility for subversion outside of the discursive regulatory practices of intelligibility, subversion must therefore be acted from within (ibid). She suggests the task is not

whether or not to repeat but how to repeat “through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (2006:203). She explains her unwillingness to name subversion with the argument that judgments on what constitutes subversion can never be made out of context or endure through time (ibid).

Samuel A. Chambers (2007) highlights the political importance of subversive intervention and suggests subversion is possible “every time an individual, an institution, a text, a movie or a group practices, theorizes, thinks or presents sex/gender in such a way as to erode the norm of heterosexuality from within” (2007:671). Chambers argues subversion is critical to political practice and suggests, in alignment with Moya Lloyd, that Butler’s theory of subversion is more effectful through the concept of heteronormativity (ibid). In choosing heteronormativity as an analytical lens, Chambers averts the use of homophobia in analysis, arguing that it makes it difficult to recognize the political power of norms. He means “the ‘solution’ to this so-called problem then looks simple: reject, deny, or throw off ‘prejudice’ against homosexuals, and refuse to discriminate against same” (Chambers 2007:664). Proposing that homophobia will disappear when illegalized, fails to recognize what Chambers calls “the power of heterosexuality when it works as a norm” (2007:657). This notion echoes Dean Spade’s (2015) critique of the strategy of legal recognition for the trans\* population to address trans\*phobia. Spade argues systems of meaning that maldistributed life chances are more complicated than the perpetrator/victim model proposed by anti-discrimination laws (ibid). As previous studies show, despite the Swedish Discrimination Act in place to protect queer minorities in the workplace, discrimination prevails. The concept of heteronormativity, rather than homophobia, “reveals institutional, cultural and legal norms that reify and entrench the normativity of heterosexuality” (Chambers 2007:665).

Returning to Butler’s politics of subversion, Chambers (2007) suggests subverting heteronormativity through revealing the norm, “since norms work best when they are never exposed” (2007:665). Subversion is then a critical theoretical and political practice of working on and undermining norms from within, by calling them into question and challenging their status as taken-for-granted assumptions (ibid). In ‘The Professor of Parody’, Martha Nussbaum (1999) dismisses the politics

of subversion and seems to read the act of subversion as nothing more than a parody, as making fun of the heteronorm. She summarizes subversion as the act of unmaking categories “just a little” and calls it “small opportunities” for opposing gender roles (Nussbaum 1999:5). I argue there is nothing little or small about challenging the oppressive heteronorms rendering queer lives less livable, less thinkable, less intelligible than heterosexual cisgender lives.

With this concept, I aim to answer the sub-question: How are queer employees experiencing possibilities to subvert heteronormativity within this workplace? I am investigating whether or not employees experience subversion, or challenging heteronormativity, to be a possible option at work. To perform a subversive act in this sense is not as Wittig (1993) proposes to simply “be” queer or not fitting the norm. As argued by Chambers (2007), it is rather to make the norm visible and question the taken-for-granted assumption upon which social norms rest. In this sense, the act of subversion can be performed by anyone and does not necessitate a queer (or any) identity category. Subversion is revealing, challenging and putting on display the social norms regulating sex/gender/sexuality in the workplace.

## 2.2 Subverting Heteronormativity in the Swedish Context

In Sweden, the binary gender system is enforced through law by only enabling female and male sex/gender. The sex/gender is medically assigned to a newborn child and sometimes investigated by a specialist team. There is no option to exist, to be intelligible or thinkable, in the legal context in Sweden in any other form than as a man or a woman. Intersex, non-binary, any and all other possibilities are excluded and not recognized as viable subjects in Swedish law. Furthermore, the Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567) not only regulates what sexual orientation is (attraction to a certain sex/gender) but also what categories of sexual orientation are possible: homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality. While expanding the understanding of sexuality beyond heterosexuality, the Discrimination Act works

to reinforce the binary sex/gender system by establishing you can either desire one sex or the other, or both<sup>2</sup>, but only two sexes are possible.

To paraphrase Butler (2006:2), the categories of sex, gender and sexuality are constituted, limited and regulated by the very system where it seeks political representation and emancipation. Medical institutions determine our sex at birth and the court of law determine if we are allowed to change them. In Foucault's (1978) words, the juridical power governs “the “right” to rediscover what one is and all that one can be” (1978:146). On the topic of human rights for trans\* people, in an interview with Butler she points out that (Jones 2021):

“The question of whether the sex you’re assigned at birth is the sex you will have to live with your whole life is one that pertains to political freedoms and legal rights. Those who say that the assignment of sex should be binding for a life are giving those initial powers absolute power to define who you are; regardless of the fact that you may feel quite strongly, in fact quite desperately, that this assignment is absolutely wrong.”

The politics of subversion is prominent in this quote because it suggests it is possible not to give those initial powers absolute power to define who we are. In an interview on the topic of discourse, Butler argues queer lives “becomes a cultural possibility that one can consider because it is already in the world. You could say that the discourse of homosexuality, as it becomes more popular, makes it more possible for people to become gay or lesbian” (Butler 2011). Queer lives can thus be presented as a possibility, they can become thinkable through discourse. I am analyzing the case of queer employees in the workplace using the concepts heteronormativity and subversion to understand the possibilities and limitations on queer lives within this workplace.

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<sup>2</sup> While the definition of bisexuality is contested within the queer community, I argue the most common understanding is attraction to “both” (bi) sexes, indicating men and women and thus reinforcing the binary gender system.

## 2.3 Queer Non-operationalization

Queer researchers Kath Browne and Catharine J. Nash (2016) will not define the term queer but rather argue it should be maintained undefined: “keeping queer permanently unclear, unstable and ‘unfit’ to represent any particular sexual identity is the key to maintaining a non-normative queer position” (2016:8). For this reason, I am using the term queer rather than the more commonly used acronyms LGBT, LGBTQ or LGBTQIA+. Since the acronyms represent identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, they work to reproduce limiting and exclusionary identity categories. I argue studying heteronormativity while reproducing these identity categories is counterproductive. The purpose of queer research should rather be, to quote Butler who is clearly echoing the words of Foucault (1982:789), “to open up the field of possibility (...) without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (Butler 2006:viii).

Benjamin William Vincent (2018) emphasizes how using such umbrella terms can risk “flattening differences of experience between populations” (2018:108). I want to be clear that I do not intend to ignore differences in experience but rather allow the participants to define their sex/gender/sexuality in words of their choosing, or not at all. I am not asking the participants to fit their desires into a neat box of clearly defined sexualities, this does not mean that I will exclude differences in experience. While allowing the participants to name themselves, my purpose is to unpack the monolithic identity categories of sex/gender/sexuality. I further want to emphasize my use of the term queer does not imply all or any of the participants self-identify with this term. They were informed the study was seeking participants who identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or queer.

With the purpose of not reproducing fixed identity categories, I am also using the term trans\* with an asterisk to assert that I am not attaching pre-determined attributes to this term. The term is borrowed from Jack Halberstam (2018) who reminds us that naming is a powerful activity. Halberstam uses the word trans\* to avoid naming, or what through a Butlerian perspective could be called a strategy to open up possibilities rather than reinforcing limitations. Trans\* can be understood as a reaction to an exclusionary and limiting definition of what trans is.



“The asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. (...) most importantly, **it makes trans\* people the authors of their own categorizations**” [author’s emphasis](Halberstam 2018:4).

Furthermore, I will not use the common expression “come out” or “be open” when explaining whether or not it is possible for the participants to lead queer lives in the workplace. The idea that queer people are expected to inform their environment on their sex/gender/sexuality is based on the heteronormative assumption that everyone should be intelligible within heteronormativity. It also reinforces the understanding that it is the responsibility of queer employees to inform their coworkers on details heterosexual cisgender people are not expected to share. I will refer to what is commonly termed “come out”/“be out” as employees' ability to live fully as themselves in the workplace. I do this to emphasize the inequality in employees' possibility to enter the workplace and perform labor fully as themselves.

# 3 Epistemology, Methodology & Methods

In this chapter I will outline the epistemological standpoint of the study, drawing on feminist standpoint theory and poststructuralism. I will elaborate on the standpoint's impact on my choice of methods and present my chosen methods of interviewing, thematic analysis and qualitative coding. By the end of the chapter, I discuss ethical considerations, reflexivity and the limitations of the study.

## 3.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory vs. Poststructuralism

Joan Acker (2006) argues the ideal worker in a capitalist society is constructed as a white male model worker; a presumably heterosexual worker with a wife at home who need not tend to a sick child or engage in domestic work. Acker further argues corporate workplaces are designed to fit this model worker (ibid). Previous research reporting discrimination on the basis of gender, race and sexuality (Mångkulturellt centrum 2014; IFAU 2007:28; 2011:21; 2017:17) suggest this is still the case in the contemporary workplace. There is therefore a critical need for feminist research on the corporate workplace. As argued by Sandra Harding (1987), white men's experiences cannot be the only perspective defining what is in need of scientific explanation.

Feminist standpoint theorists, such as Harding, argue that a structural change in scientific methodology is necessary to "undo" the androcentric biases within the traditional model of social science research. This standpoint serves as a critique of conventional epistemic standards, or what Donna Haraway refers to as 'the God trick' (1988:581). The God trick represents the notion of objectivity in research; the possibility to observe the world from an objective point of view, from above – free

from bias (ibid). In opposition to this, Haraway argues for a situated knowledge, linking the researcher to the researched, as well as their location.

“I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim **the power to see and not be seen**, to represent while escaping representation” [author’s emphasis] (Haraway 1988:581).

An embodied knowledge, situated in its social, cultural and historical context constitutes the antithesis to ‘the God trick’, which Haraway calls “various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” (1988:583). Butler adheres to this idea in her disinterest in “delivering judgements on what distinguishes the subversive from the unsubversive” (2006:xxii). She means judgements on this cannot be made out of context; what is a subversive act in this case is dependent on the norms of this specific workplace, it cannot be predetermined. Haraway (1988) further argues the researcher should be held accountable for the research produced, and its consequences for the researched group(s). Contrary to “the power to see and not be seen” (Haraway 1988:581), situated knowledge acknowledges the fact that the position and experience of the researcher forms and limits the knowledge produced. In other words, the position and experience of the researcher *matters* and should therefore be visible in knowledge production. This necessitates a heavy emphasis on reflexivity for the researcher in relation to the researched as well as the social, cultural and historical context. Haraway (1988) proposes a politics and epistemology of location, where knowledge is to be claimed on positionality rather than universality, “the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere particular” (1988:590).

