



FACULTY  
OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

Lund University

Department of Sociology

**Rainbow-Washing on Screen:**

**Perceptions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Popular Media Representations of Queer Identities in a  
Comparison between Sweden and Czechia**

Author: Elizabeth Hythova

Master's thesis SOCM04 30 credits

Spring semester 2022

Supervisor: Dalia Abdelhady

Word count: 21, 579

Author: Elizabeth Hythova

Title: Rainbow-Washing on Screen: Perceptions of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Popular Media  
Representations of Queer Identities in a Comparison between Sweden and Czechia

Master's thesis SOCM04 30 credits

Supervisor: Dalia Abdelhady

Department of Sociology, spring semester 2022

Abstract:

This thesis investigates how queer people perceive queer representations in popular media (film and TV) produced in recent years and how such representations affect queer people's identity and self-perception, as well as how they mirror and reproduce heteronormative understandings of queerness. A cultural comparison between Czechia and Sweden in perceptions of heteronormativity and queer representations and media is also made. A research design comprising of an explanatory case study approach and narrative interviews with 10 Czech and Swedish queer people aged 18-25 is used. The theoretical framework comprises of sociological accounts of gender and sexuality as social constructs instead of biologically determined qualities, and queer theorist accounts heterosexuality as normative and queerness as the 'Other'. Stuart Hall's work on representation and stereotypes, which sees marginalisation as marking and signifying difference, is added to explain participants' perceptions of queer representations as stereotypical to be contributing to maintenance of the heteronormative gender order. Symbolic interactionist accounts of social interaction as an instrument of creating and assigning meanings to social categories is applied to findings showing significance of exposure to queer images in media during youth in identity formation. The study finds that queer people view queer representations in popular media to be largely based on negative stereotypes. Findings also show that exposure to queer images in media during youth contributes to identity formation and self-perception. Lastly, no significant cultural differences between the way Swedish and Czech queer people perceive heteronormativity were not found; Czech participants perceived queer representations in media more negatively due to more conservative attitudes in Czechia.

Keywords: *queer representation; stereotypes in popular media; social constructionism; heteronormativity; othering of minorities; queer theory*

## **Popular Science Summary**

This thesis considers how queer people perceive the ways in which queerness is portrayed in popular media (film and TV) produced in recent years, how these portrayals affect queer people's identity formation, self-esteem and mental health, as well as how these portrayals reflect how queerness is understood in mainstream, heterosexual society. These aspects are all also studied through a comparison of Czechia and Sweden to see if there are any significant cultural differences. To investigate this, I conducted interviews with queer-identifying people aged 18-25 who are from Czechia and Sweden. It is important and useful to approach this topic through people's perceptions, as individual descriptions offer rich information and personal thoughts and feelings about the way queerness is shown in film and TV. In the literature review, I discuss existing research on the topic of popular media with queer themes, and focus on the way queerness is mostly shown through stereotypical and oversimplified ways. For example, the way queer people dress or behave is over-exaggerated in media portrayals. I also present previous research regarding the positive and negative impact that stereotypical portrayal of queerness in media can have on queer people's identity formation, mental health and self-esteem. Lastly, I compare legislations on queer rights in Czechia and Sweden. The theory and findings sections are structured in a similar way.

I found that participants perceive portrayals of queerness in popular media as stereotypical and as based on how heterosexuals understand queer identities. These normative understandings are built on the sociological view that social categories like gender, sexuality or race aren't 'natural' or biologically given, but are instead 'artificially' and socially created to maintain the current social hierarchy which privileges some groups over others. In this case, heterosexuality is privileged over queer identities because it's seen as 'normal' and contributing towards procreation. Queerness in media is therefore shown in stereotypical ways that reinforce this hierarchy. I also found that contact with queer portrayals in media at a young age is important in the formation of a queer identity and in self-perception. This is because media representations are seen by sociologists to significantly shape people's understandings of society and social groups, and exposure to information about queer identities has the potential to change people's perception of reality and of themselves. There weren't any big cultural differences between how Czech and Swedish participants see queer media portrayals, only in that Czech media was seen to depict queer people in more stereotypical ways than in foreign productions.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
1.1 Aims	1
1.2 Outline	1
1.3 Research questions	2
<b>2. Literature review</b>	3
2.1 Definitions of ‘queer’ from sociological and queer theorist perspectives	3
2.2 Media representations of queerness	4
2.3 Intersectionality and diversity	8
2.4 Positive and negative consequences of queer media representation on identity, self-image and mental health	10
2.5 Cultural differences in attitudes towards queerness in Czechia and Sweden	11
<b>3. Theoretical framework</b>	13
3.1 Sociological understandings of the construction of queerness as the ‘Other’	13
3.2 Queer theorist understandings of the constructions of queerness as the ‘Other’	14
3.3 Representation and stereotypes in popular media	16
3.4 The use of stereotypes in popular media representations of queerness	18
3.5 Media representations in socialisation processes and social interactions	20
<b>4. Methodology</b>	22
4.1 Methodological considerations	22
4.1.1 Case study approach	22
4.1.2 Queer methodology	23
4.1.3 Positionality	24
4.1.4 Auto-ethnography	25
4.2 Data collection	26
4.2.1 Sampling and participant recruitment	26

4.2.2 Interview guide	27
4.2.3 Interviews	28
4.2.4 Transcription and coding	28
4.3 Ethics and reflections	29
<b>5. Findings and analysis</b>	<b>30</b>
5.1 Perceptions of queer representations in popular media	30
5.2 Effects of exposure to queer images in media on identity and self-perception	42
5.3 Effects of representations of queerness in media on everyday interactions	45
5.4 Cultural comparison between Sweden and Czechia	47
5.4.1 In perceptions of the heteronormative social order	47
5.4.2 In perceptions of media representations of queerness	49
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>62</b>

## **1. Introduction**

### 1.1 Aims

Queer representations in popular media have become increasingly prominent in recent years, offering positive depictions of queerness in favour of harmful stereotypes that were previously notoriously used in queer narratives. Opening up the analysis on the subject to individual queer voices and subjective perceptions of the way queer people are depicted in media would add to arguments in existing literature on the matter. As such, this thesis explores different aspects of queer media representation as they are perceived by queer people, and especially centres around stereotypical depictions of queerness that stem from heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality. The strength of such research is the use of personal narratives of how such representations are perceived and how they affect individuals' self-perception. Such accounts are crucial, as the first time individuals come into contact with queer people and relationships is often through popular media, and the way queer people are portrayed shapes their understandings of social reality and themselves. The main goal of this thesis is to find how queer people perceive queer representations in popular media, particularly the extent to which they perceive queer media representation to be based on reductive stereotypes which reflect hegemonic social understandings of queerness. Another aim is to investigate whether the way queer people are depicted in media correlates with the way queer people are perceived in society, and how this affects their interactions with others. The last goal of this thesis is to look for cultural differences in social attitudes towards queerness in Czechia and Sweden, and if this affects queer media representation and its consumption in each country.

### 1.2 Outline

I first give general explanations of queerness in relation to social science, particularly in sociological and queer theorist accounts. I then present an overview of existing literature on queer media representation and various important aspects of it, such as its stereotypical nature, lack of diverse and intersectional narratives, and its consequences on queer people's mental health and self-esteem. This is followed by statistical reports concerning queer representation in mainstream films and TV shows to provide evidence. Lastly, I provide statistical accounts of differences in legislation regarding queer people's situation in Sweden

and Czechia. Next, I formulate a theoretical framework, which combines sociological thought on the social constructions of gender and sexuality with queer theorist applications of such notions through construction of the hegemonic gender order, which places heteronormativity as superior, and renders non-normative identities as unintelligible. Media representation and stereotypes as practice of signifying difference and marking marginalised groups as the ‘Other’ is then conceptualised using Stuart Hall’s representation theory. This is applied to queer representations in media through Barthes’ semiotic model of communication. Symbolic interactionism and theories of socialisation are then formulated to explain how queer representations in media are communicated through symbols, reinforcing the meanings that heteronormative society assigns to queerness. Furthermore, individuals take representations for granted, as their understandings of queerness in their social reality is constructed through them. I then present the methodological considerations and applications. The research process following a qualitative case study with interviews is designed, followed by reflections on my positionality as a researcher, as well as ethical considerations of working with a marginalised group. Finally, I present and analyse the findings. Queer representations in media are largely perceived as stereotypical, and as reflecting heteronormative understandings of queerness. I discuss specific stereotypes and tropes that are used in signifying queerness in media, as mentioned by participants. I then present findings suggesting the significance of exposure to queer images in youth in queer people’s identity formation, and the positive and negative effects of this on self-esteem and mental health. Finally, I discuss the cultural differences in how Czech and Swedish participants perceive queer representation in media, including productions from both countries.

### 1.3 Research questions

The research questions for this thesis are formulated in the following way:

- *How do queer people perceive queer representation in film and TV produced in recent years?*
- *In what ways do queer representations in popular media correlate with queer people’s identity, self-perception and their experiences in heteronormative society?*
- *Do cultural particularities influence queer media representation, its consumption and perception?*

To answer these questions in general, and the third one on particular, I carry out interviews with queer people regarding their perceptions of queer representations in media, as well as a comparison between Sweden and Czechia in order to account for cultural particularities and difference.

## **2. Literature review**

### 2.1 Definitions of ‘queer’ from sociological and queer theorist perspectives

In a broader sense, ‘queer’ from a sociological perspective refers to the practice of disturbing and remodelling social forces (Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz, 2020), and is not limited to a reference to LGBTQ+ identities. As the authors note, a more focused approach of ‘queer theory in sociology’ is conceptualised by Stein and Plummer (1994) as reacting to issues of destabilising identity, favouring knowledge from marginalised perspectives, focusing on institutions rather than discourse, and historicising social categories. Seidman, in the introduction of *Queer Theory/Sociology* (1996), gives an overview of the chronological changes in sociological accounts of sexuality. A major shift concerns the abandonment of viewing queerness - or homosexuality, as the main focal point of early queer theory was the heterosexual/homosexual binary - as biologically innate (Plummer, in Seidman, 1996), and instead turning to the perspective of sexuality as socially created. Social constructionism is therefore essential in queer theory - as Epstein (in Seidman, 1996) suggests, sociologists significantly contributed to the fundamental shift in theorisation of sexuality. In this call towards criticism of how knowledge about normative categories is produced through a sociological lense, the stability of identity categories is de-established and instead viewed as socially constructed and contextually and historically rooted.

From a queer theorist perspective, to queer something suggests to consider something from a position that rejects normativity of gender and sexuality (Sedgwick, in Jagose et al., 2013; Sommerville, in Burgett, 2007). The main interest of queer theory takes the form of “exploring the borders of sexual identities, communities and politics“ (Namaste, 1994). Stein and Plummer (1994) conceptualise the aim of queer theory as de-establishing the conceptual dualisms which feed into ‘othering’ minorities. Generally, queer theory challenges the “pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity in modern societies“ (Warner, 1999; 3), and

instead of situating the focus of study within the queer community, queer theorists interrogate all aspects of social life including politics, institutions and structures in order to deconstruct the firmly established heteronormative regime (Stein and Plummer, 1994). Queer theory, therefore, challenges how different academic, political and cultural agents enact gender and sexual binaries (Barber and Hidalgo, 2017), and, importantly, analyses how cultural artefacts create an imbalance by privileging heterosexuality over other sexual identities (Namaste, 1994). Stein and Plummer (1994) suggest that while queer theorists appreciate the ways mass culture shapes sexuality, they often ignore queer life and experiences beyond text; they thus argue that sociological practices marry into queer theory well, as they aid in comprehending how identities are constituted in the cultural practices of everyday life (184).

Carrington (2018) suggests that the meaning of the word 'queer' implies focus on the transgression of normativities, the focal point of which is heteronormativity. Duncan et al. (2019) define it as "referential attitudes towards heterosexual relationships" that are organised around distinctions between males and females and their expected behaviour and roles. The heterosexual model of relationships, the nuclear family structure and attached gender roles<sup>1</sup> are therefore held as ideal and normal, while other sexualities and gender expressions are taken as incomprehensible and are marginalised (Snider, 2016). Sedgwick's definition of 'queer' (in Carrington, 2018) implies that queerness in one's gender or sexuality is fluid, flexible and ever-changing, and it is not fixed, categorizable or binary in the way it is perceived through the heteronormative lens. 'Queer' is used as a label by many people as a way of encompassing their whole identity and the way they are queer into a single word. It is a more inclusive term that carries "a sense of undefined abstractness" (Cheves, 2019), and it signifies a lack of compliance and rejection of cultural norms tied to both the heterosexual world and the often-constricting LGBT community (Stonewall, 2017).

## 2.2 Media representations of queerness

This thesis particularly focuses on popular film and TV with representations of queer identities produced in the last decade and mainly in the U.S. or Europe. I analyse the way such media is perceived by queer people in relation to how queer representations reflect societal attitudes towards queerness, and how queer representations influence self-perception and identity formation of queer individuals. It must be noted that the issues discussed below

---

<sup>1</sup> rooted in an understanding of sex and gender as indistinguishable

are not unique to media representations of queer identities, but rather pertain in all popular media and its representations of different social groups. The way individuals are presented in media is heavily influenced by the creation of archetypes or ideal types of characters that are based on different societal norms or prejudices. Heteronormative gender roles play a major role in the creation of different types of female characters that present women's lives as several simplified categories, such as the damsel in distress or the femme fatale (Abi-Karam, 2021). Normative masculinity is also commonly over-exaggerated on screen through displays of physical power, aggression, lack of emotions, and leadership tendencies (Benshoff and Griffin, 2014, in Robinsson, 2019). Marginalised groups are frequently presented in a negative light through the use of stereotypes that are based on dominant societal attitudes, and are rarely portrayed as characters capable of being complex in their emotions and behaviour (University of Minnesota, 2016). This leads to the underrepresentation of minority groups in ways that are not stereotypical (Schacht, 2019). As people often, albeit unconsciously, rely on media as a major source of information about people different from them (Yuen, 2019), simplified representation leads to further perpetration of stereotypes and thus can lead to misinformation and discrimination (Harrington, 2021; Paner, 2018; Schacht, 2019), and is connected to hate-crimes, unemployment, or discrimination in the workplace (Yuen, 2019). Lack of positive representation also affects individuals' self-image and self-esteem, and can have a detrimental effect on mental health (Schmader, Block and Lickel, 2015; Yuen, 2019), particularly when exposure to stereotypes takes place during childhood (González et al., 2020; Wille et al., 2018).