In summary, Donna Haraway (1988) emphasizes the responsibility of the researcher as a producer of knowledge; researchers are not objective observers from above but active agents in structuring the world. Research should therefore be conducted from a positioned body, rather than a disembodied view. From this standpoint Haraway, along with other standpoint theorists, argue some positions are preferred and expected to produce more advocate accounts of the world than others

(Haraway 1988; Harding 1992). Haraway proposes research should be conducted from the standpoint of the subjugated: “they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge” (1988:584). Haraway means researchers in subjugated positions are more likely to produce knowledge with stronger objectivity (ibid). She is thus adhering to the notion of an insider/outsider status where a researcher who is a member of the same subjugated group as the researched, is believed to be more likely to produce objective knowledge. I believe this to be a rather flawed defense against the universal claim of ‘the God trick’ and therefore agree with poststructural critics arguing this simply “replicates the limitations of traditional scientific methods, namely, privileging one or another account as most “accurate” or true” (Naples & Gurr 2014:27). Privileging one position over another only reproduces ‘the God trick’, guided by a specific preferred perspective rather than universal objectivity.

This study is conducted from a poststructural standpoint and a Butlerian perspective where the idea of fixed identity categories inherent in an “insider status” is believed to reproduce essentialist and generalizing understandings of this group. A poststructural perspective “recognizes the social construction” of realities (Frost & Elichaooff 2014:43) and how they are often constructed in ways that serve the dominant group. Poststructuralism is anti-essentialist and often “wary of any appeal to the stable unified subject, and doubtful of the possibility of certainty in meaning” (Lloyd 2007:11). In her critique of the epistemological claims of universality, Butler adheres to queer theory which she means “moves us away from strict identity categories” by deviating from the norm (Jones 2021), highlighting the fluidity and unstableness of categories. The purpose of queer research, and this particular research, is not to further limit possible queer positioning in identity categories, but rather open up a field of possibilities beyond normative categories. To quote Catherine J. Nash (2016), queer research does not only set out to make visible, deconstruct and destabilize taken-for-granted norms that discipline social relations, but aims to create “the potential for lives lived beyond those bounded material and representational possibilities” (2016:142).

Given the problematic history of ethically flawed trans\* research and the marginalized status of queer communities worldwide (Vincent 2018), stating the purpose of research on the queer community is imperative. I am conducting this

research in an attempt to deconstruct social norms disciplining sex, gender and sexuality. The aim is to reach a deeper understanding of heteronormativity's implications on queer lives, as well as possibilities for subversion and liberation within the workplace. The purpose of the study is to benefit queer employees and labor rights, in a step towards a workplace where queer employees are not placed in the margins.

### 3.1.1. A Queer Method of Interviewing

Guided by my research questions, I am investigating implications and possible limitations to queer lives and I therefore look to the experienced realities of queer employees. In this regard, I believe in a possibility of an epistemic advantage of marginalized groups. Narayan (1989) defines this advantage as members of marginalized groups having “knowledge of the practices of both, their own contexts and those of their oppressors, as this is necessary for survival” (1989:222). Since the focus of my study is the social norms that make up heteronormativity, I expect these norms to be visible to queer employees to a greater extent. If we believe social norms to be taken-for-granted assumptions about reality, people for whom the assumptions are not true should be more likely to be aware of their existence. The previous case study on this area further conclude that offensive treatment of queer employees might be less visible to non-queer employees because of heteronormativity (Björk & Wahlström 2018).

The notion of an epistemic advantage of queer employees is touching on the previously rejected notion of insider/outsider status. From my poststructural standpoint, I want to emphasize that I articulate the possibility of an epistemic advantage with the same caution as Narayan (1989). She argues it *can* make it easier and more *likely* for marginalized groups to have critical insights into the structures of their oppression (1989:220). I do not propose queer employees share the same experiences and views of the workplace but simply that their experience *could* render insights into structures of oppression. The power of dominant norms could also be studied from the perspective of the dominant group served by the norms, but since my focus is the implications on queer lives, I am searching knowledge in the lived experiences of this group. Knowledge of the extent to which

heteronormativity is impacting the daily lives of queer employees can only be found in queer lives. Interviewing from a feminist perspective often entails seeking to understand the lives of oppressed groups with the purpose of justice and social change, as well as a heavy emphasis on reflexivity and mindfulness of the relationship between researcher-researched (Hesse-Biber 2014). Feminist research is among other things “concerned with getting at experiences that are often hidden” (ibid:190). I am concerned with the taken-for-granted social norms, maybe “hidden” to some, but expected to be more accessible through the experiences of the group marginalized by the norms.

Regarding the relationship between researcher and researched, an interview is not a dialogue between equals since the researcher defines and controls the interview situation (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). Feminist researchers have attempted to dissolve this unequal power relation referencing the insider/outsider notion. Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2014) argues that “an individual’s status as an insider/outsider is fluid and can change even in the course of a single interview” (2014:213). From an intersectional perspective, the idea of insider/outsider highlights the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. An intersectional understanding of power means experiences of discrimination are shaped by several intersecting factors (Collins & Bilge 2016), hence in this case not only structures of sexuality or gender identity. Hesse-Biber’s (2014) intersectional understanding points to the fact that the interviewer could have “insider status” on behalf of sharing the same sexuality as the participant, but “outsider status” in regard to gender identity, class, race, etc. The power relation between researcher and researched can therefore shift throughout a single interview. This demands a constant awareness of the researcher’s own position in relation to the participant. Understanding the notion of insider/outsider through an intersectional perspective also highlights how unfit it would be to rely on an insider status in interviewing, given the fluidity of this status.

### 3.1.2. The Interviews

I conducted individual in-depth interviews with a semi-structured design. The interviews were somewhat structured to enable drawing out general patterns,

though emphasis was on the adjustment to each participant's preference. Given the problematic history of research on queer minorities and their marginalized position in society, it is imperative that the participants feel their stories matter. For this reason, the focus is on probing rather than following a strict structure, meaning giving the participant signs of engagement and encouraging them to elaborate on topics of their choosing (Brinkman & Kvale 2015). The participants were informed prior to, as well as during, the interview that participation is entirely voluntary and that the interview can be stopped at any time. The aim was to be clear on the fact that the interviews, while defined and controlled by me, should be conducted on the terms of the participants to the greatest extent possible.

Interviews were conducted on Zoom due to COVID-19. There are a number of complications added by this, in addition to possible exclusion in sampling. Anna Chiumento et. al. (2018) raise the issue of confidentiality and the researcher's inability to provide a safe space, as well as lack of rapport in the form of misinterpreting visual cues and no eye contact. One benefit to COVID-19 is that the majority of the participants spend a lot of time in the privacy of their own home. A drawback is different living conditions making it difficult for some participants to ensure privacy within their home. I have attempted to be as flexible as possible to increase the likelihood of finding a time when the participants can be alone and not be overheard by family members or roommates. Because of COVID-19 participants could be expected to be more familiar and comfortable with the online setting. Despite this, as encouraged by Chiumento et. al (2018), I offered a detailed description on how to connect to the Zoom meeting.

Though conducting the interviews online rather than face-to-face has drawbacks, a previous study on collecting qualitative data using Zoom found that a majority of participants preferred Zoom to other alternatives, including face-to-face interviewing (Archibald et. al. 2019). More than half of the participants experienced Zoom as more user-friendly compared to other alternatives such as Skype (ibid). Another key benefit is the ability to protect sensitive data since video and audio content is not stored by Zoom (Zoom Video Communications Inc. 2021). Zoom is also my preferred tool since I have previously conducted interviews using it and never experienced any technical difficulties or other implications on my data.

### 3.1.3. The Participants

Information about the study was planned to be emailed directly to all of the employees within Sweden (3000+ employees). Due to an error on behalf of the company discovered in the late stages of analyzing, the information only reached around 1000 employees directly. The information was also published through several internal channels within the company, this information can be found in the appendix.

Throughout the study participants were only in contact with me to protect anonymity. All company employees (not study participants) who assisted in communicating information about the study were strictly informed not to approach individuals. The purpose was to limit the risk of queer employees misinterpreting the study as demanded by the employer rather than voluntary and not to inflict unwanted attention on queer employees.

The sample size was guided by the aim of an in-depth understanding rather than a theory-testing set of goals. I assessed ten interviews would be sufficient to report on the experience at this workplace, while giving me sufficient time to prepare with in-depth knowledge of the area, which is imperative to good interviewing (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015) as well as time for thorough analysis. Unfortunately, only seven employees expressed an interest in the study. The participants received a consent form prior to the interview, presenting the purpose of the study as well as detailed information on the interview process and data handling. The consent form can be found in the appendix. Informed consent was given verbally at the time of the interview.

Of the seven participants, four identified as male and three identified as female. All of the men identified as homosexual and/or gay, two of the women identified as homosexual and/or lesbian and one woman identified as bisexual. One of the seven participants also identified as polyamorous. Polyamory is generally, as well as by the participant, understood as the ability to have a romantic and/or sexual relationship with more than one partner at a time. All of the participants signed up for the study with the purpose of sharing experiences of a queer sexuality. None



shared experiences of trans\* or other queer gender expressions. The ages of the participants range from around 30 to around 70 years old, the majority are found in the range 31-40 years. All but one of the participants live and work in a small town and all of the participants have a white-collar position at the company. Two of the participants have non-European nationalities and five are Swedish. All work for the company within Sweden.

#### 3.1.4. The Data

Audio and video footage were recorded for all interviews. Since I expected analyzing video footage could add unnecessary stress to the participants, I informed them video footage was to be deleted immediately after the end of the interview. Audio was deleted after transcription. The transcripts were anonymized, meaning all personal information not serving the purpose of the study (such as age, race, hometown, nationality, etc.) was removed or handled to protect anonymity. This is why ages are reported in ranges such as ages 31-40 years and residency divided into categories of small town or big city. All material was stored on a password protected external hard drive.

### 3.2. Thematic Analysis

Judith Butler (2006) highlights language and discourse as a function in constructing identity categories. She means language works to restrict the meaning of identities and further determines what lives become livable or realizable (ibid). For this reason, I initially planned to view my data through discourse analysis. During interviewing, this method seemed less relevant because I experienced the participants at times lacking the language to speak about queer rights in the context of the workplace. I expect this might reflect the fact that the employer has yet to implement a diversity and inclusion strategy. Queer rights in corporate efforts towards diversity and inclusion is relatively new in Sweden in general, and this workplace in particular. It could have impacted the participants who at times were tentative in explaining their experiences in the workplace, searching long for and

sometimes failing to find the words to describe them. Because of the wide difference in language used by the participants, I decided discourse analysis was not the best method to view the data in order to address my research question. I chose to view the data through thematic analysis, enabling more flexibility in approaching the data.

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2014) define thematic analysis (TA) as a way to understand and identify what is common in the way that people talk about a specific topic. While lacking a common discourse on queerness in the workplace, the participants still raise common themes in attempting to express their experiences. I chose TA because this approach “allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke 2014:57), while still allowing flexibility.

Despite outlining my theoretical framework prior to gathering and analyzing the data, I consider my approach to TA inductive. This means the coding process is driven by what is in the data, rather than applying a predetermined code book of themes onto the data (Braun & Clarke 2014). Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize that TA is a spectrum of methods, ranging from a positivist focus on accuracy and reliability to reflexive approaches emphasizing subjectivity in data interpretation. The poststructural standpoint of this study positions my approach on the reflexive side of the spectrum. In this approach which views subjectivity as inherent on the part of the researcher, codes are understood as the outcome of the analytical process and *created* by the researcher, rather than “out there” in the data waiting to be found (Terry et. al. 2017). From this perspective, codes can be stronger or weaker but cannot be considered right or wrong in an objective sense. In a deductive approach codes are developed prior to gathering the data and therefore constructed out of context (Braun & Clarke 2021). In an effort to situate the knowledge created, I am attempting to “stay close” to the data and let the codes and themes emerge through the reflexive analytical process.

From this data-driven approach, where codes are inductively constructed from the data, it is the researcher’s task to interpret the meaning of the findings and construct theory according to the results (Boyatzis 1998). While my approach to the data entails a pre-developed theoretical framework from which I intend to analyze its content, I will not pre-construct and derive my codes from the theory but rather

derive them from what is in the data. Viewing the data in its entirety in this way enhances appreciation of the information available, where "previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information can be brought forward and recognised" (Boyatzis 1998:30). My approach is inductive because the concepts of my theoretical framework, heteronormativity and subversion, will merely guide the reflexive coding process and help analyze the themes emerging, but not predetermine the codes. Positioning my approach on the reflexive side of the TA spectrum is also suitable to the queer methodology of this study. Reflexivity and attentiveness during the process of creating themes is imperative in order to open up possibilities for queer lives rather than reinforcing limitations.

### 3.3. Computer Assisted Qualitative Coding

A thematic analysis is presented in themes derived from qualitative codes. A code in qualitative data analysis can be a word that symbolically assigns an attribute to a portion of data (Saldaña 2016). It can be understood as a "translation" of the data, constructed by the researcher (ibid). A code is applied to data to "label its content and meaning to the needs of the inquiry" (Saldaña 2016:16). It is a way of viewing the data through the purpose of the research question. Coding is then not only labeling, but linking the data to an idea, breaking the data apart in order to pose new questions (ibid). If quantitative coding calculates the mean, Johnny Saldaña (2016) suggests qualitative coding calculates the meaning. I used computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) rather than coding manually, aware this software is generally used for larger samples. I chose to code electronically because I agree with Saldaña that it "efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures your data to enable human analytic reflection" (2016:30). It also decreases the risk of losing memos and reflections as well as reducing paper consumption. I chose the CAQDAS program NVivo due to my familiarity with it.

Some critics of coding as a method in qualitative analysis dismiss it as a positivist approach. It is important to remember that coding is an analytic process, informed by the researchers position and perspectives (Saldaña 2016). Coding is not a philosophy or a perspective in itself but rather a method or tool enabling clarity

in our reflections about the data (ibid). It is the responsibility of the analyst to interpret the data through the lens of an epistemological approach or a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, codes are not the only method used in analysis, they are accompanied by reflective and analytical memo writing. Other qualitative methods such as discourse analysis rely mainly on extensive reflective memos in the analyzing process, qualitative coding is a mix of both (Saldaña 2016). Sharon A. Bong (2007) emphasizes coding as an analytical process in her reflections on using CAQDAS in qualitative data analysis. Bong addresses critics claiming qualitative coding is a positivist approach proposing meaning is “out there (inherent in codes and families of codes), waiting to be discovered” (Bong 2007:268). As put by Haraway critiquing the God trick, “The codes of the world are not still, waiting to be read” (1988:593). The world does not consist of raw material waiting to be discovered by a researcher, knowledge and codes are created by the researcher. This is also emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2016), arguing that searching for themes is hard work and is an active process of constructing themes rather than discovering them. To avoid adhering to claims of objectivity, Bong (2007) encourages constant reflexivity in the coding process, recognizing that “the interpretive act is always partial and incomplete” (2007:268). She further proposes negative case analysis to limit the risk of concluding seemingly isolated occurrences signify a larger meaning (ibid). I used negative case analysis to seek out cases not supporting my interpretation, to ensure situating the knowledge.

I followed the six-phase approach to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2016).

1. **Familiarizing one-self with the data** through transcribing the interviews while taking notes on potentially relevant topics and updating the interview guide based on the findings.
2. **Generating initial codes** by importing the data to NVivo and identifying core features relevant to answering the research question and applying code to the data. This was a cyclic process of coding and re-coding data.
3. **Searching for themes** by reviewing and examining the codes to identify broader patterns of meaning, this too involves re-coding and collapsing codes.

4. **Reviewing potential themes** by matching themes with my research question, making sure they capture data from across the interviews and not only a few. I conducted negative case analysis in this phase.
5. **Defining and naming themes** by making sure they relate but are still distinct from one another.
6. **Producing the report.**

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations & Reflexivity

A recurrent topic in this chapter is the emphasis on reflexivity. I argue it is the most imperative element to feminist research. Situating knowledge and positioning oneself means reflecting on one's role in the research process. The way I conduct research and the knowledge I create will be impacted by my position as a white, Swedish, middle-class, able-bodied, non-religious, thin and queer cis woman in her twenties. I mention a few in a list of many attributes positioning me amongst the intersection of multiple power structures that make up our social world. To position oneself is not simply to report, as I just did, the differences in power that often separate us from our participants, as stated by Diana Mulinari (1999) in her important reflections on the responsibility of qualitative researchers. To position oneself is to theoretically understand how these different experiences affect what will be said, what will be asked for, and what will remain unspoken (ibid). My previous and current experience, stemming from the intersection of the power structures that make up my position, will affect not only the way I perceive the data and the interpretations I do, but also what questions I ask my participants, what I allow them to articulate, what I choose to quote, and not to quote. In this way, knowledge can only ever be partial, situated and contextualized. Donna Haraway (1988) argues “the issue in politically engaged attacks on various empiricisms, reductionisms, or other versions of scientific authority should not be relativism – but location” (1988:588). Mulinari (1999) further points out that interpretation is an attempt to link an individual's personal story with theories of social structures and emphasizes as well as Haraway how this is not an innocent process. Interpretation always involves the risk of participants not recognizing themselves

in the analysis. To quote Mulinari, “it is a rare privilege to listen to other people's stories and to have access to their experiences and knowledge” [author's translation](Mulinari 1999:40). I will do my best to continuously reflect on my own presence in research, my role in constructing knowledge and my responsibility in representing the participants' experiences.

Another recurrent topic in this chapter is my aversion towards the notion of the insider/outsider status. I do not believe I have access to a deeper understanding of the participants' experience because of my queer positioning. However, due to the problematic research conducted in the past and the queer community's overall marginalization in society I do believe the participants deserve to know why I am conducting research on this group. For this reason, the participants will not only receive information on the purpose of this study, they will also receive my personal reason for choosing this subject. I do this for transparency and an attempt to somewhat ease what essentially is a largely unequal power relation: between researcher and researched. As argued by Brinkmann and Kvale (2014), the interviewer does have monopoly on interpretation. Since the analysis and conclusions can only ever be my interpretation of the participants' stories, they deserve to know who is interpreting their stories.

### 3.5. Limitations

The analysis is limited by the lack of representation where only experiences of queer sexualities are included in the sample, excluding experiences such as trans\* or queer gender expression. This could be a consequence of the error in distributing information, where only 1000 employees received information. The experiences of “blue-collar” employees are also excluded. I was informed by the company that it would not be possible to reach employees working in manufacturing, thus excluding working class experiences from the study.