Mennel (2012) suggests that media representations of queer identities are a way to normalise queer relationships in popular culture, which may in turn de-establish dominant societal views of queerness, and the marginalisation of queer identities. Dean (2007) offers a chronological account of the way queer representations have progressed along with societal views on queer identities. According to the author, a major shift occurred between the 1980's and 1990's, where queer presence in the media moved away from portraying queer identities as pathological and deviant to an increase in number and quality of queer depictions with the slow abandonment of stereotypes. Twenty-first century queer media representation is still subject to stereotypes, although they are being increasingly dismissed in favour of placing queer characters in major, meaningful roles (Mueller, 2018). *Queer as Folk* in particular, having aired both its UK and US versions between 1999 and 2005, managed to be one of the first to convey a normalised account of queer lives and experiences, and to challenge the

mainstream representational regime in which queer people are desexualised with its “candid and joyful“ images of sex (Porfido, in Peele, 2007; 57, 65). Many authors (Cover, 2000; Dean, 2007; Harris, 2017; Mueller, 2018; Peele, 2006; Seif, 2017; Shugart, 2010) acknowledge that although queer media representation has improved, it is still being limited and controlled by harmful stereotypes, heteronormative standards, socially acceptable ways of being queer, as well as production companies’ concerns about the box office outcome and audience reactions. Marshall (2016) suggests that although the number of queer representations has been growing, the audience is prompted to take such stereotyped portrayals for granted, which does not aid progression in societal views and acceptance of queer people. Current queer media representation, according to Creager (2019), offers an incomplete view of the way queer people live out and experience their queerness, as producers are reluctant to use non-normative depictions that are perceived as controversial or problematic (17). This leads to a carefully selected pool of portrayal of only normalised notions of queer identities, which are heavily influenced by stereotypes. Porfido (in Peele, 2007) adds to this by suggesting that queer representation– or, rather, misrepresentation – in our “visually mass-mediated“ society (61) is a form of injustice which reinforces queer people’s subaltern position in heteronormative society.

This normalisation of queer identities in mainstream media is becoming increasingly common, and there are notable examples in genres previously notorious for being homophobic and transphobic, or for complete erasure of queer narratives. Popular 90’s and early 2000’s romantic and situational comedies such as *Friends* or *How I Met Your Mother* have been severely criticised for using queer identities as comedic relief or for portrayal based on very little understanding of queerness (Miller, 2019; Riedel, 2018). Shows of this genre of the 2010s instead contain visible representation of queer identities in the form of important characters in main roles and with developed storylines, such as *Feel Good* (2020-21), *Genera+ion* (2021), *Transparent* (2014-2019), or the very recent production *Heartstopper* (2022). Positive queer representation is making its way into historical and period dramas as well, and there have been several successful shows revolving around fictionalized accounts of queer people of the past. *Gentleman Jack* (2022) uses Anne Lister’s diary for its storytelling in portraying her life as a lesbian in the 1800s (Moore, 2022). *Black Sails* (2014-17) and the very recent production *Our Flag Means Death* (2022) both present differing accounts of queerness and piracy in the 1700s New World in implication that queer identities have indeed existed for a long time and belong with the traditionally masculine and

aggressive occupation of piracy. Both shows portray multiple queer identities and relationships through a diverse cast of queer characters who are central to the plot while not revolving around their queerness (Sarner, 2016).

GLAAD<sup>2</sup> publishes yearly reports of the *Studio Responsibility Index*<sup>3</sup>, which presents important criteria for queer representation in film. It requires that the queer character in question must not be predominantly defined by their queer identity, and that the character must be tied into the plot in a significant enough way that their removal would affect the storyline. The first published *Studio Responsibility Index* covers 2012 when only 14 out of 101 releases featured a queer character. GLAAD reported, in their latest *Studio Responsibility Index*, that 2020 features a record number of queer characters in films from major entertainment companies (22.7% of all films). GLAAD's *Where We are on TV* reports<sup>4</sup> showed that in the 2005-6 season, queer characters represented less than 2% of all TV broadcast characters. The 2021-22 season marks a record with its 141 queer characters out of the total 775 regular TV and streaming characters. It must however be mentioned that these reports are not fully reliable as they only analyse American-produced media and streaming platforms, and therefore miss a large number of international film and TV.

Porfido (in Peele, 2007) ponders the use of queer visibility in media as a marketing strategy or a major spectacle, where queerness is brought to light for commercial purposes rather than liberation or representation. When this concept of spectacularization is considered, it can be argued, as Porfido suggests, that queer media representation has increased in quantity primarily due to its trendiness and, at best, in a show of performative activism – done to gain social capital rather than genuine devotion to a cause – that chronologically aligns with current queer rights movements. From this follows the inquiry of whether the media produced is perceived as queer media representation, or mere presence that does not fulfil the queer viewer and is used for commercialisation. Through ‘rainbow washing’ or rainbow capitalism, the advertisement industry and large corporations brand themselves as supportive of the queer community in order to gain visibility and income (Kose, 2021; Langer, 2021). This is

---

<sup>2</sup> The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

<sup>3</sup>, where the Vito Russo test, inspired by the Bechdel test – which measures women's representation in films - is used to analyse how queer characters are included in a film.

<sup>4</sup> analyse diversity of prime-time television broadcasts as well as streaming platforms and their number of queer regular characters.

particularly visible during Pride month, and while the placement of images symbolising queerness is attention-grabbing and a large number of queer people feel that this exposure has helped them come out, others feel invisible in such advertising (Roderick, 2017). Questions about corporate dedications to the good of the queer community through such advertising are raised, as new laws and bills restricting queer people are put out simultaneously (Desjardins et al., 2021), and there are rarely displays of direct contribution to queer people's needs from such products' revenue. While entertainment companies may not be as guilty of this, it has been common for blockbuster films or mainstream shows to be marketed for any little queer element they contain in order to attract viewers (Cheng, 2020; Mitchell, 2018) without fulfilling the promise (McDermott, 2021), which comes from a place of money-hungry producers who do not actually want to represent queer identities (Murphy, 2021). This phenomenon is known as queer-baiting, and media marketed as such rarely presents elaborate or positive queer representation; displays of queerness are more often than not presented in fleeting shots or through subtext (Cheng, 2020; Mitchell, 2018). Such approaches to queer representation are harmful, as it can be invalidating to not see oneself represented in a positive or meaningful way, and it can contribute to continued marginalisation of the queer community (Murphy, 2021; Nordin, 2015).

### 2.3 Intersectionality and diversity

Calavante (2015) dubs the frequent use of stereotypes as inspiration for queer media representation “‘anxious displacement’”, which is explained as excessive use of negatively codified social differences and symbolism in depicting queer characters and their relationships (455). Mattsson (2013) suggests that while there is an attempt to normalise queer people and their lives on screen, it does so by portraying queer people in normative ways (Creager, 2019), which instead results in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes associated with queer identities. As GLAAD's reports have shown, most queer characters are an isolated figure of representation and are significant solely for being queer as a sort of symbol of diversity that is built on stereotypical perceptions. They are the ‘Other’ character that is visibly marked as such, through appearance or behaviour, among the predominantly heterosexual and cisgender cast, and they are queer and out in an extravagant act or an emotional affair (Corey, 2017). This results in an oversimplified depiction of ways of expressing one's queerness and of being out, with no room for characters who are ‘casually’ queer without their identity being justified or validated through others. It also leaves no space

for representations of queer people who are not out or whose narrative does not revolve around coming out in general, or for queer characters who are not markedly different from the heterosexual cast. Much of queer representations in popular media indeed centre its characters' lives and struggles around the decision to come out, which paints the act of coming out as an obligation that queer people have to fulfil in order to be seen. This is also in line with Peele's (2007) reasoning that popular media depicts queer people as needing acceptance from heterosexuals, where the heterosexual audience is constructed as tolerant rather than accepting.

The way queer people are depicted in media is curated as not to deviate from conventional norms of family and relationships. Queer representation in media thus mostly remains subject to being written through a binary heteronormative lens that depicts queer people in a one-dimensional sense (Thomson, 2013) through repeated patterns of behaviour and stories that are made to reflect real queer lives, but that rather merely mirror normalised societal views of queer identities. Queer characters are ascribed traits and attributes associated with certain categories, made to be easily recognised by the audience (Marshall, 2016). Media representations of identities beyond the hetero/homo and trans/cis binaries are missing, and if they exist, they do so through other kinds of binaries and stereotypes (e.g. genderqueer people are viewed as a singular identity, and their portrayal is reductive of the complexity of their identity). This may make the queer audience internalise these portrayals and model themselves on such characterizations in order to be recognised.

Sociological and queer theorist thought, as well as most popular media with queer themes, is centred in the U.S. and Western Europe. This approach is limiting as it is US- and Euro-centric, leading to the erasure of ethnically diverse perspectives - indeed, it has been subject to much criticism for its 'whitewashing' (Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz, 2020). Existing data and research on queer representations in media rarely extends past these two continents, and depictions of queer people of colour continues to be largely absent. This reinforces marginalisation within the queer community, and therefore in the continued privileging of white, cisgender and middle class queer identities as faces of queer media representation (Mueller, 2018). However, in the last approximately 7 years, there has been a rise in the number of productions centring around queer people of colour, transgender people, or people whose queerness manifests in non-normative ways – this is primarily the case of TV shows, such as *Pose* (2018-2021), *Tales of the City* (2019), or *Euphoria* (2019-), as well as films, some of which have received awards or other accomplishments (e.g. *Moonlight* (2016)). The

list of 21st century queer representations that shows diversity within the community however remains small. This corresponds to marginalisation and discrimination *within* the queer community, especially regarding racism towards queer people of colour. In a 2015 study by the Stonewall organisation, 51% queer people of colour in the UK reported having experienced discrimination from other queer people. Romesburg (2020) reports that racism has been an enduring problem in San Francisco's queer community, which is reflected in access to health resources, housing, and relationships, particularly in the online dating scene. This racial discrimination is also reflected in queer representations, as is evident in GLAAD's reports, which exposed mainstream film production for decreasing the number of queer characters of colour and queer women. Additionally, since *The Danish Girl* (2015), there have been 0 transgender characters that passed the Vito Russo test. The findings of GLAAD's TV-focused study differ, with queer characters of colour outweighing white queer characters, and with 42 regular transgender characters in the 2021-22 season.

It is important to show diversity not just within ethnicity, but also within queer identities themselves. Bisexuality, for example, is a severely underrepresented identity (Corey, 2017), and in the events of its inclusion, stereotypes with negative connotations are reinforced. Filippo (2014) builds on bisexual erasure by discussing the tendency to limit bisexual characters into presenting as heterosexual or homosexual based on their object choice at a given time. The author thus criticises the restriction of bisexual representations to both compulsory monosexuality and compulsory monogamy, as such depictions fail to encompass the complex experiences of bisexual people. Stanger (2019) especially criticises the lack of media representation of bisexual men, which is reflected in the discrimination bisexual men experience from both the queer community and heteronormative society, as the scrutiny they face is reportedly much higher than bisexual women do (Kelleher, 2021). Bisexuality is also commonly perceived as an identity centred around sexual experimentation or promiscuity, a perception that is commonly reflected in portrayals bisexuality in media (Stanger, 2019).

#### 2.4 Positive and negative consequences of queer media representation on identity, self-image and mental health

Media representation of marginalised groups plays an important role not only in identity formulation, but also in "diversifying the idea of what certain identity categories entail" (Mattsson, 2013; 34). Positive media representation especially helps queer youth to assign meaning to their feelings, situate their queer identity, and develop positive self-perception.

Gomillion (2011) has found that queer people feel that exposure to queer media has influenced their “self-realisation, coming out, and identity formation by providing role models and inspiration” (330), as well as being a source of pride and comfort within their queerness. The author found that participants were more likely to feel validated and comforted by positive representation of queer characters of the same identity or experiences as them. It is important for people to see themselves in popular culture and thus feel represented, especially as invisibility is central to the marginalisation of queer people (Pratt, 2012). Such representation also functions as a “catalyst for resilience” to help queer youth mediate negative experiences and navigate adolescence as a queer person (Craig et al., 2013; 269). Mattsson (2013) suggests that this is important especially for people of several marginalised identities, such as queer people of colour. Exposure to such representations of queerness is therefore a very helpful and necessary tool for people who are questioning themselves. Diversity in media representation is crucial for socialisation purposes, but it also impacts individuals’ self-image and self-esteem, especially during youth (Levinson, 2020). Rogers (2021) suggests that positive and negative representation in media communicates influential messages about societal and cultural attitudes towards different social groups. These connotations are especially felt during youth, as individuals’ understanding of marginalised groups, and of themselves, is shaped by media consumption (Rogers, 2021). Seeing a portrayal of oneself on the screen therefore shapes how one perceives a given identity or group, and how they perceive themselves. Negative representation, especially through the use of stereotypes, leads to their internalisation (Bonnot and Croizet, 2006) and to one’s denial of their identity (Zhang and Haller, 2013), hindering the process of identity formation. Positive media representation, therefore, enables queer people to feel seen, recognized and validated (Nordin, 2015).

## 2.5 Cultural differences in attitudes towards queerness in Czechia and Sweden

As one of the aims of this thesis is finding whether there are cultural differences in the way people perceive queer media representation, a comparison of attitudes towards queer people in Czechia and Sweden is appropriate as a starting point. I primarily use the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Index and Map<sup>5</sup>. These are annually published and publicly available documents that illustrate the “legal and policy situation of LGBTI people in Europe” by examining

---

<sup>5</sup> the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association that overlooks recognition and protection of queer people’s rights

government laws of European countries through a set of criteria<sup>6</sup>. Countries are then ranked by percentage weight of how well they accommodate the categories, and thus how much they are legally safe and comfortable for queer people. The 2021 index shows Sweden as ranked 9th out of 49 with 65.07%, reportedly lacking in the criteria of legal gender recognition (38%), and is particularly strong in laws and policies regarding family (93%), with hate crime, asylum and equality weighing between 50-65%. Czechia is ranked 33rd with 26.03%, with 0% achieved in hate crime and discrimination and asylum laws, family and legal gender recognition weighing between 15 and 20%, and 48% achieved in equality policies.

Governmental debates regarding legalisation of same-sex marriage have been ongoing since 2018, with politicians divided in opinions (Patricolo, 2018; Pirodsky, 2018; Natrass, 2021), and 70% of the Czech public supportive of the bill being passed (Pew Research Center, 2018). In Sweden, same-sex marriage has been legal since 2009 (RFSL, 2022), and in general, Sweden is seen as particularly progressive towards queer rights (Nikel, 2019). This data paints a rather binary and divided perspective of attitudes towards queerness, where Sweden seems to be progressive and accepting, and Czechia seems to be clouded by conservatism and traditionalism, as it is a reflection of the countries' respective political ideologies. It may however be useful to also consider the extent to which heteronormative values are projected into social institutions and structures, as these may be expressed differently in legal matters and in, for example, family structures or education. As I am interested in how queer people themselves feel treated in their country and how they perceive their country's attitudes towards queerness as well as the degree to which heteronormative values are projected onto them, I will include questions on the matter in interviews, and will discuss the findings later.