The information of the study not reaching all parts of the Swedish organization could have impacted the willingness to participate in the study due to uncertainty on where the employer is positioned on the issue. The small sample also limits the details I am able to present in some of the incidents the participants share. This is

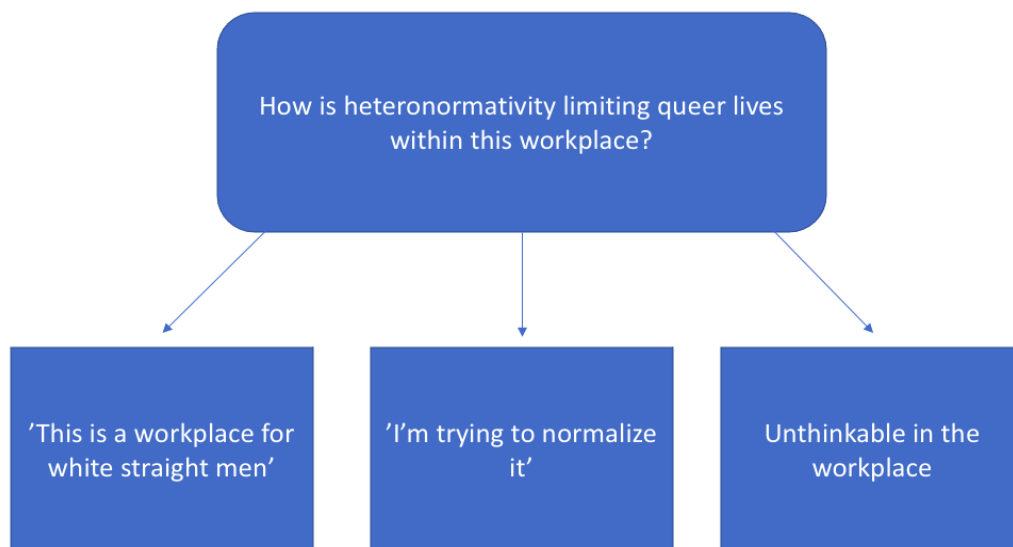
due to their high visibility in the workplace. Given the minority status of the queer employees in this workplace, I assess the risk of them being identified large and am therefore careful in not disclosing too much information on the events and experiences they share. For this reason, an intersectional perspective beyond sex/gender and sexuality is not possible.

Conducting the interviews online via Zoom could affect the sampling. Participants could be hesitant due to unfamiliarity with the technicalities of an online meeting, or simply not comfortable sharing personal stories and sensitive information through a screen. Despite this, my experience was that the participants seem comfortable with the setting and familiar with online meetings. I did experience some limitations due to Zoom where a few of the participants had faulty WIFI-connection, leading to time lag during the interview. This had a negative impact on rapport between interviewer and interviewee and on a few occasions parts of their comments were inaudible.

Despite not meeting the aim of ten participants and the limitations in representation, I argue we can still learn new ways of understanding heteronormativity and subversion within the context of the corporate workplace from this case study.

## 4. Heteronormative Limitations at Work

With a focus on how limitations to queer lives reproduce inequality in the workplace, I constructed the following three themes displayed in the figure below.



As the name of the theme **unthinkable in the workplace** suggest, the coding process was inspired by the Butlerian theoretical framework, while still staying close to what is in the data, as the themes **"I'm trying to normalize it"** and **"this is a workplace for white straight men"** suggest. These two themes are labeled by a direct quote from participants. **"This is a workplace for white straight men"** aims to explain in which way social norms of the ideal worker is rendering queer employees in the margins of the workplace context. Articulation of these norms refer to the male-dominated industry, queer not being experienced as compatible with a successful career and queer rights articulated as a non-work-related issue. **"I'm trying to normalize it"** aims to explain in which way social norms shape the understanding of what it means to be queer in a way that reinforces queer employees marginalized position. Articulations of these norms refer to gay stereotypes, gendered stereotypes and queer employees' worry that their sexuality will be made into a topic of conversation, further reinforcing the "deviation" from the ideal model



worker. **Unthinkable in the workplace** aims to explain in which way the lack of queer representation and visibility is rendering a subject position outside of heteronormativity unthinkable within this workplace.

All of the themes were constructed to reach a deeper understanding of the inequality in queer and non-queer employees' ability to enter the workplace and perform labor fully as themselves. Each theme is presented through three subcategories summarizing the codes included in each theme, the first one being *male dominated industry*.

#### 4.1. "This is A Workplace for White Straight Men"

The first theme is characterized by the experience of the ideal model worker being a white straight man. This is mainly expressed with reference to the industrial industry, which confirms previous research on male-dominated industries (Yoder & Mattheis 2016). This is further expressed through the feeling that queer is not compatible with attributes associated with work performance and that this issue is not relevant in the workplace, similar to Robert Mizzi's "heteroprofessionalism" (2013). This theme illustrates how heteronormativity is limiting queer lives in this workplace by reinforcing the understanding that this is a place for straight men and articulating queer employees as deviant.

##### Male Dominated Industry

"it's male-dominated, it tends to be more traditional."

A recurrent topic in the interviews are comments on what kind of culture is associated with the male-dominated industrial industry. The industry, and the employer, is described as traditional and conservative and some participants expect a male dominated workplace to be less welcoming to queer employees. This expectation has been proved by previous American research (Yoder & Mattheis 2016). All of the participants were hesitant or reserved about disclosing their sexuality when first entering this workplace, because of the predominantly male industry. One participant refers several times to "a lot of white middle-aged men in manager positions". Another female participant means "being a woman in a man's

world”, she already deviates from the norm and is therefore less likely to disclose a queer sexuality as well.

“I can be in a meeting room with 15 white middle-aged men, so I'm already in a very exposed situation.”

She means she is already “from the beginning a bit inferior” and further explains in meetings with subcontractors she can still be expected to be the one to get coffee, despite holding a manager position. She explains she has to pick what battles to fight, her sexuality has not been one of them. Another participant compares the current to a previous workplace and illustrates how the minority status of queer employees is reinforced by the experience of this being a workplace suitable to white straight men.

“There were quite a lot of gay guys working, so it was very widespread. So, there you perhaps felt that you were a little bit more in the community than you do here, where it is very straight. [name of employer] is very straight, if I may say. Just straight, it's very straight. That's it.”

The participants' comments indicate they experience themselves as deviating from the norm within this workplace. Because of this, several of them suggest queer employees are less likely to live fully as themselves within this workplace and that it might be particularly difficult for queer women who already deviate from the male norm. While the majority of the participants speak of heteronormativity connected to the male-dominated industry, one participant means these are only prejudices and he has never experienced any proof of this being true within this workplace.

## Queer Career

“Then I realized that it is important to keep a low profile, otherwise you'll have all kinds of chances of career development ruined, because then it is not accepted here. But also, many people have quite preconceived notions about who you are, and I don't like it. I think you should be judged from who

you really are, I mean how people perceive you. Therefore, I have chosen not to be too outspoken about it.”

Several participants express a worry that disclosing a queer sexuality will negatively impact career opportunities. The quote above is shared by a gay man, commenting on an incident happening 10 years ago. Two male managers had expressed they would have a "very difficult time having a homosexual man in the management team". The participant explains despite being a long time ago it still shapes his experience today and he is very careful about who he shares information about his private life with, "for strategic reasons". He feels you need to fit the norm of the white straight male model worker to be able to advance within this company.

Another participant confirms this experience and explains taking this job was a career move for her and she is therefore less likely to live fully as herself now. She values her career highly and therefore chooses not to disclose her sexuality at work. When I ask her what she fears might happen if she lives fully as herself in the workplace, she replies "I think it's about wanting to be taken seriously", implying her experience is that this characteristic is not compatible with being queer within this workplace. Another participant means she wants to show what she can do before anyone finds out about her homosexuality.

“You want to come in and show that you can perform without people viewing you with different glasses and judge you in some way and think: we don't want a person like this.”

These experiences suggest some queer employees feel they have to choose between living fully as themselves at work and having a successful career. They articulate not wanting to be judged by their sexuality and feel they have to prove high performance despite their sexuality. In addition to hindering career opportunities, several participants feel living fully as themselves might negatively impact their ability to do their job. One participant emphasizes how important social relationships are to the job. She feels being polyamorous is particularly difficult because it is still stigmatized in society.

“Especially about being poly. You want people to.... see you in the way you also want to present yourself. I think it's about the fact that you're quite

sensitive to how other people perceive you. A lot of my job is to work well with other people in a group, that you have a good social interaction. If there is something there not running smoothly because you live a life that people may not understand, you will very easily become a little more extradited, people may choose not to work with you.”

She fears performing well at work will become more difficult if she lives fully as herself in the workplace, further indicating that this workplace is perceived to be for straight men. Furthermore, several participants suggest disclosing a queer sexuality in the workplace might be easier if you have been successful in your career. The word respect is often used to explain this.

“I’ve been here for many years, I perform very well, I’m very appreciated in these rooms and I’ve become someone, so maybe it’s not as big of a deal for some people.”

This participant in a manager position suggests disclosing her sexuality is not that big of a deal because she has proved herself to be a high performer, further indicating that her sexuality and performance are not viewed as compatible. With reference to “respect”, it seems living fully as yourself in the workplace is something you earn by performing well despite of a queer sexuality. When I ask a lesbian participant in a manager position if subverting heteronormativity within this workplace is more possible for her given her senior position, she means the opposite is true. She might challenge a heteronormative assumption articulated between coworkers, she means this is her responsibility as a manager, but she would not do it for herself. She refers to her position and means subversion is harder if you have a “drive”.

“If you really want to go somewhere you have to be aware that there can be people above you hindering your career.”

While feeling like her sexuality “isn’t that big of a deal” because of being highly regarded and respected in this workplace, the quote above suggests she feels like you do not come this far by subverting heteronormativity. In addition to negatively impacting queer employees’ possibility to live fully as themselves in the workplace,

articulating queer as incompatible with career also negatively impacts the possibility for subversion within this workplace. This participant further means the subversive act of questioning assumptions of heterosexuality with the counter-question “why do you assume that my partner is male?” would be perceived as “an attack”. Another participant shares this experience and agrees with the importance of good social relations at work.

“Do I also take it a step further and say by the way it's offensive for you to say that? That is a hard statement for people to make because in an employment situation, if you're gonna see that person again, of course you don't want to offend someone that you necessarily have to work with the next day. It's a little different in a personal or social setting than it is in a professional setting. So, I tend to sort of quietly correct rather than confront them on that issue.”

A majority of the participants confirm they are less likely to perform subversive acts at work compared to other spaces because of the importance of career opportunities and maintaining relations at work. Challenging heteronormative assumptions at work is referred to as an attack, seen as confrontational or could risk embarrassing or demeaning coworkers.

#### Not a Work-Related Issue

The idea that “sexuality doesn't belong in the workplace” is a recurrent topic in the interviews. This view is held by some of the participants, others express worry that coworkers or the employer might hold this view. Comments like “I don't talk to my coworkers about their sex-life” suggest sexuality is by some understood as synonymous with sexual practice. Other participants express a worry that people might think a queer professional network do not belong in the workplace. Negative attitudes toward companies participating in Pride have been expressed by some participants' coworkers.

One participant is conflicted about the relationship between sexuality and work. It is important to raise the issue, but at the same time she feels it does not belong in the workplace.

“Sexuality in the workplace, it's pretty difficult. I guess I don't think it belongs there, but everything around, that is in some way so closely linked to it, that's what's difficult.”

With “everything around it” she refers to not being able to speak freely about how she spends time out of the office because of not wanting to disclose her sexuality. The notion of sexuality not belonging in the workplace requires sexuality to be understood as synonymous with sex and “everything around it”, such as partners or dating, be excluded from “sexuality”. Another participant contests this understanding.

“It is not about who I have sex with, it's how I've structured my life. So, if I can't disclose to you that I have a male partner or a husband, that's pretty basic information about how my life is structured and who my relationship is with. So... you know, yeah, I find that a very naive statement that sexuality shouldn't be part of our work-life.”

Since sexuality not belonging in the workplace is a statement often made in association with demands for queer rights such as Pride, a queer professional network and this study, it suggests it is rather only queer sexuality perceived as not belonging in the workplace. I argue sexuality is discussed in the workplace every time employees express assumptions of heterosexuality to a coworker. Within this context heteronormativity is reinforcing an understanding that only queer sexuality is in fact “sexuality in the workplace”, where heterosexuality is “normal” and expected. Articulating an assumption of heterosexuality is not considered “talking about sexuality in the workplace”. At the same time, expecting employees not to speculate in coworkers’ sexuality is considered confrontational, an attack or demeaning.

Butler (2006) means heteronormativity works to foreclose the option to exist outside of the norms of intelligibility, by only presenting the norm as a viable subject position. This not only leads to queer employees feeling heterosexuality is a prerequisite for a successful career. It further forecloses the option to demand change, by presenting queer rights as a non-work-related issue. A majority of the participants seem to lack a sense of entitlement to the right to come to work and

live without heteronormative comments reinforcing queer lives as deviant in the workplace. Several participants add comments like “I feel like I’m making too big of a deal out of this” or “it’s not really an issue” after talking about heteronormativity in the workplace. After sharing an experience that upset him, one participant adds:

“You don’t want to make a big thing of it either, because I obviously survived that comment. I mean... I remember it, as you understand. I will remember it for the rest of my life, but it doesn’t affect my life or my work situation.”

The discourse of sexuality not being a work-related issue is articulated by some participants in the understanding that it does not impact their work performance and is therefore a non-issue in the workplace. Another participant further confirms this, suggesting that heteronormativity is not an issue “at work” but only in comments made in informal settings such as the break room. Incidents taking place in the workplace during breaks or not directly disrupting the participant’s ability to perform work is thus not understood as a workplace issue. Several participants’ experiences further indicate heteronormativity and homophobia is only perceived to be an issue if a queer person is directly offended. This is expressed in comments on incidents of homophobic acts such as “you don’t know if anyone in that room has had a traumatic experience relating to that”. Several participants also suggest they are part of the problem for not daring to live fully as themselves in the workplace. One participant who refrains from discussing the Pride parade with her coworkers suggests she is partly to blame for assuming her coworkers would not be interested in joining Pride.

Experiences like these indicate heteronormativity is by some understood as an individual rather than a structural issue. This is reinforcing an understanding that limiting and exclusionary norms of intelligibility are only harmful if someone present has experienced trauma. A queer employee not being able to live fully as themselves is an issue of that individual. In this way, the understanding of queer rights as a non-work-related issue is further placing queer employees in the margins and foreclosing the possibility to demand the same rights as non-queer employees.

## 4.2. “I’m Trying to Normalize it”

This theme is characterized by experiences of queer sexualities being made into “a thing” that is articulated as deviant in the workplace. It includes how participants deal with queer stereotypes, worries about being the topic of conversation and the link between sexuality and sex/gender. This theme illustrates how heteronormativity is limiting queer lives in this workplace by reinforcing queer as a coherent identity category, attached to attributes beyond sexual attraction.

### Stereotypes

“You don’t look gay.”

Several of the participants have met this comment when living fully as themselves in the workplace. Comments like this reproduce an understanding that sexuality is visible, that you can determine by someone’s appearance if they are straight or not. This implies queer sexualities are understood to mean something more than just sexual attraction. Stereotypical understandings of sexualities seem to be most commonly associated with gay men. The male participants experience male homosexuality associated with attributes such as a specific appearance, body gestures and personal interests, articulated in comments like “of course he knows music, he’s gay”. One participant means “female interests” are associated with gay men.

This articulation of the stereotypical gay man illustrates Butler’s (2006) notion of identity categories being limiting and exclusionary as well as her critique of Wittig proposing liberation in a lesbian identity category. It is clear that male homosexuality is associated with additional attributes beyond sexual attraction, reinforcing an identity category rather than simply desire. Foucault (1982) argues meanings attached to a subject category in this way both work to subjugate and create the subject. Comments such as “of course he knows music, he’s gay” works to form an understanding of homosexual men as not only characterized by same-sex attraction, they are also men who know music. Furthermore, some male participants have been asked questions by coworkers such as “who is the woman in your relationship?”. The question indicates heterosexuality is the intelligible



sexuality within this context. Employees need their gay colleague to explain his sexuality in terms of opposite-sex attraction for them to be able to comprehend his relationship. This further confirms Wittig's (1980) argument that discourses of heterosexuality prevent queer minorities from speaking in any other terms than the heterosexual. By attaching these meanings to homosexuality, it is not only created as a subject, it is also articulated as deviant from the "normal" heterosexuality, thus in Foucault's (1982) words: created as well as subjugated. This example further illustrates how sex/gender and sexuality are co-consolidating what can be perceived as a viable subject. The desire between two men needs to be explained in terms of a man and a woman in order to present itself as an intelligible sexual relationship. As put by Butler (1990), "one either identifies with a sex or desires it, but only those two relations are possible" (1990:333).

Another participant explains expressions of gay stereotypes in the workplace is a situation where he feels like subversion is possible, and necessary.

"Sometimes I've said something like what do you mean you wouldn't expect me to be gay, what did you expect? Should I come to work with a boa and painted nails? What do you think a gay man is? How should a gay man be?"

Using Chambers (2007) theory, this act is subversive because it reveals the norms which reify the normativity of heterosexuality. Counteracting a comment like "you don't look gay" with the question "what do you think a gay man is?" highlights the fact that the initial comment is attaching attributes to homosexuality beyond same-sex attraction. It makes this coworker's preconceived assumptions of what it means to be gay visible.

It is clear throughout the interview that this participant is disturbed by gay stereotypes and experiences a feeling of shame associated with them. He returns to the feeling "you don't have to confirm all the stereotypes" twice in the interview. It seems like the limiting identity category associated with homosexuality is causing him to distance himself from what is perceived to be stereotypical gay attributes. Compared to the other participants, he spends the most time talking about stereotypes, which are clearly an issue for him. At the same time, he means it is not something that impacts his work situation but is rather just something occurring in break room situations. This connects to the lack of sense of entitlement of the

previous theme where participants do not seem to feel they have the right to a work-life free from heteronormativity. Another gay man and a lesbian woman also make comments indicating an attempt to subtly distance themselves from gay stereotypes.

“My appearance and my dress are pretty much what you would expect from an older white guy my age.”

“I'm a very normal and boring person, from that aspect. I'm not wearing rainbow clothes or anything.”

The comments further confirm heteronormativity is expressed through stereotypes and an expectation on queer people to present themselves in a particular and deviating way in this workplace. The three participants' experiences suggest stereotypes are causing them to want to distance themselves from the identity category.

One of the lesbian participants adopts the opposite approach to stereotypes and explains she has used them to correct assumptions of heterosexuality, informing coworkers she is not straight and adding a comment such as "can't you tell?". Another participant shares a similar experience and means he is comfortable with the stereotypes, because of them everyone probably already knows he is gay. When asked what might make people expect this he replies:

“It could be me having other interests maybe than what other guys have or I might dress differently. Or just making gestures and talking in a different way and having other interests, stuff like that, that could reveal you. These are the stereotypes. I fit them pretty well sometimes haha. So, I can definitely understand that people think I'm gay when they meet me and that is nothing that bothers me at all.”

The comment exemplifies how queer employees' experiences of stereotypes impact them differently. Some perform acts of subversion to challenge them, others find them useful to inform their coworkers of their sexuality.

Sex/Gender/Sexuality

As previously mentioned, understandings of what it means to be homosexual is expressed as associated with gendered attributes, where gay men's interests are referred to as "female". This further illustrates how heteronormativity is working to mutually discipline the meaning of both sex/gender and sexuality. Butler (2006) refers to a repetitive process of regulatory practice producing intelligible gender identities. She means gender is a practice, a doing rather than a noun, it "is a set of free-floating attributes organized through a repeated regulatory practice that we recognize as gender" (2006:34). Several participants explain "female interests" and acting in a way that is perceived to differ from men is associated with gay men. Gender is thus performed through a regulatory practice rendering some interests female and some actions male. These "female attributes" are associated with male homosexuality, indicating sexual attraction to men is considered a female attribute. One of the male participants means coworkers probably know he is gay because of how he acts and dresses. It seems like he is not conforming to the norms of intelligible gender identities, rendering his subject position unintelligible within heteronormativity. He appears to be a man but is not engaging in the regulatory practice that creates male gender; he presents 'female attributes' such as his interests, bodily gestures and attraction to men. An incident he shares where a coworker refers to him as a woman can perhaps be understood through the norms of intelligible gender identities.

"I'm actually not a girl, I'm a guy. And I don't strive to be a girl either. I want to be a man; I enjoy being a man. I'm a man in my own way."

From the perspective of gender as a performative act, where the "subject" (man/woman) does not preexist the deed but is constituted by the deed itself (Butler 2006) this participant presents his gender in a practice that can be understood as failing to perform an intelligible gender. Identity categories are thus functioning as limiting by foreclosing the opportunity to be "a man in my own way".