The qualitative research that was carried out for this project, coupled with the previous research presented above and considerations of several theories regarding heteronormativity, representation, and symbolic interactionism will aid in answering the following research questions:

- *How do queer people perceive queer representation in film and TV produced in recent years?*
- *In what ways do queer representations in popular media correlate with queer people's identity, self-perception and their experiences in heteronormative society?*

---

<sup>6</sup> such as equality, family, hate crime, or legal gender recognition.

- *Do cultural particularities influence queer media representation, its consumption and perception?*

### **3. Theoretical framework**

#### 3.1 Sociological understandings of the construction of queerness as the ‘Other’

As mentioned in the literature review, much of queer theory is rooted in sociology, particularly social constructionism. This theory holds that characteristics that are typically deemed biologically innate<sup>7</sup> are instead socially defined, and are shaped by historical and cultural contexts (Giles, 2006). From this stems the creation of categorical concepts<sup>8</sup> according to which individuals are classified, and which are reproduced and re-shaped through historical processes. Consequently, through meanings associated with social categories, understandings of reality are socially situated. Social constructionism therefore strongly contests the essentialist notion that the characteristics of people or social groups are biologically determined, and temporarily and spatially similar (Giles, 2006; Kang et al., 2017). In *The Spectacle of the Other* (1997), sociologist Stuart Hall contemplates marginalisation as construction of difference and consequent creation of the ‘Other’. He suggests that the majority – or the hegemonic social groups – are conceptualised in binary contradiction to those markedly different from them, and this difference is exaggerated to maintain the hierarchy. Similarly, Kang et al. (2017) and Ferber (2009) point to the fact that difference is socially constructed within relations of power. Social hierarchy and marginalisation thus produce notions of essential difference between the oppressors and the oppressed. Social constructionist accounts aim to understand how gendered, sexualised or racialised differences occur to dismantle their power relations (Kang et al., 2017).

In a sociological lense, sexuality is viewed as a status hierarchy (Fitzgerald and Grossman, 2020), and thus as a site of power relations. As Foucault (1990) argued, the current forms of how sexuality and gender are perceived are contemporary creations, and are also defined within a particular cultural context (Finocchiaro, 2021; Fitzgerald and Grossman, 2020; Stein,

---

<sup>7</sup> e.g. gender, sexuality or race

<sup>8</sup> based primarily on bodily features, or on otherwise significant features

1997). According to Vance (2005), social constructionist accounts reject transhistorical and transcultural definitions of sexuality and sexual orientation, and instead argue that sexuality is negotiated by specific historical and cultural factors. In *Sociology of Sexualities*, Fitzgerald and Grossman (2020) give an overview of how modern conceptions of queerness came to be constructed, linking this with the ‘procreative imperative’, which constructed homosexuality as ‘unnatural’ due to its lack of procreative potential. Heterosexuality therefore became privileged, creating a social hierarchy and the notion of heteronormativity. Fitzgerald and Grossman explain that stereotypical conceptions of queerness – particularly the common notion of queer men as effeminate and queer women as masculine – is also historically rooted, as homosexuality was first regarded as ‘gender deviancy’. Social constructionism therefore argues that sexual orientation is not innate or biologically determined, and is instead constructed in the context of culture and history (Vance, 2005).

Much like sexual orientation, gender is also viewed as socially constructed, and as resultant of sociocultural influences in an individual’s development (Power, 2011). In this regard, gender is separate from one’s biological sex – feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler (1991), among others, argues in *Gender Trouble* that gender is a performance; it is something one does. The author suggests that whatever biological complexity sex seems to have, gender is distinctive from it, and is culturally constructed. The dominant conception of gender however continues to reside in roles and expectations which are rooted in the differences between the female and male sex, where gender is seen to mirror sex (Butler, 1991). While gender is viewed as socially constructed, these constructions are based on the notion that biological differences between the sexes determine one’s gender and associated roles and behaviour. Gender is thus another structural feature of society, and is a site of power relations (Lorber and Farrell, 1991; Power, 2011). As the universal person is masculine, women – and performances of femininity - are defined in terms of their sex as ‘the Other’, through which the gender order is maintained (Irigay, in Butler, 1991). Social constructionist accounts of gender and sexuality, as well as notions of the creation of social categories for the purposes of maintaining the hegemonic social order, thus give a basis in understanding dominant perceptions of queerness that are projected into popular media representations.

### 3.2 Queer theorist understandings of the constructions of queerness as the ‘Other’

Queer theorist works present more detailed notions of gender and sexuality as socially constructed sites of power relations. Contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality

can be explained as being constructed through the modern gender order, defined by Connell (2005) as “the structure of relationships that interconnect the gender regimes of institutions“ (xxi). This establishes the cultural authority of compulsory heterosexuality (186) around which all aspects of social life are organised. In short, the gender order is an apparatus through which patriarchal values are reproduced in everyday life (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2013), and from which hegemonic gender archetypes of ideal conduct for men and women are constructed (Veissiere, 2018). Masculinity and femininity are further seen as internalisations of these sex roles (Connell, 2005), and deviations from them are seen as disrupting the gender order. Judith Butler explains the gender order through the concept of the heterosexual matrix, which “designates that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised“ (1991, 151). In order to maintain the privilege of heterosexuality, asymmetrical oppositions between the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ - understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’ - are required (Butler, 1991; 17).

The heterosexual matrix establishes certain manifestations of gender and sexuality as intelligible through their adherence to the gender order. Consequently, identities that do not conform to such norms appear as unintelligible and socially unacceptable. The heteronormative gender order constructs gender as a binary relation which strictly differentiates the feminine from the masculine, and which is realised through the practices of heterosexual desire. Sexuality and gender are thus always constructed within relations of power, where superiority is marked by heterosexual cultural conventions. With the heterosexual matrix, Butler characterises a hegemonic epistemic model of gender intelligibility which assumes that for bodies to be intelligible, they must have a stable sex expressed through stable gender<sup>9</sup>. When the gender expression is inverted, the assumption of the opposite sexuality is made – femininity in males or masculinity in females signifies homosexuality. Intelligible genders are understood as those which maintain “coherence and continuity among sex, gender and desire” (Butler, 1991; 23), thus reproducing the heteronormative, patriarchal structure. Consequently, identities deemed ‘unintelligible’ are made intelligible through the imposition of heteronormative ideals. This manifests itself, for example, in the imposition of heteronormative, asymmetrical logic of relationships where one’s masculinity means they must be attracted to the feminine or vice-versa is forced onto

---

<sup>9</sup> masculine = male; feminine = female

queer relationships (Connell, 2005), leading to the belief that each partner must perform roles associated with their gender expression (Mahdawi, 2016).

The notion of media as created to replicate and reinforce the hegemonic social order explains why positive, intersectional and multi-dimensional queer narratives are slow to appear on screen. Butler (1991) argues that most queer representations are victims of 'homo-invisibility', a covert form of homophobia and the marginalisation of queer identities. This is a persistent occurrence within the entertainment industry as heterosexuality continues to be perceived as the taken-for-granted norm for gender expression. Queerness is marked as the 'Other' and is signified through excessive portrayals (Butler, 1991; Renold, 2006), and the hegemony of heterosexuality is thus maintained. Heterosexuality and its intelligibility and 'normality' therefore depend on this presence of the contrasting 'Other' (Renold 2006). Butler (1991) suggests that this dependence reveals the fragility and malleability of the heterosexual matrix, which could potentially be subverted and rearticulated. The maintenance of heterosexuality and of normative notions of queerness in media representations may be one of the ways to prevent the established gender order from being reconstructed. However, something like this must occur in order for queer media representation to progress past its current state. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) call this process 'un-believing the matrix', where heteronormativity as the 'natural order of things' (17) and the subsequent practice of compulsory heterosexuality can be queered through disorganisation of the current structure.

### 3.3 Representation and stereotypes in popular media

Stuart Hall's writings on representation suggest that media representation is process of assigning meaning to the subjects being depicted. Butler (1991) regards representations as a normative function of language that either reveals or distorts what is assumed to be true about a social category. In a lecture on representation (1997), Hall specifically focuses on visual representation due to the way our culture is saturated in images. While there is no true representation of people (or events), a representation can generate numerous meanings which are formulated by the audience. Hall's theory is an attempt to find the extent to which the meaning communicated through representation distorts the true meaning of the subject of representation, and an attempt to find whether the subjects being depicted have any one fixed meaning at all (1997). Hall instead argues that representation cannot capture the true meaning, as there is nothing fixed or true to represent in the first place. Additionally, he argues that something has no fixed meaning until it has been represented, but even then, this

meaning changes according to the time and place of where the representation is constructed. In his lecture (1997), he suggests a cycle where the true meaning of the subject of representation depends on what meaning people assign to it, which in turn depends on how the subject is being represented. Importantly, Hall argues that people who are significantly different from the majority are represented in a binary way that presents polarised extremes. Difference is therefore marked through such binary representations to enlarge the gap between the majority and the minority.

Everything is categorised into types to make sense of the world – this is inevitable as humans understand things by classifying them (Dyer, in Hall, 1997). Stereotypes are however more rigid, as they reduce people’s complex identities and experiences into a few simple, widely recognised and easily understandable characteristics (Hall, 1997); they are normalised perceptions of the ‘Other’ (Schweinitz, 2010). Additionally, such characteristics are presented as fixed by nature. Stereotypes are tools for signifying difference between social groups - in Hall’s view (1997; 258), they are preconceived and oversimplified notions about an individual or a group of people based on different demographics<sup>10</sup>. Taylor and Willis (1999) explain stereotypes as the construction of generalised signs that categorise individuals or social groups. As stereotyping fixes difference, what is perceived in our society as ‘normal’ and acceptable is split from the abnormal and unacceptable (Hall, 1997). As Hall writes, “stereotyping is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” (258), and its practice occurs when there are great power imbalances. In the culture industry, stereotypes are a tool of power used by creators or producers – who are the part of the hegemonic social group - to represent marginalised groups in oversimplified ways. Stereotypes are thus used to affix a preferred meaning to a representation that the hegemonic group wishes to convey about those they are ‘representing’. Additionally, as Derrida (in Hall, 1997) notes, there are actually very few neutral binary oppositions – one pole is usually greatly disproportional in social privilege to the other, and there is thus always a relation of power within a binary opposition. Consequently, skewed media representations contribute to hostility towards marginalised groups (Ross, 2019).

Fürsich (2010) suggests that contemporary media functions as a normalising forum for the social construction of reality. According to the author, representations are carefully selected and constructed images that are continuously embedded and reproduced in media. They carry

---

<sup>10</sup> such as race, gender, or class

ideological connotations through establishing norms and common-sense assumptions about groups and institutions in society, normalising dominant world-views and ideologies. There is a supply of curated representations with which visual media is continuously saturated, and it is this saturation and repetitiveness that maintains such representations. Consequently, prolonged immersion in television and film can lead viewers to perceive media-constructed reality as actual social reality, and to indeed view recurrent representations as ‘true’. Adorno and Horkheimer’s notion of the culture industry (1944) presents similar arguments in suggesting that media consumers are psychologically conditioned into instantly accepting the social patterns presented on screen as mirroring social reality. The audience’s capability to deviate from hegemonic social norms is thus eliminated. As Hall argues – and Adorno and Horkheimer agree – representations in media are constructed to adhere to the hegemonic social order. Entertainment media is a powerful site of communicating ideologies regarding social hierarchies – it stereotypes minority groups either by excluding them from coverage, or by representing them in a limited and insufficient manner (Fürsich, 2010). Minorities are thus depicted in media as markedly different from the majority, or as abnormal, which, as Fürsich suggests, is often rooted in historical or scientific notions that perpetuate such differences.

### 3.4 The use of stereotypes in popular media representations of queerness

The above explained notions of social constructions of queerness, and of constructions of minorities as the ‘Other’ through stereotypical representations in media can be formulated into a theoretical framework that is applicable to the case of queer representations in popular media. Queer identities are the ‘Other’ in the heteronormative social order, and are classified into a binary opposition to fit into the pole that is contradictory and inferior to heterosexuality. It is thus made intelligible through simplistic, rigid categories. The heterosexual matrix aids in understanding queerness through a heteronormative lense, as it compartmentalizes queerness into normative categories. Manifestations of queerness which cannot be understood in normative ways remain unintelligible in heteronormative society, and are subject to more stigmatisation; perceptions and subsequent representations of non-normative queerness are thus subject to oversimplified binaries. Maudlin (2002), in contemplating the role of humour in the social construction of stereotypes, suggests that homophobic humour and stereotypical representations of queer men are rooted in heteronormative understandings of homosexuality as a lack of masculinity. Consequently, homosexuality is perceived as an undesirable role, and as a prescription of what men ought

not do. Stereotypical representations of queer men are based in their association with effeminacy, and are references to the dominant assumption that queer men can be identified by their feminine manners or appearance. Homosexuality is thus marked as significantly different from normative perceptions of masculinity that are associated with heterosexuality; subsequently, any deviations from this hegemonic masculinity are perceived as signs of homosexuality (Connell, 2005). This is an easy tool for stereotypical representations of queer men in media that can border on being homophobic, as any activities or expressions perceived as ‘feminine’ in men are seen as inferior. The difference between heterosexual and queer men is thus significantly exaggerated in media representations, and, subsequently, representations of queer men are saturated with simplistic images that suggest all queer men are effeminate and lack masculinity (Ellis, 2020). The representations of queer women are constructed in similar ways – queer women are perceived as universally masculine due to being desexualised and undesirable through the male gaze (Butler, 1991). Such stereotypical representations of queerness continue to be dominant due to the hegemonic status of heteronormativity, which renders sexual minorities invisible in media (Fitzgerald and Grossman, 2020).

Barthes’ semiotic model of communication analyses how meaning is created and communicated. It operates around the signifier, the signified, and the sign, which Barthes (2012) modifies into the form – an object’s physical elements, such as images or sounds; the concept – the mental ideas one attaches to the form, and signification – the actual object. Thomson (2021) applies this to media to explain stereotypical portrayals of queerness. In this view, the signification is a character, the form is their appearance, and the concept is the symbol signifying their queerness<sup>11</sup>. Characters’ sexual orientation, through their gender performance, is over-exaggeratedly signified to the viewers in order for them to interpret it as such based on their understanding and learned assumptions of what queerness ‘looks like’. This interpretation also explains how various meanings of a representation are assigned to it based on the audience’s knowledge or relation to the subject of depiction. This semiotic communication model therefore demonstrates how people interpret objects based on previous knowledge and assumptions, and coupled with the above discussed theoretical framework of social constructions of queerness, it explains why queer media representation in popular media has not completely let go of stereotypes when they pertain in society.