The inseparability of sex/gender and sexuality is further illustrated by one of the lesbian participants who believe gay men might have a harder time in a male-dominated industrial industry compared to a lesbian woman. Her experience is that she is not perceived as a threat, while gay men might be.

“Men can feel very threatened by homosexual men. I don't know if they feel like they're being courted or what, but they have this fear...”

She means women are stereotypically perceived to be the opposite of masculine, motherly and caring, thus not posing a threat. Straight men would be more likely to approach lesbian women in a flirtatious manner, speculating if they can "turn them over". This experience of heteronormativity in the workplace adds another element to the perception of a gay man. While attaching 'female attributes' to the identity category beyond sexuality, the actual sexuality seems to still be considered male, and therefore posing a threat. She further elaborates on the industrial industry and means it would be easier for a lesbian woman than a gay man working in manufacturing, because of the stereotypical norms attached to the two.

“I think it would be very easy to be a homosexual girl in a factory, because it's almost a societal norm that it should be okay. But I think it can be a little tough there. And I also think it can be a bit tough as a woman to be there...”

She means it could be tough for a straight woman and a gay man and easier for straight men and lesbian women to work in the factories. This reinforces the understanding of attraction to men as a female attribute, while further articulating attraction to women as a male attribute. The characteristics associated with the identity category of lesbian women are thus the opposite to a gay man, she is someone who fits in the male-dominated industrial industry.

“A Topic of Conversation”

The stereotypical understanding summing up queer employees in coherent identity categories impacts how the participants act in the workplace, beyond some of them attempting to distance themselves from stereotypes. One participant explains he makes sure coworkers are aware of his sexuality to avoid events of "whispering and talking shit behind my back". He means speculation about his sexuality turns it into a topic of conversation, knowing he is gay makes it less interesting. Several participants express not wanting to become the topic of conversation. There seems to be a general concern about queer sexuality “becoming a thing”, which is further expressed by participants saying they try to normalize or de-dramatize their sexuality.

"I'm trying to normalize this as much as possible and not let people assume things that aren't true about me."

"When you start talking about your sexuality, they picture something entirely different, because of their prejudice and assumptions."

"It's completely ordinary! It's natural! There is nothing weird about it, but people make it weird and that is so stupid."

It seems stereotypical understandings of queer is causing participants to modify their behavior. One participant refers to offensive jokes about gay people and explains he does not "want to be the angry man who can't take a joke". Another participant explains:

"I get very provoked. Sometimes you just want to scream, you know? But one tries to handle it very diplomatically and carefully educate."

Both are examples of queer employees limiting their actions because of a concern of drawing further attention to what is already perceived to be "a thing". This confirms the previous case study (Björk & Wahlström 2018) conducted on this area concluding a common reason for queer employees choosing not to live fully as themselves in the workplace is the fear of being reduced to their sexuality, as expressed in the comment "then that is all I become" (ibid:47).

The two youngest participants talk about not wanting to disclose their sexuality because they feel it is not their responsibility to "come out" in the workplace. One of them argue this expectation is reinforcing the understanding that queer sexuality is "a thing", that it is abnormal and deviant in the workplace. One of them means she refuses to "come out" and is tired of the fact that every time she speaks about her personal life it would become a "coming out process". She feels unable to casually talk about her dating life in the same way as straight employees. It becomes a thing about her sexuality, rather than the date she is actually talking about.

"I don't want to "come out" because it's not relevant, I want to talk about where I took this person on a date. (...) what's relevant is not their gender, lots of other things are relevant!"

Heteronormativity reinforcing queer sexualities as deviant in this workplace leads this participant to censor herself when talking about her personal life at work. Another participant shares an event where a coworker disclosed his sexuality to his coworkers without his consent. While feeling it was not their information to share, the participant means that for him it was “nice not to have to come out”. This further confirms the experience that sharing information about a same-sex partner is treated differently to sharing information about an opposite-sex partner. Queer is thus articulated as an identity category associated with more information than the actual information disclosed (gender of one’s partner) and further placed in the margins, reinforced as a deviant in the workplace.

### 4.3. Unthinkable in the Workplace

This theme is characterized by the experience of queer existence as unthinkable in the context of the workplace. This is expressed by the number of queer employees, by employer actions reinforcing unthinkability and by a lack of employer initiative to make this diversity visible. This theme illustrates how heteronormativity is limiting queer lives in this workplace by foreclosing the possibility of queer existence; the assumption being that there are no queer people present. This theme differs from ‘This is a workplace for white straight men’ by focusing on the unawareness of queer existence rather than the perceived incompatibility with the workplace, as the first theme illustrates.

“I’m the only one”

Almost all of the participants express feeling like there are no/few other queer employees in this workplace. Most of them do not know of anyone else, some of them know a few. One participant share that she has "felt very lonely in this". They all seem confident there must be more queer employees in the workplace than they know of.

“I can't say that I know of any employee in this company who lives openly gay or is in a same-sex relationship. I'm sure there are people, but you don't see them.”

The quote suggests the invisibility of queer within this company do not reflect reality. One participant is aware of an employee choosing not to live fully as themselves within this workplace, the rest seem convinced there must be others choosing to hide parts of themselves in the workplace. One participant repeatedly exclaimed “there has to be more!”. When I raise the idea of a professional queer network within the company one participant means this idea is so far from reality, he cannot relate to it. Despite convinced there has to be more, it seems even to the queer employees themselves the idea that there would be a larger number of queer people within this workplace is unthinkable. One participant, who has never interacted with another queer employee at work, means this makes it difficult for him to promote inclusion within the workplace.

“It's hard when we're not connected to each other (...) until you identify a group of people that you're supporting or benefitting, how do you present to the company that it's important? That's why at the end of all this, if you connect us it might serve that useful purpose, so we can say hey there's twenty of us who feel the same way and you need to understand that we're willing to speak out about it.”

Several participants express similar feelings. The queer community being small in numbers seem to affect participants' feelings of whether or not their experience matters. Another participant appreciates this being an in-depth study because he feels like queer employees' workplace experiences are not "captured by employee surveys". He means their minority status places them in the margins in inquiries about employee well-being. They are "the ten percent that deviate the most from the norm" and will therefore not be counted. Exclamations like “there has to be more!” can perhaps be understood through the feeling that queer employees' experiences do not matter unless they are large in numbers.

The employer further acts to confirm this concern of queer employees not "counting". In the employee headcount of 2020, two employees chose not to

identify their gender as either male or female. They could have chosen to simply not declare their gender, or their gender was not represented in the options available. Currently there is no option to register beyond male or female. If this binary model does not fit, you are labeled “not declared”. As put by one of the participants "if you're not a man or a woman you're not welcome because you're not measurable". This practice of presenting only male and female as viable subject positions is foreclosing the possibility to exist outside of the gender binary.

In an effort made by the employer to address queer experiences, one participant recalls what he calls a “diversity employee survey” conducted three years ago.

“It was something in the lines of 'how do you think it would be for a transsexual person to work in this company' (...) that makes me terrified, because everyone is going to reply that it is great and then they don't have to do anything. (...) it's as if 95% white people would answer if people of color are experiencing discrimination. It's terrifying.”

The survey question shared by this participant is articulated in a way as to suggest there are no employees with trans\* experiences present within this workplace. This works to reinforce the unthinkability of queer employees within this workplace. Comments like “there's twenty of us who feel the same way and you need to understand that we're willing to speak out about it” suggest employer actions like these have a negative impact on queer employees’ experiences of employer support. Several participants seem to feel like their experiences would only matter if they are large in numbers.

### Queer Non-Existence

“Well, they need to educate their managers on the fact that different people exist.”

When asked what improvements could be made for queer employees at work, this participant refers to the unawareness that “different people exist” four times during the interview. It seems the occurrence of queer in this workplace is unthinkable to the extent that it would not cross someone’s mind that queer people are present. The



lack of awareness of queer employee's existence is further articulated in the following quotes.

"I think a lot of managers could use some education, because I'm not sure all of them even have anyone in their life who is homosexual."

"If you were to say this [referring to heteronormativity in the workplace] to a white straight man of 45 years they would be like WHAT?! Because you don't see it. You don't see it if you have a different perspective."

"I first came out in an era where it wasn't that common to see on TV."

"But there are certainly a number of individuals, men who are my age or even a little bit younger, who have never dealt with anyone who are LGBTQ in a professional setting."

These experiences are not dealing with phobia, hate or negative attitudes towards queer employees. They exemplify the experience that employees in this workplace are simply not aware queer people exist, they are unthinkable within the workplace context. Awareness of their existence is articulated as requiring education, visibility and proximity to queer people. This is further foreclosing opportunities to exist beyond the subject positions intelligible within heteronormativity; existing outside is not presented as an option within this context.

The unthinkability of queer within the workplace seem to more strongly impact participants who exist outside of the homo-/heterosexual binary. One participant identifying as polyamorous feels people in general are unfamiliar with her sexuality, leading her not to disclose it in the workplace.

"If I had a second partner, I think it would be hard to talk about it as easily as I talk about my primary partner, who I live with. I think many people don't come in contact with that as often, it becomes foreign in some way."

She further states she is careful about not disclosing her sexuality because polyamory is not protected by the Discrimination Act. Similar to polyamory, bisexuality is experienced as particularly difficult in the workplace because of the

lack of knowledge and unawareness of its existence. One participant means “you are seen as either gay or straight, there is nothing in between”. While homosexuality might be unthinkable within the context of the workplace it is something coworkers at least “have seen on TV”, as expressed by another participant. In the case of polyamory and bisexuality, the participants fear coworkers might not have knowledge of their existence at all.

The unthinkability of queer employees is most commonly expressed in assumptions of heterosexuality. A majority of the participants have experienced heteronormative assumptions where a coworker misgenders their partner. This further illustrates the inseparability of sex/gender and sexuality. When a man speaks of his partner and is asked “what’s her name?” by a coworker with no prior knowledge, several assumptions are made. By assessing the way this man is visually presenting himself, without asking questions, this coworker determines the sex/gender to be male. With this assumption, they further assume opposite-sex desire as followed by the male sex/gender and thus articulate an expectation of heterosexuality in the question “what’s her name?”.

One participant means it would be easier to disclose her sexuality if questions were not heteronormative: “then you don’t have to contradict them, you can just answer the question”. Comments and questions expressing an expectation of heterosexuality thus negatively impacts some participants ability to live fully as themselves at work. By reinforcing heteronormativity in this way, queer employees are reminded they do not fit into what is expected in this workplace. This participant feels like she would be more likely to live fully as herself if expectations of heterosexuality were not articulated at work.

Another participant suggests awareness of queer people’s existence would reduce jokes being made about gay people. She means her coworkers do not mean any harm by these jokes and that they are only funny on the premise that no one is hurt. It seems homophobia is acceptable if no queer people are present, and the assumption is that no queer people are present. This further reinforces the understanding that heteronormativity is an individual issue rather than a structural issue, meaning it is ok as long as no one is offended.

The lack of awareness and visibility of queer employees in this workplace is most clearly articulated by the following incident.

“There is a very senior leader in the organization (...), his conclusion was ‘we don't have anyone in the Stockholm office who is LGBTQ, why do we need to be sensitized about these issues? It is not relevant to our business’.”

In addition to reinforcing queer as unthinkable within the workplace context, this comment is further articulating an identity category attached to being queer. The comment suggests queer sexualities are something you can see; it means something more than simply sexual attraction.

“It's an Invisible Element of Diversity within this Company”

“(...) representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject” (Butler 2006:2).

A majority of the participants express a lack of employer initiative to promote queer rights and the visibility of queer employees. Five participants were asked if they feel their employer is a supporter of their rights. None of them answered yes, three said no and two were unsure or hesitant. While some feel this study is in line with expectations on their employer, most of the participants were surprised or even shocked to see their employer participate in this study: "Very surprised. Super surprised! Definitely not something I was expecting". The lack of initiative leaves several participants concerned about whether or not they have their employer's support. One of them is skeptical that they will actually act on the results of this study. A lack of engagement with queer as an element of diversity is most commonly articulated with a reference to conversation.

“It's not something that people talk about.”

“you don't see it, you don't hear it, anywhere.”

“I don't see that kind of communication ever.”

Daily conversation and the ability to speak freely about one's private life is constant throughout this theme. Many participants feel this is an initiative that could be made by the employer and that it would change the daily conversation if it came “from upstairs”.

Recalling Butler's (2011) reflections on the importance of discourse in making queer lives possible, it seems queer is not discursively presented as cultural possibility within this context. It is not, as Butler said in an interview, something that is "already out there in the world" (Butler 2011), but rather something that is not visible in conversation. Two participants consciously limit themselves in conversations at work. One of them means it was easier to speak freely in her previous workplace where she had several queer coworkers. Several participants would like to ask their coworkers to join Pride events but do not feel comfortable doing so. Increased visibility is the most prominent topic when talking about what actions they would like to see from their employer. Many of the participants refer to "acknowledgement" or "recognition".

"I would really like to see the company take some small steps to recognize LGBT employees."

They further refer to education and specifically leadership training and mean that leadership is important for their ability to live fully as themselves in the workplace.

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

This analysis was guided by the question “how is heteronormativity limiting queer lives within this workplace?”. The focus was limitations, and this discussion will therefore not speculate in whether the participants’ experiences constitute discrimination or not. Because of the focus on limitations rather than possibilities it is also important to note queer employees in this workplace do experience possibilities for a queer life at work. This is indicated by quotes such as “I've never felt hindered in my development, I've never felt backlash because of the issue”. While all participants originally approached this workplace with reservation, the majority of them now live fully as themselves. It is equally important to note this does not imply queer lives are not limited by heteronormativity in this workplace.

The most prominent factor negatively impacting queer employees in this workplace is the lack of visibility, rendering queer minorities unthinkable within this context. This is expressed in a lack of employer support, lack of visibility in discourse and lack of queer employees living fully as themselves in this workplace. The participants experience an identity category attached to their sexuality, consolidating gay men as feminine, gay women as masculine, and none of them compatible with high performance at work. The regulative and limiting category construction of what it means to be queer is causing queer employees to feel they need to prove themselves to be hard workers despite of their sexuality. Several participants mean this is a heterosexual workplace and explain living fully as themselves could risk career development. Disclosing a queer sexuality at work is not experienced as a possibility for all participants, for “strategic reasons” some choose not to live fully as themselves. This choice is mainly a consequence of a concern for work performance, where several participants feel like being queer could negatively affect their work relations.

The discourse within this workplace context is reproducing an understanding and assumption of heterosexuality being the default sexuality at work. Existence outside of heterosexuality is therefore not presented as a viable option within this

context. The participants' experiences indicate a heterosexual discourse, rendering queer sexualities intelligible. Expectations of heterosexuality is reinforcing an understanding of opposite-sex desire as naturally following sex/gender. Several participants experience coworkers determine their sex/gender and further assume their sexuality based on their sex/gender. Expectations of heterosexuality based on sex/gender reinforces the gender binary and clearly illustrates the impossibility to speak about sexuality without speaking about sex/gender. Subverting heteronormativity within this workplace and requesting the right to a discourse that presents the possibility to live outside of the norms of intelligibility is explained by some as a confrontational attack. Several participants mean they are less likely to perform subversive acts at work compared to other spaces. One participant means subversion is not compatible with career development. The experience of little to no possibility to subvert heteronormativity within this workplace could be understood through queer rights being articulated as a non-work-related issue. By proposing "sexuality doesn't belong in the workplace", heteronormativity is not only making it more difficult for queer employees to live fully as themselves in the workplace. Heteronormativity is also foreclosing the option to demand further rights. This could explain the general lack of sense of entitlement to the right to live queer at work on the same conditions as non-queer employees.

This study concludes heteronormativity is limiting queer lives within this workplace. All of the participants entered this workplace with a reservation, and some are still not living fully as themselves because of their sexuality. While partly free in the sense of having no issue disclosing their sexuality in the workplace, heteronormativity is still inflicting a limitation where some participants modify their behavior to navigate not fitting the norm. This is exemplified by acceptance of homophobic jokes or feeling like subversion is not a possibility. The lack of visibility in discourse is foreclosing the possibility to live queerly in this workplace. When queer is presented as a possibility, it is commonly articulated in regulative stereotypical understandings of what it means to be queer. Limiting and exclusionary identity categories are thus constructed. These are all examples of labor rights inequality. Queer employees face challenges at work that non-queer employees never face. It is important to note that even if queer employees do not feel the need to actively conceal their sexuality at work, the interviews clearly

illustrate their sexuality and strategies to navigate it in the workplace is something that is on their mind. This indicates, as suggested by previous research, queer minorities experience additional stress than what is typical in the workplace (Holman 2018).

The last survey on LGBT conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights life (FRA 2014) report queer people are more likely to experience discrimination in employment than any other area of social life. Swedish investigations conclude structural discrimination of queer sexualities in recruitment processes (IFAU 2011:21) and concealment of sexuality or gender identity common in the workplace (SOU 2017:92). The previous case study of the City of Gothenburg (Björk & Wahlström 2018) reports expectation and fear of negative reactions causes queer employees to avoid disclosing their sexuality in the workplace. This study further indicates the expectation and fear of negative impact on work performance and career development causes queer employees to not be able to live fully as themselves and/or not experiencing subversion as a possible action in the workplace. This analysis contributes to previous research in confirming current policies are failing to protect queer minorities in the workplace. The conditions under which queer employees perform labor are not equal to non-queer employees.

The focus of this analysis was limitations to queer lives, with a sub question exploring experiences of possibilities for subversion. Even though subversion is generally experienced to be less possible within the workplace, participants do share events of challenging the assumptions of heteronormativity. Further research should be conducted not only on the experienced possibility, but the acts and strategies of subversion conducted by employees. Such research should include non-queer employees as well, to further explore strategies to create possibilities for livable lives beyond the regulative identity categories constructed by heteronormativity.

The majority of the participants identify as homosexual. The experiences shared from bisexual and polyamorous lives in this workplace suggest experiences differ from homosexuality. Further research should include a broad representation of queer sexualities, beyond the categories protected by the Discrimination Act. This employer's actions reinforcing the unthinkability of trans\* employees as well as

previous research indicating the particularly vulnerable position of trans\* people in the workplace (Björk & Wahlström 2018; Mattheis et. al. 2019) illustrate the critical need for further research on the specific workplace experience of trans\* employees.

Though limited in representation, this analysis of the workplace experience of seven queer employees within the male-dominated industrial industry can function as a stepping stone for practical action towards “increasing the possibilities for a livable life for those who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins” (Butler 2006:xxvi). As eloquently put by one of the male gay participants:

“If you can bring your whole self to work and not worry about it, that's a major deal in making you feel comfortable and loyal to that employer. They need to make more effort in doing that.”



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## 7. Appendix

The appendix includes the consent form received by all of the participants as well as information on the study which was developed in collaboration with the company. This information was shared on screens in the workplace. Both documents are presented in English as well as Swedish since the company is an international workplace and the study includes participants who do not speak Swedish.

### 7.1. Consent Form in English



**LUNDS**  
UNIVERSITET

#### Consent Form for Participation in In-depth Interview

Hi! I am very happy that you are interested in participating in my study on LGBTQIA+ in the workplace. Before you decide whether or not to participate, you need to read this document and give your consent to its contents. Take your time and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

##### WHO AM I AND WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?

My name is Amanda Zetterlund and I am a master's student at Lund University. In my master's thesis, I have chosen to study the workplace experiences of people who identify with LGBTQIA+ and/or queer. Previous studies and a government investigation on the area show deficiency in the workplace environment for this group and establish that the state of knowledge on this area is insufficient. The purpose of this study is to contribute to increased knowledge about the situation

for LGBTQIA+ people in the workplace and hopefully function informatively on future strategies for inclusion.

I am interested in the workplace as a social space and the equal rights of all employees. The focus of this study is also based on the fact that I myself identify as queer and feel that the issue is often forgotten in diversity & inclusion work in the workplace.