---

<sup>11</sup> e.g. their masculine or feminine clothing, depending on their gender, leads to the assumption that they are queer

### 3.5 Media representations in socialisation processes and social interactions

Academics interested in the processes of socialisation strongly argue that media is a powerful agent that greatly shapes individuals' socialisation as well as perception of the self (Genner and Süß, 2016; Paus-Hasebrink, Kulterer and Sinner, 2019). This is particularly evident during youth, as children and adolescents' understanding of the world is actively constructed through interactions with their environment, which includes media (Genner and Süß, 2016). This is because media provides symbols and meanings about social life, and through this, individuals construct their understandings of the world in the specific context of their upbringing. Media exposure also stimulates identity formation, where youth form beliefs about themselves (Paus-Hasebrink, Kulterer and Sinner, 2019). Media consumption thus motivates individuals to cultivate their worldview and values according to the images and representations they are presented with (Genner and Süß, 2016). This is particularly crucial during the transition from childhood into adulthood, as this period is prone to instability – one's identity is thus more fluid and more subject to exploration (Paus-Hasebrink, Kulterer and Sinner, 2019). This notion is helpful in investigating the influence that exposure to queer images in the media during youth has on queer people's identity and self-perception. Socialisation processes do not only affect one's understanding of reality; they also function in the cultivation of learned behaviour and fitting into acceptable social roles, part of which are heteronormative gender roles. Depending on the circumstances of one's upbringing and the degree to which gender roles and normative values regarding sexuality and gender were present, the exposure to queer media during youth may hold varying importance in a queer individual's identity formation. Consequently, depending on social stimulants, one's queerness manifests only in appropriate conditions (Finocchiaro, 2021), and the process of formation of a queer identity varies individually. As Plummer (in Seidman, 1996) argues, the social situations and interactions that lead to the building of a queer identity must be analysed, and exposure to negative perceptions of queerness are just as incorporated into one's self-conception as positive ones.

Genner and Süß (2016) suggest that individuals' understanding of the world is constructed through interaction with one's environment, of which media is part of; media consumption is then a type of social interaction. Everyday interaction is conceptualised by symbolic interactionists as a process whereby meanings and understandings regarding the social reality are created and reinforced (Blumer, 1969; Carter and Fuller, 2016). Through social interaction, individuals interpret each other's actions, and their response is stimulated by the

meaning they assign to a given situation (Blumer, 1969). One's behaviour and one's self is therefore shaped by constant interaction with others and by the meaning assigned to it. Importantly, as Blumer argues, human interaction is mediated through the use of symbols (1969; 66), the meanings of which are shaped and maintained through interaction.

As mentioned before, the media is saturated with symbols and meanings about concepts in the social reality. Symbolic interactionist accounts can thus be applied not only to media consumption, but also to queerness, and link the two together. Symbolic interactionism has been applied to different sociological subfields, cultural studies, as well as to the construction of gender and sexuality (Carter and Fuller, 2016). It is also utilised as a theory concerning media, particularly as media is a powerful agent of creation and propagation of shared symbols. Symbolic interactionism is therefore useful as it can be utilised to understand how media affects the meanings of shared symbols, and how such symbols and meanings influence individuals. An adapted model of the key points of symbolic interactionism may thus be utilised here in explaining how the exposure to queer presence in the media influence queer people's self-perception and identity formation, as well as how representations of queerness presented in media and their meanings are reproduced in everyday interactions and queer people's experiences. Longmore (1998) suggests that the symbolic meanings associated with queerness influence how individuals perceive themselves, how they relate to others, and how others perceive and relate to them. Expressions and representations of queerness, like other social roles, are symbolic (Longmore, 1998), and the shared meanings assigned to them – meanings emanating from the constructions of sexuality and gender based on the heteronormative reality – are reproduced not only through everyday interactions, but also through their projection into media representations of queerness. Plummer (in Seidman, 1996) writes that exposure to queer representations in media is an important source for learning 'the homosexual role'. Media representations of queerness thus provide a point of reference for queer people to understand that such expressions of the self exist, and consequently, their queer identity can be formulated. Continued consumption of media representations also reproduces dominant and stereotypical perceptions of queerness in individuals' understandings of it, which manifests itself in everyday interactions that queer people experience with the heteronormative world.

This theoretical framework combines the social constructionist theories of gender and sexuality as being a product of a specific cultural and historical context of being biologically innate with queer theorist utilisation of such notions in conceptualising the heteronormative

gender order and heterosexual matrix, which constructs queerness as intelligible through categories that contradict it to normative sexuality and gender expressions. Accounts of representation and stereotypes, particularly from Hall's work, explain how marginalised groups are othered and how their difference from hegemonic social groups is marked and exaggerated through simplistic representations. Such theory can be applied to the case of queer representations in media, where queerness is presented as significantly different from hegemonic genders and sexualities through stereotypes stemming from normative understandings. The other part of the theoretical framework concerns itself with linking exposure to queer images in media during youth to the formation of a queer identity, and conceptualises this through symbolic interactionism, where media consumption is a form of social interaction, and where shared meanings are communicated and reproduced through dominant representations of queerness.

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1 Methodological considerations

###### 4.1.1 Case study approach

The thesis project assumed the qualitative case study approach – particularly an explanatory case study - in the form of a small sample of participants and semi-structured interviews investigating queer people's perceptions of queer representations in popular media. Case study research provides in-depth accounts when studying a particular phenomenon; it is particularly significant in studying communities (Johnson, 2006), and aids in understanding matters through the participants' perspective (Zainal, 2007). It requires a smaller number of participants for collection of in-depth and robust data, and in the case of this research project, its methods are appropriate to the research question and for gathering data from the group of interest. The explanatory case study is a particularly useful approach which looks for causalities while also explaining phenomena in the data by closely studying it (Zainal, 2007) – this is applicable especially in the examination of whether exposure to queer depictions in media significantly affects queer people's self-perception. While the case study approach has been criticised for not contributing to scientific generalisation due to small participant group (Yin, 1984), it allows for the gathering of contextual, in-depth data (Baxter and Jack, 2008), which in turn aids in explaining complex real-life situations that cannot be captured by

research aiming to generalise (Zainal, 2007). Case studies are especially useful in in-depth investigations of a particular phenomenon, as in the case of this thesis. Through a small participant sample group, I was therefore able to have detailed conversations about queer people's perceptions of queer representations in media and how this influenced their identity, and was able to collect data unique to each participant without aiming to generalise them.

#### 4.1.2 Queer methodology

A queer methodology is essential to practice when researching queer identities. In a general sense, queer methodology is a way of questioning the way knowledge is produced when queer identities are the subject of interest (Rooke, 2009; 157), as well as doing justice to the complex ways people live their queer identities. Queer methodology is any type of research that is situated within theoretical frameworks that emphasize and question taken-for-granted power relations and meanings (Browne and Nashe, 2010). Ghaziani and Brim (2019) invite researchers who wish to engage with queer methods to reject any dominant rigid categories and dualisms or binaries<sup>12</sup>, as they are inconsistent with the reality of social life. Researchers should instead embrace the logic of social construction; to see sexuality and gender identity and their meanings as capable of changing over time (p. 11). Rather than subscribing to existing dualisms, queer methods allow for multiplicity and the emergence of new, more accurate and encompassing categories. Using queer methodology goes beyond researching queer lives; it also means questioning the conventions of qualitative research in regards to the 'ethnographic self' in writing and doing research. It therefore means to bend established orientations of ethnography and its practices by creating a space of praxis where identity categories can be deconstructed (Rooke, 2009). Rooke suggests that this is done by unravelling researchers' subjectivities regarding gender and sexuality and the way these are constructed as stable in writing (153). Through being reflexive, the researcher acknowledges their subject position in the power relations of research. This translates into being attentive to the researcher's own sexual subjectivity and performativity of the self in the research process (Rooke, 2009; 154). I must therefore be critical and reflexive about my position as a researcher, my queer identity, the relations between the two, and how this can benefit but also impair every step of the research process. As queer theory aims to question the way cultural

---

<sup>12</sup> the male-female gender binary, its associated societal roles and expectations, and its subsequent definition of heterosexuality as natural; the marking of non-normative sexual and gender identities as the 'other' as opposed to heterosexuality, even the notion of monogamous relations as normative

artefacts privilege heterosexuality (Namaste, 1994), it is likewise inappropriate and not in line with this approach to privilege any specific LGBTQ+ identity over others. The interviews focus on participants' opinions on queer media representation, I however kept the questions very open, so participants were able to choose what media/aspects of media they want to talk about. To keep the focus, however, I focused on queer media representation where the term 'queer' implies deviation or dissonance from heteronormativity in terms of sexuality and gender, and is understood as an umbrella term for non-normative sexualities and identities (Jagose, 1996, in Ahmed, 2006).

#### 4.1.3 Positionality

It is important to note my position as a researcher in this project. The concept of positionality implies one's world view and the position they assume about a research project's social and political context (Holmes, 2020). According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), positionality is a reflection of the position a researcher has adopted within a research project in acknowledgment, and it affects how the research is conducted, and its outcomes (Rowe, 2014). Importantly, the concept of positionality entails that a researcher is not separate from the social processes of their interest (Holmes, 2020). It is important to determine whether my position in the project is that of an insider or an outsider to the community of interest, and how advantageous or useful for the research this position is.

As a queer person who has actively participated in the queer community in Skåne, I can assume an insider position here, especially in the participant recruitment process. I am a member of numerous social media groups for local queer people, attend many events, and have friends that belong in the local queer community. I am however not Swedish and have not lived in Sweden long enough to align myself with its society, which, at the same time, makes me an outsider. I have grown up in Czechia and am more aware of the specific social and cultural reality there. I have however never been a part of the queer community, as I have studied abroad for almost 7 years - I therefore have less understanding how the community and its networks operates, which presented challenges during participant recruitment. In both cultural settings, I am therefore in between an insider and outsider position in different ways. This may be beneficial, as it does not result in biases that lead to portraying the two countries in differing and unequal ways; it also allows me to regard participants from both countries on the same ground, and not gather skewed results. My queer identity as a queer person grants me, to varying degrees, the insider position in both settings through the ability to understand

the experiences of others in the queer community due to my *a priori* knowledge and lived experiences of being queer and what this entails in both countries. My own experiences and knowledge also allow me to construct more insightful questions, as I partly have done in the construction of the interview guide. I can utilise my queer identity, as well as my position as a student knowledgeable in the field of sociology and queer theory, to situate myself within the context of the research subject, and to question the binary, heteronormative society, and how it reproduces its oppressive values through popular media.

#### 4.1.4 Auto-ethnography

The basis for formulating this thesis project stems from my own experiences as a queer person whose identity was considerably influenced and formed by popular media consumption. I therefore feel that an auto-ethnographic account is a useful starting point for the research process of this project. From my personal experiences, I have useful insight on the matter that I can reflect on (Harding, 2008), and that I can utilise especially in constructing the interview guide and in reflecting on the research process (Méndez, 2013). While this method is highly subjective and has been criticised for its self-indulgent nature, it can be a meaningful tool to begin research with “an account from the inside“ (Hine, 2015; p. 83).

In my adolescence, my household was rather conservative, and politics were not a favoured topic of discussion; the media I consumed therefore largely changed my perceptions of normative society. It was my first point of exposure to the concept of queerness and to depictions of queer people’s stories and experiences. The sudden exposure to sources like this helped me alter my skewed view of the queer community that was dominant in my home and gave me access to discussions about queer identities both in person and online. It also helped me very gradually realise that I am queer, and to find likeable and relatable models. The periods of instability and unsureness about my sexuality and gender identity that I have gone through were partially settled due to the gradual shift in popular media and the increased appearance of queer characters in that were portrayed multi-dimensionally and projected ways of being queer I have not seen before, and I could identify with. The majority of media with queer themes available to me during my adolescence focused on queer men, who were favoured by the media industry over other queer identities, and their depiction was mostly based on old-fashioned stereotypes of overexaggerated femininity or promiscuity. In film, TV shows and reality TV alike, it was either mostly queer men who presented one form of

sexuality and gender expression (such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*), or it was media marketed through queer-baiting, where any actually visible or explicit queer content was only discussed in fandom spaces. While exposure to any form of queer media was useful, this left me wondering and confused about whether I fit into this community to begin with, and if so, how. Only recently has the media industry and queer community alike started giving way to a multiplicity of identities and ways of being queer. While some of this media has made an effort to dive deeper into depicting queer people through positive representations, the remaining productions merely boasted this supposed achievement for marketing purposes, much to the queer audience's disappointment. I myself have been a victim multiple times, when I was younger – BBC's *Sherlock*, for example, was the prime example of queer-baiting - but also just in the past year or so, predominantly with major production companies such as Marvel Studios and their recent blockbuster *The Eternals*, marketed under the groundbreaking first openly queer superhero, which resulted in a barely-there scene that did not contribute to the plot. I therefore wanted to use my experiences with queer media representation as basis for this thesis and through this situate the issue with queer media representation and how this is perceived by queer people.

## 4.2 Data collection

### 4.2.1 Sampling and participant recruitment

I used the purposeful sample method, combined with snowball sampling. In qualitative research, these methods are utilised for selecting information-rich cases related to the subject of interest (Palinkas et al., 2016), and judgements about who to sample is determined by the purpose of the study and its context (Emmel, 2013). The sample population I chose is queer-identifying people who are 18-25 years old and are university students. This age group was most easily available to me, and I felt that it would be easier to interview people of similar age as me, especially regarding their queer identities and media consumption. Furthermore, the age group of choice tends to perceive media in a particularly critical way that comes with being a digitally native generation that is comfortable with cross-referencing and integrating different sources of information (Cristea, 2021). I selected specifically university students as this demographic is, again, the most accessible to me. I however understand that a student sample is not an accurate representation of all people in the sample age group, and that people without higher education may have different opinions and outlooks on the research

topic. I have recruited students from different academic backgrounds, as this is more representative of the university student body at large and ensures anonymity.

To recruit participants, I created a research flyer (Appendix 1.1) stating the desired demographics and my research intentions. I placed physical copies on notice boards in various campuses of Lund University, as well as posting a digital copy of the flyer on several Facebook groups that were affiliated with the university or the local queer community. To recruit Czech participants, I posted a digital copy of the research flyer, translated into Czech (Appendix 1.2), on a few queer Facebook groups. As I am unfamiliar with the queer community there and am not an active member, I also emailed some queer organisations, such as the facilitators of Prague Pride, *Trans\*parent*<sup>13</sup>, and the queer club *Charlie* at Univerzita Karlova in Prague, asking to repost my flyer on their social media. I recruited five Swedish and five Czech participants. The Swedish participants are all students at or recent graduates of Lund University, and the Czech participants are all students at or recent graduates of Univerzita Karlova in Prague or at Západočeská Univerzita in Pilsen. All participants reached out to me through or e-mail. In Czechia, I initially received insufficient responses; one of the participants, however, gave me contacts for acquaintances who were also interested in taking part, and I contacted them to ensure their interest in participating. Participant profiles can be found in Appendix 4.