#### WHY HAVE YOU BEEN ASKED?

I am conducting the study in collaboration with your employer [name of employer]. Your employer's role is limited to helping me internally spread information about the study. No one from [name of employer] will have access to any form of data or information, other than what is openly presented in the final result. Your employer has chosen to collaborate with me as part of a larger work with diversity & inclusion in the workplace.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PARTICIPATE?

Your participation consists of an in-depth interview of one up to two hours, you decide how long.

**When:** the interview is done in March. We agree on a time that suits both of us.

**Where:** the interview takes place via Zoom, I will send you a link.

**How:** I ask you questions about your everyday life at work. Participation requires no preparation on your part, but if you feel more comfortable coming prepared the focus of the interview is social norms in the workplace.

Your participation is completely voluntary and can be terminated at any time without any justification and without consequences. Please note that any interrupted participation must be announced before the study's final reporting on 20 May 2021.

#### ANONYMITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

The interview will be recorded, the video is deleted immediately after recording because I am not analyzing the image but am only interested in the stories you share. The audio file serves as a basis for transcription, i.e. writing down what has been said, and is deleted immediately when the transcription is complete. No material is shared with your employer.

All recordings are thus deleted, and a written document of the interview is the data that remains for analysis. Personal data is processed in such a way that you as an individual cannot be identified. You are de-identified in all data, which means that



personal information such as your name, names of your colleagues/managers and names of your workplace are censored in the material. Personal data that serves the purpose of the study, such as sexuality, gender identity and gender expression, is not censored. Personal data that may be relevant to the study, such as place of residence and age, is handled in categorizations such as small town/big city and age ranges such as 25-35 years, in order to protect your anonymity. Parts of direct quotes from you may appear in the thesis.

The essay will be available on Lund University's website together with other student theses. Your employer will have access to the thesis.

#### SUMMARY OF WHAT YOU ARE REQUESTED TO GIVE YOUR CONSENT TO:

- The interview will be recorded.
- Data is handled confidentially and de-identifies you as an individual.
- No raw data is shared with your employer.
- Quotes from you may appear in the thesis.
- You can cancel your participation at any time without consequences.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Amanda Zetterlund

[am4016ze-s@student.lu.se](mailto:am4016ze-s@student.lu.se)

## 7.2. Consent Form in Swedish



**LUNDS**  
UNIVERSITET

### Samtyckesblankett till deltagande i intervju

Hej! Jag är väldigt glad att du är intresserad av att delta i min studie om HBTQIA+ på arbetsplatsen. Innan du bestämmer dig om du ska delta behöver du läsa det är dokumentet och ge ditt samtycke till dess innehåll. Ta god tid på dig att läsa och tveka inte att göra av dig till mig om du har några frågor.

## VEM ÄR JAG OCH VAD HANDLAR STUDIEN OM?

Jag heter Amanda Zetterlund och är mastersstudent på Lunds universitet. I min masteruppsats har jag valt att studera arbetsplatserfarenheterna hos människor som identifierar sig med HBTQIA+ och/eller queer. Tidigare studier och en statlig utredning på området visar på brister i arbetsmiljön för den här gruppen och fastställer att kunskapsläget är otillräckligt. Syftet med studien är att bidra till ökad kunskap om situationen för HBTQIA+personer på arbetsplatsen och förhoppningsvis fungera informativt för framtida strategier för inkludering.

Jag är intresserad av arbetsplatsen som samhällsrum och alla människors lika rättigheter på jobbet. Den här studiens fokus bottnar också i att jag själv identifierar mig som queer och upplever att frågan ofta glömts bort i arbete med mångfald & inkludering på arbetsplatsen.

## VARFÖR HAR DU BLIVIT TILLFRÅGAD?

Jag gör studien i samarbete med din arbetsgivare [namn på arbetsgivare]. Din arbetsgivares roll är begränsad till att enbart hjälpa mig internt sprida informationen om studien. Ingen från [namn på arbetsgivare] har tillgång till någon form av data eller information, utöver det som öppet presenteras i slutresultatet. Din arbetsgivare har valt att samarbeta med mig som en del av ett större arbete med mångfald & inkludering på arbetsplatsen.

## VAD INNEBÄR DET ATT DELTA?

Ditt deltagande består av en djupintervju på en upp till två timmar, du bestämmer själv hur länge.

**När:** intervjun görs i mars. Vi bestämmer en tid som passar oss båda.

**Var:** intervjun sker över Zoom, jag skickar en länk till dig.

**Hur:** jag ställer frågor till dig om din vardag på arbetsplatsen. Deltagandet kräver ingen förberedelse från din sida, men om du känner dig mer bekväm förberedd så är fokus under intervjun är på sociala normer på arbetsplatsen.

Ditt deltagande är helt frivilligt och kan avbrytas när som helst utan motivering och utan konsekvenser. Observera att eventuellt avbruten medverkan måste meddelas innan studiens slutrapportering den 20e maj 2021.

## ANONYMITET OCH HANTERING AV DATA

Intervjun kommer spelas in, videofilmen raderas direkt efter inspelning, jag analyserar alltså inte bild utan är bara intresserad av det du berättar. Ljudfilen fungerar som underlag för transkribering, alltså nedskrivning av vad som sagts, och

raderas direkt när transkriberingen är klar. Inget material delas med din arbetsgivare.

All inspelning raderas alltså och ett skriftligt dokument av intervjun är det data som kvarstår för analys. Personuppgifter behandlas på ett sådant sätt att du som individ inte går att identifieras. Du avidentifieras i all data vilket innebär att personuppgifter likt ditt namn, namn på dina kollegor/chefer och namn på din arbetsplats censureras i materialet. Personuppgifter som har ett syfte i studien, exempelvis sexualitet, könsidentitet och könsuttryck, censureras inte. Uppgifter som kan ha relevans för studien, såsom bostadsort och ålder hanteras i kategoriseringar såsom tätort/landsbygd och åldersspann likt 25-35 år, för att inte möjliggöra identifiering. Delar av citat från dig kan förekomma i uppsatsen.

Uppsatsen kommer finnas tillgänglig på Lunds universitets hemsida tillsammans med andra studentuppsatser. Din arbetsgivare kommer ta del av uppsatsen.

SUMMERING AV VAD DU OMBES GE DITT SAMTYCKE TILL:

- Intervjun kommer spelas in.
- Data hanteras konfidentiellt och avidentifierar dig som individ.
- Ingen rådata delas med din arbetsgivare.
- Citat från dig kan förekomma i uppsatsen.
- Du kan avbryta ditt deltagande när som helst utan konsekvenser.

Tveka inte att kontakta mig om du har några frågor eller funderingar eller upplever något som oklart.

Amanda Zetterlund

[am4016ze-s@student.lu.se](mailto:am4016ze-s@student.lu.se)

## 7.3. Study Information in English

### How do LGBTQ+ employees experience the workplace in Sweden?

- The year of 2020 has taught us a lot. An inner need for concrete actions on Diversity & Inclusion has awakened like a cold shower by global waves such as the "Black Lives Matters" movement. We encourage Diversity in all its forms and aspects, and we are committed to creating an inclusive workplace that welcomes everyone.
- While getting ready for our D&I Strategies launch, we are participating in a focus study on LGBTQIA+, working with master student Amanda Zetterlund from Lund University, to increase knowledge of the workplace culture and investigate obstacles to inclusion of LGBTQIA+ employees.
- **We are now looking for employees who identify with LGBTQI+ and/or queer and want to participate in an interview to share their experience of working at [name of employer] within Sweden.**

**Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.** Interviews will be conducted via Zoom, where the participants will be in contact only with the researcher, Amanda. All participants will be fully anonymous.

If you are interested in sharing your experience or have further questions, email Amanda directly at [am4016ze-s@student.lu.se](mailto:am4016ze-s@student.lu.se). To sign up for interviews, please send your email by the **3rd of March** and include:

- Your preferred contact information.
- Your connection to LGBTQI+/queer (optional).
- Your location in Sweden and position at [name of employer].

**All communication between you and Amanda will be strictly confidential, all data will be handled in accordance with GDPR and no personal data will be collected by, shared with or otherwise processed by any [name of employer] entity**

[name of contact person within the company]  
Project Manager – People & Organization  
[email address of contact person]

## 7.4. Study Information in Swedish

### Hur upplever HBTQ+-medarbetare arbetsplatsen?

- År 2020 har lärt oss mycket. Genom globala rörelser såsom "Black Lives Matters" har behovet av konkreta inkluderingsåtgärder gjorts tydligare än någonsin. Vi uppmanar mångfald i alla dess former och är fast beslutna att skapa en inkluderande arbetsplats som välkomnar alla.
- Samtidigt som vi förbereder lanseringen av en mångfald & inkluderingsstrategi deltar vi i en fokusstudie om HBTQIA+, tillsammans med masterstudenten Amanda Zetterlund från Lunds universitet, för att öka kunskapen om arbetsplatskulturen och undersöka hinder för inkludering av HBTQIA+-medarbetare.
- **Vi letar nu efter medarbetare som på olika vis identifierar sig med HBTQI+ och/eller queer och vill dela med sig av sina erfarenheter av att arbeta på [namn på arbetsgivare] i Sverige.**

Deltagande i studien är helt frivilligt. Du deltar i en djupintervju via Zoom och har bara kontakt med Amanda. Alla deltagare är och förblir helt anonyma.

Om du är intresserad av att delta eller har ytterligare frågor, mejla Amanda direkt på [am4016ze-s@student.lu.se](mailto:am4016ze-s@student.lu.se). För att delta i intervju, vänligen mejla senast den **3e mars** och inkludera:

- Din kontaktinformation.
- Din koppling till HBTQI+/queer (valfritt).
- Din plats i Sverige och din position på [arbetsgivares namn].

**All kommunikation mellan dig och Amanda behandlas strikt konfidentiellt, all information hanteras enbart av Amanda och i enlighet med GDPR. Inga personuppgifter kommer samlas in av, delas med eller på annat sätt behandlas av någon [namn på arbetsgivare]-enhet.**

[namn på företagets kontaktperson]  
Project Manager – People & Organization  
[emailadress till kontaktperson]