#### 4.2.2 Interview guide

The interview guide (Appendix 2) was constructed to cover four topics – the first part concerned the participants' queer identity, the journey they took through settling into themselves, and feelings of safety in coming out. While this data is not necessary for my thesis, I added it to make the participants feel comfortable talking about personal matters, and to get a sense of who they are before continuing with the rest of the interview. Recalling these memories in the beginning was helpful to participants in answering other questions later on. The second section of the interview guide focused on heteronormative values and roles as participants experienced them in their household growing up, as well as in the context of their countries in a more general sense. The third section concerned participants' opinions on queer representation in media. It was constructed in such a way so the questions would first spur general thoughts on the matter and narrowed down more and more into specific aspects of the

---

<sup>13</sup> an organisation devoted to fighting for transgender rights in Czechia

ways queerness is portrayed in media. The last section intersected queer media representation with participants' identity and concerned participants' recalling how media affected their identity or self-expression during their childhood/teenage years, and how it has affected them (if it has) since their first realisation they were queer.

#### 4.2.3 Interviews

I conducted the interviews in Czechia in the period of December 2021 to January 2022. Three interviews were conducted in Prague, and one in Pilsen, all in-person upon agreement with the participants, and in cafes of their choice. All COVID-19 restrictions were followed during the interviews. One interview was conducted through Zoom in later January 2022. In Sweden, the interviews were conducted over later January and early February 2022. I met all five participants in person upon their agreement, on the Lund University campus or a cafe of their choice. The interviews were all roughly an hour long and audio recordings were made with the participants' consent. The interviews conducted in Sweden were all in English, and three of the interviews conducted in Czechia were in Czech and two in English, as the participants were fluent in English and felt more comfortable talking about their queer identity and experiences in English.

#### 4.2.4 Transcription and coding

I transcribed all approximately 10 hours of audio recordings from the interviews manually. While this aspect process was very time-consuming, it allowed me to engage with the data much more actively than electronic transcription would, and I was able to get to know each participant all over again and revisit our conversations; it was also a way to discover new themes or findings that were missing from the first impressions and initial results I noted. A naturalized transcription method was privileged here, which is where as many details as possible from the oral discourse are captured. Speech is expressed in writing as said (Oliver et al., 2005), therefore representing a "real world" approach (Cameron, 2001, in Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019), as opposed to correction of grammar in written discourse and standardisation of accents and informal speech during denaturalized transcription (Oliver et al., 2005). My chosen method of transcription therefore presents data naturally and accurately (Oliver et al., 2005), as it holds the forms it took upon collection from participants.

The transcripts were manually coded. Manual coding was more appropriate in this project as I was able to access the data from a closer distance, and it enabled me to connect more with the participants and their stories. While I acknowledge that coding data manually may be a subjective process, it allowed for data immersion. I was also able to code interviews in two different languages using the same method, which would be a more complicated process using software. I approach the coding process with a combination of the inductive and deductive approaches – while I have prior assumptions that stem from the literature review and my own experiences, I have derived all codes from the data instead of starting with pre-existing codes or themes (Chandra and Shang, 2019), which will follow by using theories for analysing the data that fit it. Through an initial round of open coding, I was able to identify the most frequent themes and create a summary such codes (see Appendix 3 for list of codes). This was followed by a closer reading of the transcriptions and a more detailed coding, where I particularly looked for major differences between the two nationalities, and for all film or TV shows mentioned to later create a typology of different categories of queer media or the way queer people are depicted in media, and participants' opinions on them. The coding was done manually on the *Goodnotes* app, through colour coding and highlighting phrases in the interviews to match with the different codes.

#### 4.3 Ethics and reflections

On the research flyer, I stated the purpose of my research, as well as the method of interviewing and making audio recordings. When I met with participants, I informed them about their right to withdraw at any point during the interview, as well as their anonymity in this research project. Prior to starting the interview, I also guided them through all of the interview sections, so they were familiar with the themes. I asked all participants for consent to audio record them and informed them that I would be the only person hearing the recordings. I did not personally know any of the participants prior to the recording to ensure unbiased questions or conversation. Upon meeting with participants, we exchanged names, pronouns and some small talk to imply that our interview sessions are a safe space for them to share anything they want. I had good rapport with most of the participants, which I predominantly attribute to our shared queer identities and experiences, which aided our discussions and their elaboration on various points. A few of the interviews felt a bit stilted as the participants may not have been used to talking about these topics or did not usually talk this much in general – some of the interviews were therefore shorter than others; all

participants have however answered all questions as mentioned. I gave all participants the opportunity to read the transcripts of their interviews in case they want any parts omitted. To further ensure anonymity, participants chose fake names for the purpose of using their data. They were informed of the inclusion of participant profiles, and had the opportunity to not include any of their personal information in these.

As Rolin (2009) argues, unbalanced power relations between interviewer and interviewees can distort or suppress evidence by intimidating informants, invoking uncomfortable emotions, and undermining trust between the researcher and the researched. This must be considered especially as I am working with and researching members of a marginalised group. It was therefore important to level out power relations within this research project as much as possible, particularly as while I received valuable data from participants, and as they are gaining the opportunity to openly convey their experiences and opinions. The fact that my participants and I share identities and experiences – not just in queerness, but also in education, and with half of them, nationality - creates a comfortable, safe space for open, honest conversations, especially for those who are unwelcomed to express such opinions in their social environment.

Perhaps the biggest issue I had throughout conducting the interviews was a slight language barrier. Although I am Czech and am fluent in the language, I've lived and studied abroad for seven years and rarely use the language. I struggled with constructing the Czech versions of the questions and communicating some concepts or terminology related to queer media, as these terms are not used in the Czech language, and one is not familiar with them unless they frequent English-spoken parts of the Internet. Translating my questions into Czech was therefore a bit of a struggle as I had to slightly alter the wording and language, which in turn resulted in different meaning of the questions, especially with terms specific to the English language such as 'queer-baiting'. Language was thus an aspect of the interview process, as well as of the findings, that became more of a factor than I expected.

## **5. Findings and analysis**

### **5.1 Perceptions of queer representations in popular media**

Representations of queerness in popular media were perceived by all participants as predominantly lacking and based on negative stereotypes. This notion was expressed in

varying degrees of frustration and dissatisfaction, and overall, the role of stereotypes in depicting queerness in popular media emerged as a negatively perceived concept. “On the surface, I think it (queer media representation) is quite shit”, Dylan sighed when asked about their thoughts on current queer representation. For someone like Dylan, who seeks out queer media content and proclaims to have seen almost every piece of media with queer narratives there is, a summary like this is especially disappointing. Representations of queerness were primarily perceived as rooted in normative understandings of gender and sexuality, and as being portrayed through marked difference from heterosexuality. As a result, certain identities or manifestations of queerness are privileged, which renders other identities as underrepresented and thus invisible (Schacht, 2019).

This is accordance with the literature review, which mentioned that most depictions of queerness in media are saturated with images of homosexual men and lesbians, while bisexuality, for example, is severely underrepresented. Many participants voiced similar thoughts – Ylva noted that “The queer representation comes down to gay men- a certain type of gay men”. While queer men therefore cover most queer representation, this favouring does not lead to increased quality, as they are instead predominantly depicted in stereotypical and reductive ways. Kuba, for example, said that “gay men are portrayed either as extremely promiscuous, or we’re the best friends of a main character, usually a woman.” Such depictions of male homosexuality as displays of femininity are frequently realised through the ‘gay best friend’ character – a trope that is employed when a queer character does not contribute to the plot, and his primary function is to provide comedic relief. It is manifested in the form of a homosexual man who is a sidekick to a lead female character and perpetrates the idea of homosexual men being overly feminine, preferring to befriend women, and being interested in typically ‘feminine’ activities. “They’re always like, super girly, it’s obvious that they’re queer from the start.”, Ambrose supplied. Participants often said that as this kind of depiction of queer men is often the first contact for the audience, it projects this idea and reinforces the notion that all homosexual men are like this. The ‘gay best friend’ trope is therefore not just an overdone stereotypical way to depict queer men, it also determines who is and who is not perceived by society as a queer man – it strongly presents feminine queer men as the only recognised version of queerness that men can express. Such stereotypical portrayals of homosexual men can be understood as stemming from its heteronormative perceptions, which, as Connell (2005) notes, associate male homosexuality with a lack of masculinity. Femininity in queer male characters is overexaggerated in order to signify the

difference between homosexual and heterosexual men. As queerness in men is understood as linked with femininity – as the heterosexual matrix shows – queer men are portrayed as engaging with ‘feminine’ activities and as being friends with women. Additionally, queer men are portrayed as visually different from heterosexual men with the use of visual signs, such as ‘feminine’ style of dress or evidently ‘feminine’ behaviour (Maudlin, 2002) – as Kuba said, queer male characters are most easily recognisable through “a higher pitched voice, neat clothing.”

Participants therefore felt that queerness is represented in media through marking its difference from heteronormative genders and sexualities as signified and overexaggerated. This is most often communicated through visually marking queer characters as different from the rest of the cast. Following Thomson’s application of Barthes’ semiotic model of communication, this is most often manifested in the way the characters look or behave. Queer characters are thus ascribed traits that are associated with social categories and are easily recognisable by the normative audience (Marshall, 2006) – queerness is thus signified through universally understood symbols. Some participants noted that they recognise the several ‘models’ on which queer characters are based - mannerisms and features instantly noticeable as ‘different’ and associated with the stereotypical notions of what a queer person is. Dylan noted that queer characters – especially when there is only one in the whole production - are always visibly and obviously different from others, and this is set in visual markers, such as dyed hair or a different style of clothing. “In *Deadpool 2*, I think, there’s this lesbian couple where one has short hair and the other one has pink hair.”, Ambrose said, giving an example. These depictions imply that society expects to be able to identify queer people, and different queer identities, by obvious qualities. As Hall (1997) argues, stereotypes encompass the complex experiences and identity of a person or social groups, and reduce them to a few memorable, vivid and easily recognized characteristics which are exaggerated. This notion explains why, for example, the representation of nonbinary characters relies on androgyny – which was noted by some participants - as this is how the nonbinary identity has been compartmentalised for easier understanding. Stereotyping therefore manifests in presenting the image of what most people have when it comes to queer identities, which makes a lot of its members and complex manifestations of queerness invisible.

As a few participants implied during our conversations, the current trend to feature queer stories in popular media reflects how most depiction of queer people is handled and carried out. The largest concern participants had was the portrayal of queer people as one-

dimensional, particularly in the way their personality and any plot lines revolved around their queer identity. There is a lack of narratives where queer characters have a place in the story for more than just their queerness, where they are queer and something else, and where they encounter issues or struggles unrelated to their queerness. As Kuba voiced:

If they took some of these common tropes and wrote them so a queer person experienced them from their point of view, it would be interesting and a way to renew these plots. That someone is queer *and* they have problems at school, or struggle with mental health or something like that.

This would mean to place more queer characters into lead roles, as participants noted that the superficial quality of queer characters is most common when they are side characters. As Ambrose noted:

When there's a queer character but they're not, like, the main role, there's no depth to it. Their whole personality and back story, if there is any, is based entirely on their queerness. It's frustrating because it shows how people see us.

This implies that society views queer people as individuals who are unworthy of having narratives more complex than their queerness, which is reflected in the way they are represented in media. It also implies that such simplistic and superficial representations are a way to maintain the superiority of heterosexuality, where heterosexuals are given main, complex roles. Queer representations offer an incomplete view of the way queer people live and experience their queerness, which leads to a curated pool of portrayal of normalised and stereotypical understandings of queerness (Creager, 2019). Hall's (1997) notion that marginalised groups especially are made recognizable by a few memorable characteristics is helpful here. The portrayal of queerness through recurrent and simple roles maintains the shared understandings of queerness in heteronormative society (Thomson, 2013).

Furthermore, such representations are a form of injustice, as they reinforce queer people's inferior position in heteronormative society (Porfido in Peele, 2007). These oversimplified modes of representation are perceived to be more frequent when queer people are not involved in the production. As Dylan noted:

You can tell a big difference when the producer is queer and isn't, you know? In the way the characters are developed, and also in the very one-dimensional characters and story line, of like, always trouble coming out.... and how the sad stories evolve around the queer identity.

Dylan's thoughts present some of the tropes most commonly used in queer representations that were also mentioned by other participants. A frequently mentioned aspect of queer representations was overexaggerated sexualisation of queer relationships, and sexual scenes as the only signification of queerness. "It's used as a shock factor, so people go away feeling stunned by what they saw", is what Kuba said on the subject. He specifically talked about HBO's *White Lotus*, which features a queer male character, and a scene where upon a hotel guest opening the manager's office door, he is revealed to be engaging in an act of anilingus with a hotel staff member. Kuba said he felt upset while watching this scene, as it projects the idea that all homosexual men engage in this sexual activity, and that homosexual men are promiscuous and always desire sex. "Sexual scenes with queer themes are too obscene", he voiced. Maudlin (2002) suggests that the association of homosexual men as always interested in sex is, alongside association of homosexual men with effeminacy, one of the dominant stereotypes, leading to the perception of homosexual men as 'immature and animalistic'. This raunchy and pornographic-like quality of queer sexual scenes is perceived by participants as not unlike a fetish, especially when portraying sapphic relationships. Lesbian sexual scenes in popular media are created not even for whoever finds women sexually attractive, but solely for heterosexual men, as Kuba put it, as they are predominantly orchestrated by heterosexual people themselves, who do not fully understand queer sex, and assimilate the act to heterosexual sex.

According to participants, there are therefore two models from which queer sexual scenes in popular media follow. Sex involving two men is a shock factor which depicts them as promiscuous, done quickly, roughly and often in public places, rarely showing how queer men actually have sex and most often only showing anal sex, often being the only way in which queerness is shown. Sex involving two women is very explicit, with overly long, pornography-like scenes. Additionally, sexualised depictions of queer women are a way to make them desirable through the male gaze – queer women are otherwise undesirable and thus desexualised (Butler, 1991), as they are unattainable for heterosexual men. Neither of these representations show the depth of queer sexuality, and they are another point of misinformation that affects not only how society views the subject of queer sex, but also how queer people themselves understand queer sex. Just as lesbian sexual scenes – and thus most representations of queer women - are perceived as fetishisation, so are representations of queer men. On the subject of fetishisation, Ylva noted:

In many series oriented towards young women, the favourite couple is the gay one. This shows how most straight women think of gay men, the kind of relationship – like, one is a twink, and the other one is, like, manly. It's often very stereotypical, heteronormative gender norms in the relationship.

This indicates that heteronormative values are often enforced on queer people and their relationships, in the way they are represented in media, and in the way they manifest in real life in the pressure to conform to ideals. The depiction of queerness through stereotypical and overexaggerated portrayals of intimacy further translates to many cisgender-heterosexual people fetishising and sexualising queer people in real life, for example in the form of inappropriate questions about their sex life. Hall (1997) brings up fantasies and fetishisation when considering stereotypes about minority groups. He uses Said's (1978) writings in *Orientalism*, where he remarks that the general idea who an 'Oriental' is also emerged from desires and projections – this may be applied to imply that normative notions of any minority group emerge not just from binarized and reductive understandings, but also from fantasies. Hall argues that such fantasies, especially of sexual nature, are represented as pathological forms of 'Otherness'. As queer sexuality does not fit the heteronormative ideal, and does not adhere to the procreative imperative (Fitzgerald and Grossman, 2020) it is constructed as the 'Other', and this is again done by signifying the difference. This therefore explains why portrayals of queer sexuality in popular media are overexaggerated, as it is differentiated from heterosexual intimacy.

Another trope in queer media representation that was often brought up was the distinct lack of happy and positive narratives. Participants perceived most portrayals of queerness as being centered around struggles with relationships, family, mental health, homophobia or transphobia. Additionally, these struggles mostly stem from one's queer identity, which, as some participants noted, creates the idea that queer people are unable to, or should not, be happy. "It always seems like whatever tragedy is a punishment for being queer.... you have to go through all this mud to reach the happy ending.", Dylan said. The content or happy ending often comes at a price for queer characters, making it seem like they must prove themselves or earn it first. This depressing element of queer stories was only acknowledged as acceptable when it is either based on a real story, or when the queer narratives in such depictions are of high quality. When basing media on real stories, however, some participants have noticed that creators prefer to use only use tragedies as inspiration, such as *The Danish Girl* or *The Imitation Game*, creating the narrative that the suffering in queer people's lives is

much more present than the happy moments. These examples present the tendency to overexaggerate the tragedy in queer representations. Some tragic queer representations were still well-received, the condition being that they show positive representations of queerness (mostly stemming from involvement of queer creators) and that they are well done.

*Moonlight*, a semi-autobiographical piece based on the unpublished dramaturgical play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, shows the reality of how African American queer men experience the stages of life. *Moonlight* is an Oscar awarded film, the first queer-themed one to take the title, and according to several participants, it is well-deserved. “I understand that it’s very good representation of how it is to be a gay black man in the U.S. even though I’m not a gay man.”, Ylva said when giving examples of queer representations she liked. “*Moonlight* is a very good example of a sad queer story, but then it’s also a fantastic film.”, Dylan noted. The consensus was that even though *Moonlight* does showcase a tragic account of queer narratives, this side of queer representation is important too, especially when done well like in this case.

It is therefore important to show this side of queer lives as well, as it paints a more realistic picture; focusing overly on the side of struggles, however, does not give the queer audience much hope for a happy and fulfilling life. Portraying queerness as tragic may be another way in which it is marked as different from heteronormative society, and it also creates another power imbalance where queer people are objects of pity due to their tragic lives. Anna’s reasoning for why the lack of happy narratives is so evident is because queer people are a subject of sympathy which helps the heterosexuals “feel a kind of superior sense, like it’s gonna satisfy some of their complexes.” It may therefore be easier for both the audience and creators to sympathise with queer people – or any marginalised group, for that matter – as they cannot see themselves in such a role, and as being the subject of marginalisation is understood only to induce misery, leaving no space for joy in life. Colangelo (2017) attributes this to the phenomenon of ‘misery porn’, where the purpose of marginalised characters is to provide shock value of human suffering. It establishes and reinforces the hegemony of heteronormative genders and sexualities – heterosexuals are shown as deserving of ‘normal’, happy lives, and are painted as saviours on who the miserable queer people are dependent on.

Dylan mentioned that the portrayals of queerness in oversimplified manners “takes away the responsibility of actually developing an interesting character”, they are merely a tool for recognition by the heterosexual audience. While stereotypical representations may help some people recognise themselves, as Dylan noted, they continued by saying that “it doesn’t do

much for the actual, like, de-establishment of the oppressing system towards queer people, because it's not speaking to, I don't know, challenging the system." Queer representations in media thus reinforce the hegemony of heterosexuality, and, as Fürsich (2010) notes, this is because media is too closely aligned with hegemonic social groups to be interested in changing the status quo. This also corresponds with Adorno and Horkheimer's (1944) notion that media representations adhere to the hegemonic social order, as it is a powerful agent of communication ideologies regarding social hierarchies. Creager (2019) notes that producers are careful to depict queerness in non-normative ways, as they are perceived by heteronormative society as controversial. "I feel like a lot of the queer representation is not speaking to a queer crowd, it's speaking to a cis-het crowd and their perception of a queer person.", Dylan mentioned. Much of queer representation is thus perceived as being targeted towards a much more general audience than the queer community. While queer representations in media are growing in number, which aids in its normalisation in mainstream, heteronormative society, they are modelled on binary and reductive understandings, as was explored above. Additionally, Fürsich (2010) argues that commercial media industries are profit-driven and cater to large, mainstream audiences, and they are thus to blame for a lack of complex representations that would challenge the problematic ones.

As was noted in the literature review, the role of corporate companies in using representations of queerness (or any marginalised group in general) for monetary gains is questionable (Desjardins et al., 2021). Mainstream entertainment companies tend to market their productions through containing queer images in order to attract the audience (Cheng, 2020; Mitchell, 2018). Such productions are in the hands of producers who are not interested in representing queer identities in a way that is beneficial other than for profit (Murphy, 2021). As a result, queerness is portrayed in normative ways that are understandable and recognizable by the general public. This is reflected in the simplistic and superficial nature of how queerness tends to be depicted so it is easily recognisable by the general audience, as discussed earlier. Related to this problem of orienting queer representation towards the queer audience is the phenomenon of queer-baiting, a marketing technique where the audience is lured in under the pretence of a queer plotline being included, only for it to either not be realised at all, or realised poorly (Needham, 2018). When breaching the subject of queer-baiting, many participants agreed that while it is "a brilliant marketing strategy, because a bunch of queer people are going to watch it even if it's just a tiny amount of representation" – as Kaj noted - it makes them disappointed to see their community being used for clout and

boosting the box office income in this way. Frequently mentioned examples of films or TV shows that utilised queer-baiting were BBC *Sherlock*, *Hannibal*, *Star Wars* and *Supernatural*, as well as media that did include queer representation, but it was insufficient, mostly in the form of short scenes depicting a queer relationship that can easily be deleted in order to show the film in countries where views on homosexuality are less lenient. “It’s not representation.”, was Ambrose’s summary of how they see queer-baiting. “You can’t show a queer couple in the background or something and say that’s representation, because it’s not even clear sometimes.” It can be concluded that queer-baiting, as well as simplistic, stereotypical depictions of queerness, are harmful for queer people, and carry negative connotations. “It’s a deliberate strategy to, sort of, want that crowd, but also not wanting to actually work towards queer representation.” Dylan’s commentary implies that queer-baiting is used to lure the queer audience in, but there is no reward in the form of seeing fulfilling queer narratives, and viewers are instead left unsatisfied with fleeting portrayals of queerness. This further contributes to maintenance of the heteronormative gender order, where hegemonic social groups, who are involved in media production, utilise the inferior queer community for their own benefit – monetary gains – while maintaining this hierarchy.

While queer representations in media were perceived as stereotypical and reductive in nature, all participants also feel that queer representation is a subject of progress, and that it has been or is “getting better”. This coincided with a common answer to a question measuring the extent to which societal views of queer people are reflected in their fictional depiction – they are both moving forward. Dean (2007) offers a chronological account of such progress, as mentioned in the literature review. This progress was however not perceived in the same way for all participants. For Kaj, the fact that stereotypes are still dominant in queer representations suggests that society is not necessarily accepting of queer people more than previously, which is why he prefers to look for queer representation in novels. As a step towards a more inclusive and representational depiction of queer people in popular media, all participants said that letting more queer people take part in the production process is crucial. “I think a big thing is involving queer people with writing, you know?” Lim said. It is evident when there is a lack of queer producers, as queer representation is reduced to stereotypes or other over-simplifications. There is therefore a need for creators to present more varied narratives, inspired by real queer lives rather than by already existing and over-used fictional accounts. A rise in the quantity of queer narratives that are created by queer people themselves lead to educating the heterosexual audience, as Maya offered. Awareness,

understanding and education is required when heterosexual people write queer representations.

You can represent other groups without it being offensive, you just need to be educated and know what you're doing. A man can write a book about a woman and it can still be good, and the same can be here, cis people can present queer people without it being bad, as long as they respect us. (Maya)

Ross (2019) suggests that queer media – that is, media with queer representations that are produced by as well as for queer people – offer more positive representations through countering the normative narratives and stereotypes that currently encompass queer representations. The impact of producers who are part of marginalised groups is thus potentially significant. This can however be fully realised only in the occurrence of the shift in the current social hierarchy of sexualities, where queer people are given more space and agency in positions currently occupied by heterosexuals. Atkinson and DePalma (2009) call this process 'un-believing the matrix', where the hegemonic nature of heteronormativity can be queered through disorganisation of the current structure. While a major shift cannot occur with the current rigidity of the heteronormative gender order, such processes can be seen on a micro scale, in the form of queer people, especially queer people of colour, challenging current queer representations by producing media that reflects their own complex narratives.

The tendency for or queer people of intersecting marginalised identities to be underrepresented in media was brought up as well. As Dylan commented:

It has to be intersectional, like watching queer characters that are also, you know, in a wheelchair, or people of colour, and all of this... come from a working-class background. It's usually very white.

Diverse and intersectional narratives are therefore what several participants seek in queer media representation. Several shows were frequently mentioned as a good example of this and as personal favourites. *Pose*, an FX production depicting ball culture in 1980s New York and struggles of the queer community with the AIDS epidemic, was perceived by some to be one of the few shows where queer people have been involved in both the production process and the acting. It is a rare case of intersectionality, where transgender people of colour are the central plot point. *Pose* was praised for its diverse depiction of queer identities and struggles, and it being educational on ball culture and the AIDS epidemic while offering well-written fictional accounts of how queer people lived in this era. Its production was also frequently

discussed, and most importantly the domination of transgender women of colour in the cast, as they are severely underrepresented in the entertainment industry. Participants would like to see more shows like *Pose*, shows that intersect issues of queerness with race, poverty, addiction and other issues. *Sex Education* is another example of queer media that several participants appreciated, and especially the third, latest season and its portrayal of two nonbinary characters. “I think this was the first time I’ve seen someone wear a binder in a film or show”, Ambrose, who was particularly excited about this representation, recounted. This was seconded by Dylan: “I realised it was the first I saw someone use a binder in popular culture, and it was very heart-warming to see... it teaches a lot of young people how to bind safely.” Overall, participants felt that this was one of the few shows that showcased diversity within queer identities and relationships, and the depiction of queer characters was realistic and relatable. Shows such as these are intersectional and diverse in their depiction of queer identities and narratives, and participants indicated that they could easily relate to the characters and their struggles. They all also present queer characters as important for more than just their queerness and give them a well-rounded story while making them relevant to the plot. Additionally, rather than having a lone queer character whose portrayal seems unnatural and forced, they show the community aspect of queerness. This is something participants feel is missing from much of queer media, as it is easier for them to like and relate to media that includes this, as it reflects their own experiences.

Stereotypical representations are particularly perceived as problematic for queer people of identities that are underrepresented in media, which Anna has pointed out:

I think it’s improved for a lot of subgroups in the queer community, but when it comes to trans people, it hasn’t improved much... it’s mostly based on stereotypes and what people already have in mind about trans people, and I have never seen anyone like myself on screen.

Anna does not want to conform to the ‘ideal’ image of a trans woman which she sees as a display of overexaggerated femininity, and this representation is often perpetuated by media as the only way for trans women to express their identity. Her perceptions of how trans women are (under)represented in media suggest that transfemininity is only made intelligible in heteronormative society by understanding it as performances of hyper-femininity. This is the only intelligible manifestation of femininity, as Butler’s heterosexual matrix shows, and expressions of femininity that do not adhere to the heteronormative gender order (and that

cannot be harshly contrasted to masculinity) are unintelligible and thus rendered unacceptable and invisible. This stems from the way gender and associated roles and behaviours are socially constructed to follow from biological differences between the sexes, as the theoretical framework explains. It is understood in a strict binary, and gender expressions that do not fit on either pole are unintelligible. Trans people who identify with binary genders must therefore often overcompensate in order for their gender identity to be understood and thus accepted by heteronormative society.

One of the ways in which transfemininity is presented as ‘intelligible’ in heteronormative society is shown through frequent representation of the desire for sex reassignment surgery. “When I was younger, I watched all of these shows that narrated the same story an associated being trans with desperately wanting to get the surgery as soon as possible”, Anna said. Lana added onto this topic by mentioned *The Danish Girl*:

The character really wants bottom surgery, and I really don’t want bottom surgery, but I’m tolerant of this because I know a lot of girls who do... in films there’s always only one fragment, because you can’t address all aspects of a problem.

When it comes to the queer community, and particularly to identities that are underrepresented, they are rarely depicted in multifaceted and complex ways, and are instead grouped into a portrayal of only one of the many ways in which a given identity is experienced and lived.

It must be noted that the analysis above does not encompass *all* queer media representations. Participants primarily consume mainstream or Hollywood media, and their perceptions of queer representation therefore relates only to these productions. Some however provided comparisons of how they perceive queer representation in mainstream and independent media. There is no particularly reason for this tendency to favour mainstream media – it may be because it is simply more accessible on streaming platforms and cinemas, and more easily searchable. “I think independent media, from how I see it, is harder to understand, it’s like, art house, and stuff”, Ambrose explained. “I think I’m a bit too unaware of where the media comes from”, Dylan said when asked about their preferences. The consensus was that in independent media, the theme of queerness is handled and explored in a more in-depth manner than in mainstream media, where queer characters are portrayed superficially, as discussed above. *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, an independent film, was mentioned a few times, and from participants’ accounts of it, it can be seen how portrayals of queerness in

independent media are perceived. “That kind of movie is a bit deeper... they focus more on the emotional sides or the hard things, and are not as glamorous and fun”, Lim offered their thoughts on the film and queer independent representations in general. These accounts show that depictions of queerness in independent media are perceived as showing more encompassing and complex queer narratives, whereas in mainstream media, queer representation is more oversimplified and subject to stereotypes. Kuba also noted when comparing independent and mainstream media: “In indie films, queer people are just normal people who have a different sexuality and solve different problems, and you can relate to them.” Independent media is therefore perceived as creating a more well-rounded and human perception of the queer experience.

## 5.2 Effects of exposure to queer images in media on identity and self-perception

A significant number of participants’ narratives indicated that exposure to queer images in media at a younger age directly affected their self-perception and identity formation. The mere presence of queer narratives in media, no matter how their portrayal was realised, was important for their identity to develop. Participants felt that the exposure was helpful for them, and some attributed this to the fact that they did not have access to the Internet until later on, and that their parents were not a source of information on the matter. Queer presence or undertones in media was the first point of exposure for them, and while not all participants said that this directly affected their identity, it made them feel recognised, validated or more comfortable with themselves. Lana talked in detail about Corporal Klinger from the series *M\*A\*S\*H* – which aired on Czech television very frequently in the early 2000s and still does – who was a cross-dresser in order to get kicked out of the military. While the humour in the show around the matter were very transphobic, Lana’s exposure to this was her first point of realisation that a transfeminine identity was possible. *M\*A\*S\*H* is from the 70s-80s, yet its popularity lasts until now, and in Lana’s case, it was the only piece of media with any kind of depiction of non-heteronormative ways of presenting in Czech television. Similarly, Anna shared the significance that her first contact with the concept of transgenderism in media held:

I don’t remember the name of the film, but the first time I actually heard the word ‘trans’ was when I was 16. It gave me the word to know that there are people like me and that there’s a word that I can Google.

These findings support the notion of media being a powerful agent of socialisation which shapes individuals' sense of self, particularly during youth (Genner and Süß, 2016; Paus-Hasebrink, Kulterer and Sinner, 2019). The findings also suggest that, as Mattsson (2013) argues, media representation of minority groups aids in diversifying the understanding of identity categories. Exposure to queer images in media during youth provided participants with new conceptualisations of social categories and stimulated exploration of the self. Such new concepts were not available anywhere else but in popular media – for example, most participants complained about how sex education during their compulsory education was strongly oriented towards painting sexuality through a heteronormative and procreative lense. Apart from exposure to queer representations in media, access to a queer community enabled participants to gain understandings of queerness as well as of themselves. Dylan, for example, recounted such experiences - “It wasn’t until I moved to Lund and met other trans people that... it was the first time hearing about these ways to identify.” Plummer’s (in Seidman, 1996) notion that access to other queer people provides the learning of new previously unfamiliar meanings of identifying and of perceiving oneself supports such findings. The consensus among participants’ recounting of their childhood was that the queer media consumed during their childhood was not abundant and it was mostly of poor quality in terms of the depiction of queer narratives. This kind of media was therefore the first moment of contact with the idea of queerness, followed by first-hand contact with other queer people and communities during their adolescence. For most participants, queer media that is well done is crucial for them, especially the ability to relate to specific and non-generic narratives, and seeing queer characters in roles and positions that challenge stereotypes and heteronormativity.

Some participants noted that the queer representations in media that was available during their youth was saturated with images of queer men, and did not offer representations of other queer identities. “I watched a lot of male gay stuff, because that’s what was available... I was looking for anything I could get my hands on, which was mostly bad gay movies.”, Lim recounted their youth. Such underrepresentation, as Bonnot and Croizet (2006) suggest, may hinder identity development; diverse and positive queer representations are thus crucial for queer people’s identity formation. Overall, however, it is evident that exposure to the concept of queerness during youth is important to stimulate questioning of the self, especially in instances where popular media is the sole agent of communication such messages as the social environment is hostile towards queerness, such as compulsory education, as discussed

before. This coincides with Finocchiaro's (2021) argument that one's queerness manifests only in appropriate stimulus conditions. Through consuming popular media that contains queer narratives, individuals are presented with symbols signifying ways of identifying and living outside of the heteronormative way, which influence how one perceives themselves and relate to others (Longmore, 1998). In turn, one's identity can begin to be questioned and reformulated according to the non-normative notions presented in the media.

As Yuen (2019) suggests, negative representations can have a detrimental effect on individual's self-image, self-esteem and mental health, and may lead to internalisation of dominant stereotypes regarding heteronormative understandings of queerness. Such experiences were also expressed during some interviews; Anna, for example, said:

I think these tropes are harmful, especially for young people watching these... I have this mindset that since I'm a trans woman, I'm doomed because of what I've watched, so it can definitely have a negative impact on how you see your future.

She voiced this in relation to the tendency to portray queer narratives in a tragic and miserable light, as discussed earlier. Similarly, Maya shared her reluctance to engage with queer representations in media. She prefers cartoons with queer narratives as they tend to present more positive and light-hearted queer representations. While queer representation in media is important for her, she said:

It's something I want more and more... I still haven't opened the door of queer media, I'm afraid to open it because I'm afraid I'm not gonna like it, and then I'm gonna start questioning my identity again.

Her fears of not liking queer representations in popular media upon engaging with it stem from her experiences with settling into her identity. She has gone through many different ways of expressing her gender before finding the right fit, and therefore feels that exposure to the stereotypical ways in which queer identities are portrayed in media would negatively affect her self-perception. Exposure to negative representations can thus lead to their internalisation, which can have a detrimental effect on self-esteem. Plummer (in Seidman, 1996) notes that feelings of low confidence towards one's queer identity can increase their attentiveness to negative imagery of homosexuality in society, and therefore also in media. Individuals who do not feel fully comfortable with their identity are thus more sensitive to negative representations of queerness in the media, especially when ideologies regarding

heteronormative ideals about gender and sexuality are communicated through media representations as strongly as was indicated earlier.

Representations of queerness as being centered around the event of coming out were indicated by some participants as being over-exaggerated and done in a way that is not relatable. Dye (2020) suggests that most media frames coming out as the major or only important aspect of a queer person's lie in an assumption that this is what the general audience wants to see (Giese, 2018). Dye therefore argues that the act of 'coming out' is commonly shown when portraying queer identities, and it is presented and perceived as necessary for a queer person to be 'valid'. Additionally, it paints queerness as something that must be made known in order for queer people to feel accepted and for heteronormative society to 'tolerate' it (Porfido in Peele, 2007). Through coming out, a queer individual is marked as different from the rest of society, and a status hierarchy of them as inferior is automatically established through such representations. Giese (2018) suggests that this is because dramatized coming-out moment seems to be key in depicting queer people, and it is a way to signify their queerness and difference. The majority of participants said they prefer 'out' characters; they also however added that the signifiers used to mark a character as queer are often overexaggerated in a superficial and unpleasant way – as discussed earlier - and some said that for this reason, queer-coded characters are sometimes more enjoyable.

### 5.3 Effects of representations of queerness in media on everyday interactions

Queer representations in popular media were perceived as stereotypical and negative, as was discussed earlier. While this may lead to internalisation of heteronormative understandings of queerness – which deteriorates queer individuals' self-esteem and mental health – it also reinforces such perceptions of queerness in society, which manifests in the way members of the heteronormative society interact with queer people. Stereotypical depictions work towards continuous marginalisation of the queer community as they reproduce dominant pre-established notions of queerness and present them as the only way for queer people to exist. It also paints queerness as something that is visible and noticeable, something which can be identified by its marked difference. This is because, as Yuen (2019) argues, people often rely on media as a source of information regarding marginalisation groups, and take this information – in the form of signifying queerness through the use of stereotypes and easily recognizable symbols – for granted. As media is made to be indistinguishable from real life, (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944), people expect to recognize queerness in social reality

through the symbols presented to them in fictional, imaginary realities of film and TV. In turn, understanding media representations of queerness as mirroring reality leads to further perpetration of stereotypes, which may result in misinformation or microaggressions (Paner, 2018; Schacht, 2019).

Members of the heteronormative social group expect queer people to look and behave the same way they are depicted in media, and this was expressed by some participants. “A lot of people that I’ve met told me that they wouldn’t think I’m gay”, Kuba said. This is because he does not subscribe to normative notions of what a homosexual man ought to be – visibly feminine, interested in fashion, neat in appearance. Such representations of queer men in media are common, as was discussed earlier, especially in the role of the ‘gay best friend’ that queer male characters are often placed in. When Kuba discloses his identity to acquaintances, he is met with responses that make it evident that people use media representations as a main source of information:

‘I’ve always wanted to have a gay best friend’, a lot of girls have told me. These women think I like shopping and ask me for their opinion on how they look, but I don’t think I’m more informed on the matter than them.

The relationship between queer media representation and societal perceptions of queer people can therefore be painted as bidirectional. While normative perceptions of queerness are reflected in the way queer people are depicted in media - as the discussion regarding stereotypes shows - these simplified portrayals spread a lot of misinformation to the audience, which then manifest in experiences such as Kuba’s. Queer people who do not present themselves as is shown in popular media therefore experience their identity being questioned by others, which is deeply invalidating. Such experiences also occur within the queer community, and this was mentioned by some participants. Ylva, for example, discussed how heteronormative perceptions of queerness pertain within the queer community, saying: “Even in queer relationships, people follow these norms... some cis women feel like they should be more masculine”. This suggests that heteronormative values that associate queerness in women with displays of masculinity lead to only understanding butch lesbian women as queer, while femininity in queer women is unintelligible. Consequently, queer women must overcompensate and appear masculine in order to be recognized and accepted. Queer representations in media do not therefore only affect how heteronormative society perceives queerness, but also the perceptions of queer people themselves. Connell’s (2005) argument

that heteronormative logic of relationships, where one masculinity is associated with attraction towards femininity and vice-versa, is imposed onto queer relationships can also be applied here. The way queer relationships are depicted in media also affects how queer people approach social interaction and form romantic bonds – this was expressed by Kuba, who reminisced on his relationships:

I think a lot of gay men don't really know what they want, don't really know how to form romantic relationships. Guys text me saying like 'let's sleep together first and then maybe there'll be feelings' ...they say 'yeah, isn't that how you do it?'

Another interpretation of Plummer's (in Seidman, 1996) notion that exposure to queer images in the media provides a source for learning 'the homosexual role' can be made, as Kuba's experiences suggest that through media representations, queer people are provided with models on how they should carry out social interactions and form relationships. Overall, findings suggest that representations of queerness in media are interpreted by both heteronormative society and queer people themselves as showing reality, which shapes the ways interactions occur. Media is thus as a socialisation agent that works towards internalisation of dominant ideologies about society, thus leading to perpetration of stereotypes and reductive perceptions of queer people by heteronormative society and within the queer community. However, positive representations in media can socialise people into changing their understanding of queer identities. Such findings were expressed by Lana, who talked about the character Dáša in Czech TV show *Most*. This representation of transfemininity is very similar to her own identity, and, through providing understanding of such ways of being queer to her parents, eased her coming out to them.

## 5.4 Cultural comparison between Sweden and Czechia

### 5.4.1 In perceptions of the heteronormative social order

As presented in the literature review, the ILGA Rainbow Index and Map indicates that Czechia and Sweden are very divided in their attitudes towards queerness, as is apparent in laws and policies working towards creating a safe environment for queer people that exist in each country. Through this account, Czechia is presented as conservative and Sweden as liberal; a hypothesis can thus be made about these differing political ideologies impacting queer people's experiences with normative society, as well as with heteronormative gender

roles. While the majority of Czech participants indicated that they perceive Czechia to be conservative, and Swedish participants perceive Sweden to be more liberal, there was overall no indication of significant differences from their personal experiences. Regarding heteronormativity as well as attitudes towards queer people, it was indicated that such a simple split based on differing political ideologies cannot be made – instead, it depends on one’s social environment or whether they reside in an urban or rural setting. As Lana said:

It depends on the social bubble you’re in. You can work somewhere in a warehouse in Ústecký kraj<sup>14</sup>, and you can work at the Vodafone office where there’s rainbow flags everywhere.

From participants’ accounts of their experiences and perceptions of the reality of their country’s treatment of queer people, a significant difference between the two nations was thus not evident. Several participants did share experiences where they felt unsafe in or harassed for expressing their queerness (in acts of affection with a partner or style of dressing), similar accounts however came from both Sweden and Czechia. Maya recalled her experiences with being harassed for her gender expression in Sweden:

Why should it be a problem if I want to wear- like today, a shiny skirt? How can that be so provocative? How can wearing a rainbow jacket make people yell ‘faggot’ to you every now and then when they drive by in a car?

While Sweden has implemented laws criminalising hate speech, as shown in ILGA’s report, it is evident that it has not eliminated it. Kuba shared his worries about displaying affection in public spaces in Czechia. “When I hold hands with a guy in public, I don’t feel good about it. I remember than I only held hands with my ex when we were out with friends, in a group.” This disrupts the notion that Sweden is a much more progressive country than Czechia in regards to creating a safe space for queer people.

Overall, participants felt that heteronormative values, however little or much they were present in their childhood, did not significantly affect their queer identities, apart from their ability to freely form themselves into the person they are without any external pressures in the case where heteronormative values were not too present. On the other hand, if any pressures regarding conforming to heteronormative ideals – in the form of adhering to gender

---

<sup>14</sup> An administrative region in the north-western part of Czechia known for worse living conditions and hostile a social environment associated with poverty and a heavy industry-oriented economy

roles, for example - were felt, participants recalled that because of this, it took them longer to recognize and accept their queerness. None of the participants were entirely negatively affected by the way heteronormative values manifested during their childhood and adolescence, they however agreed that it is a great source of oppression for the queer community. Heteronormativity and associated values were perceived by participants of both nationalities to be most present in families and manifested in the form of expectations and pressures on children to adhere to traditional practices e.g. finding a partner of the opposite sex or marriage. Similarly, there were no significant cultural differences in the perception of how social institutions contribute towards the marginalisation of queerness, and education was felt to be the primary agent of this. Such responses largely stemmed from participants' personal experience of cisgender-heterosexual and abstinence-oriented sexual education, or from gendered division of roles during P.E. classes. Representations in media were also felt to be an important tool of the oppression of queer identities, as was discussed earlier in the analysis.

#### 5.4.2 In perceptions of media representations of queerness

Both Czech and Swedish participants haven't talked much about media produced in their respective countries, or have done so only in a negative light. Participants of both nationalities predominantly watch media produced in the U.S. or U.K. This points to the lack of queer media representation in both Czech and Swedish-produced media, or representation that is meaningful or holds value to queer people. Regarding Czech media, the film *Šarlatán* was mentioned most often - a biographical, internationally co-produced film about Jan Mikolášek, a gifted healer who lived during the first half of the 20th century, who was also a gay man. The film was received as largely positive as it did not overly focus on Mikolášek's sexuality and offered a well-rounded story about him. Participants however did not appreciate that the only point of signifying his queerness was through a sexual scene, which was also the only indication of the nature of the relationship between Mikolášek and his assistant. "I really liked *Šarlatán*. I avoid Czech films because they're usually not good, and this looked good from all sides.", Ambrose recalls their thoughts in watching the film. "If people didn't know that Mikolášek was gay, I think the sex scene would be a bit shocking and sudden, it would stand out." On this subject, Jirka noted: "I think the fact that this is a historical film means that Mikolášek's identity was a bit of a free interpretation." Finocchiaro (2021) suggests that in contemporary society, there is a tendency to project sexual categories onto historical

figures; modern conceptions of queerness cannot however be applied onto previous time periods, as they hold different meanings specific to its own temporal era. Mikolášek's queerness was signified through portrayals of sexual intimacy, as it could not have been communicated through contemporary symbols that are associated with queerness.

Lana recalled the HBO TV show *Terapie* and elaborated on one episode portraying a therapy session between a therapist and a transgender woman. She felt that although the inclusion of a transgender character in Czech media is a big step, it was handled completely incorrectly, and, in her words, served more as a guide on how to not carry out a gender-affirming therapy session. A few other Czech films were mentioned by participants (e.g. *Láska je láska*), none of which however presented queer characters in the main role, resulting in stereotypical portrayals. As Jirka voiced, "In Czech productions, queer representation tends to fall into these stereotypical caricatures." In general, Jirka differentiated his perceptions of queer representations in Czech and 'foreign' media, indicating that he felt that Czech productions heavily rely on stereotypes and normative notions of queerness, while queer representations in foreign media are more multifaceted and thus more positive. Intriguingly, there were differences in the ways Czech people watch foreign media – half of the participants said they mostly watch media in Czech if it is available, while the other half said they are not fans of dubbing and prefer the original sound. Kuba elaborated on this with his experience watching a Netflix Christmas queer film (*Single All the Way*), where he switched from dubbing to subtitles halfway through, as the way in which the gay male characters were dubbed made them sound like "faggots rather than homosexuals." Their queerness was audibly portrayed through a stereotypical high-pitched, feminine voice, and did not match the actors' original voices or manner of speaking.

A difference emerged regarding participants' enthusiasm towards enjoyment of queer representations, as Swedish participants implied they were more likely to seek out queer-themed media, and it was of higher importance for them than Czech participants. This is due to the way some Czech participants felt the Czech mass media pick apart any event – particularly topics regarding non-normative, 'progressive' notions – and the way the Czech public reacts to it. Jirka implied that this made him uncomfortable, as Czech mass media sees queerness as 'LGBT+ ideology' that is "shoved into people's faces." Queer representations in popular media are thus overanalysed and reported in Czech media outlets in a negative light, and Jirka therefore does not seek out media with queer themes. This and findings presented in the paragraph above can be explained through the notion that the construction and meaning of

social categories – in this case, those relating to gender and sexuality – vary culturally. In Czechia, the heteronormative gender order and constructions of gender and sexuality that stem from it may be, albeit unconsciously, more present in people’s understandings of queerness. Consequently, producers of Czech popular media rely on stereotypes and easily recognizable symbols to signify queerness more than in other countries. Such understandings of queerness may also be historically rooted, as Czechia is a post-socialist country with lingering attitudes originating from the Socialist regime. This was felt by Jirka to be a reason why Czech society is conservative and reluctant to change its views on minority groups. A true comparison between the ways queerness is represented in popular media in Czechia and Sweden cannot however be made, as Swedish participants did not elaborate on any Swedish productions. The only Swedish-produced film mentioned was *Kyss Mig*, which, according to Dylan, was of very poor quality, but it was also “the only movie with a central queer story“ when they were younger. *Cirkeln*, a Swedish book series, was mentioned in passing as meaningful for having queer-characters, and the exposure to this was helpful to Ylva during her childhood.

## **6. Conclusion**

This thesis investigates the ways in which queer people perceive queer representations in popular media (film and TV) produced in recent years, how such representations affect queer people’s identity formation and self-perception, as well as their interactions with heteronormative society. I also conduct a cultural comparison between Sweden and Czechia to investigate whether there were significant cultural differences regarding perceptions of heteronormativity as well as perceptions and consumption of media containing queer themes. In the literature review, I present an overview of existing research regarding queer representations in media, particularly regarding the prevalence of heteronormative notions and stereotypes, as well as lack of intersectionality within depictions of queerness. I discuss the significance of the sociological domain in studies of gender and sexuality, and formulate the meaning of ‘queer’ as is used in this thesis. I present research regarding the impact that positive and negative representations have on individuals’ identity formation and mental health. Finally, I compare Czech and Swedish legislations regarding queer rights as a base for the cultural comparison. I then formulate a theoretical framework which combines social constructionism of gender and sexuality, and its utilisation by queer theorists in explaining how non-heteronormative identities are made unintelligible through the heterosexual matrix. I

connect this with Stuart Hall's works on representation and stereotypes that situate marginalised groups as the inferior 'Other' in the hegemonic social order, which is manifested through reductive stereotypes. I connect these theories in applying them to the case of queer representations in media. Finally, I integrate theories of socialisation and symbolic interactionism with media consumption to show that the ways in which queerness is depicted in media constructs individuals' understandings of queerness, in their social reality, as well as perceptions of the self. To test this theoretical framework, I interviewed 10 queer-identifying people aged 18-25, 5 of whom are Czech and 5 of whom are Swedish, about their perception of queer representations in media, their queer identity, and the causal effect between the two. Much of what the theoretical framework argues is confirmed in my findings through the analysis:

Queer people perceive queer representations in recent popular media as predominantly stereotypical, and as reflecting heteronormative understandings of queerness. Such perceptions emerged in specified accounts of how different queer identities are stereotyped, and how queer narratives are lacking intersectionality and a variety of social roles. Queer identities are represented through easily recognisable symbols in the form of stereotypes regarding queer people's appearance, behaviour or social roles that signify their difference from heteronormative society. Normative understandings of gender and sexuality that stem from the social construction of heterosexuality as superior to queer identities are privileged in queer representations in media, leading to underrepresentation and invisibility of non-normative manifestations of queerness. The heteronormative gender order is thus maintained and reproduced through such representations. Exposure to queer images in media during youth was found to have a significant influence on participants' self-perception and identity formation in both positive and negative ways. Contact with queer narratives provided participants with information about queer identities that was otherwise unavailable to them, which stimulated the questioning of their identity, and aided in the manifestation of their queerness. On the other hand, as the queer representations available during participants' youth were limited, stereotypical and of poor quality, such depictions led to their internalisation and lowered confidence regarding participants' future outlooks or self-esteem. It was also found that as media is a powerful socialisation agent, people tend to take representations for granted and expect social reality of queerness to hold the same meanings, which made participants feel invalidated. The cultural comparison of Sweden and Czechia found that there are no significant differences in perceptions of heteronormativity and

attitudes towards queerness in either country. There was however a difference regarding how queer people from each country perceive media representations. While Swedish participants seek out media with queer themes more, some Czech participants perceive such media negatively due to the ways Czech mass media and normative public regard queerness as a spectacle. Queer representations in Czech media were also felt to be stemming from the country's more conservative nature and thus being saturated in offensive stereotypical depictions.

The thesis offers empirical research on queer people's personal narratives regarding their relationship with and perception of queer representations in popular media, and how it affects their identity and self-perception. There is potential in developing the cultural comparison aspect; as this thesis did not find many significant differences, and there is a lack of research or material regarding queer representations in Czech and Swedish media, this did not become the main focus. A more in-depth investigation of differing attitudes specifically towards queer representations in media produced in both countries would therefore be intriguing and would supply the insignificant analysis made here. The cultural comparison was however still included as it showed – on the surface, at least – that there are no significant cultural differences regarding queer people's experiences in each country, despite what the statistics in the literature review indicate.

## Bibliography

- Abi-Karam, M. (2021). *The Effects of Gender Stereotypes in Film*. Retrieved from Redefy: <https://www.redefy.org/stories/the-effects-of-gender-stereotypes-in-film>
- Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (1944). *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception*. In *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. London: Duke University Press.
- Atkinson, E., & DePalma, R. (2008). Un-believing the matrix: queering consensual heteronormativity. *Gender and Education*, 21(1), 17-29. doi:10.1080/09540250802213149
- Barber, K. (2022). *queer*. Retrieved from Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/queer-sexual-politics>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559. doi:10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573
- Bonnot, V., & Croizet, J.-C. (2007). Stereotype internalization and women's math performance: The role of interference in working memory. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(6), 857-866. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2006.10.006
- Browne, K., & Nash, C. J. (2010). *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315603223
- Butler, J. (1991). Chapter 1: Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1991). *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*. London: Blackwell Publishing.
- Carrington, J. M. (2018). *AnthroBites: Queer Anthropology*. Retrieved from Society for Cultural Anthropology: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/anthrobites-queer-anthropology#:~:text=AnthroBites%20is%20a%20series%20from,manageable%2C%20bite%2Dsize%20chunks>.
- Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2016). Symbols, meaning, and action: The past, present, and future of symbolic interactionism. *Current Sociology*. doi: 10.1177/0011392116638396
- Center, P. R. (2018). *Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>

- Cheng, Z. (2020). *Queer-Baiting: What is it, and Why is it Harmful for the LGBTQ+ community?* Retrieved from Hypebae: <https://hypebae.com/2020/6/queer-baiting-what-is-it-why-harmful-lgbtq-community-tv-shows>
- Chandra, Y., & Shang, L. (2019). Inductive Coding. In *Qualitative Research Using R: A Systematic Approach*. Singapore: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-981-13-3170-1\_8
- Cheves, A. (2019). *9 LGBTQ+ People Explain How They Love, Hate, and Understand the Word "Queer"*. Retrieved from them.: <https://www.them.us/story/what-does-queer-mean>
- Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Craig, S. L., McInroy, L., McCready, L. T., & Alaggia, R. (2015). Media: A Catalyst for Resilience in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(3), 254-275. doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1040193
- Cristea, M. (2021). *Generation Z: fully authentic and digital native*. Retrieved from Business Review: <https://business-review.eu/br-exclusive/generation-z-fully-authentic-and-digital-native-223138#:~:text=Beginning%20to%20track%20this%20new,integrating%20virtual%20and%20offline%20experiences>
- Dean, J. J. (2007). Gays and Queers: From the Centering to the Decentering of Homosexuality in American Films. *Sexualities*, 10(3), 363-386. doi:10.1177/1363460707078337
- Deerwater, R. (2022). *GLAAD'S 2021-2022 Where We Are on TV Report: LGBTQ Representation Reaches New Record Highs*. Retrieved from GLAAD: <https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaads-2021-2022-where-we-are-tv-report-lgbtq-representation-reaches-new-record-highs>
- Desjardins, L., Jacobson, M., Carlson, F., & Thoet, A. e. (2021). *Rainbow capitalism raises questions about corporate commitments and Pride Month's purpose*. Retrieved from PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/rainbow-capitalism-raises-questions-about-corporate-commitments-and-pride-months-purpose>
- Duncan, S. G., Aguilar, G., Jensen, C. G., & Magnusson, B. M. (2019). Survey of Heteronormative Attitudes and Tolerance Toward Gender Non-conformity in Mountain West Undergraduate Students. *Frontiers in Psychology*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00793>
- Dye, S. (2020). Representing Sexuality: An Analysis of Coming Out in Contemporary Film. *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 11(2), 51-58. Retrieved from [https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2020/12/05-Dye\\_EJfinal.pdf](https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2020/12/05-Dye_EJfinal.pdf)
- Emmel, N. (2013). Chapter 2 - Purposeful Sampling. In *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach* (pp. 33-44). SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781473913882.n3

- Filippo, M. (2014). *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television - Excerpt*. Retrieved from In the Life: <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/inthelife/history/b-word-bisexuality-contemporary-film-and-television-%E2%80%93-excerpt>
- Finocchiaro, P. (2021). How to Project a Socially Constructed Sexual Orientation. *Journal of Social Ontology*. doi:10.1515/jso-2021-0005
- Fitzgerald, K. J., & Grossman, K. L. (2021). *Sociology of Sexualities*. SAGE Publications.
- Fürsich, E. (2010). Media and the representation of Others. *International Social Science Journal*, 61(199), 113-130. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2451.2010.01751.x
- Ghaziani, A., & Brim, M. (2019). Queer Methods: Four Provocations for an Emerging Field. In *Imagining Queer Methods* (pp. 3-27). New York: NYU Press.
- Genner, S., & Süß, D. (2017). Socialization as Media Effect. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*. doi:10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0138
- Giles, J. (2006). Social Constructionism and Sexual Desire. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5914.2006.00305.x
- GLAAD. (n.d.). *Bisexual erasure*. Retrieved from GLAAD: <https://www.glaad.org/accordionview/bisexual-erasure>
- GLAAD. (2006). *Where We Are on TV Report: 2005 - 2006 Season*. Retrieved from GLAAD: <https://www.glaad.org/publications/tvreport05>
- GLAAD. (2013). *2013 Studio Responsibility Index*. Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/sri/2013>
- GLAAD. (2020). *2020 GLAAD Studio Responsibility Index*. Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/sri/2020>
- GLAAD. (2020). *The Vito Russo Test*. Retrieved from GLAAD: <https://www.glaad.org/sri/2020/vito-russo-test>
- GLAAD. (2021). *2021 GLAAD Studio Responsibility Index*. Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/sri/2021>
- Gomillion, S. C., & Giuliano, T. A. (2011). The Influence of Media Role Models on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(3), 330-354. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.546729>
- González, M. P., Infantes-Paniagua, A., Thornborrow, T., & Jordán, O. C. (2020). Associations Between Media Representations of Physical, Personality, and Social Attributes by Gender: A Content Analysis of Children's Animated Film Characters. *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 6026-6048.
- Hall, S. (1997). Representation & the Media. *Media Education Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf>

- Hall, S. (1997). The Spectacle of the 'Other'. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE, London.
- Harding, S. (2008). *Sciences From Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*. Duke University Press.
- Harrington, M. (2021). In Hollywood, Representation of Marginalized People Has its Moment. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 80(3), 863-74. doi:10.1111/ajes.12410
- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography of the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- ILGA. (2021). *Rainbow Europe*. Retrieved from ILGA: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope/2021>
- ILGA. (2022). *About Us*. Retrieved from ILGA: <https://ilga.org/about-us>
- ILGA. (n.d.). *Country Ranking*. Retrieved from <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>
- Kang, M., Lessard, D., Heson, L., & Nordmarken, S. (2017). *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies*. University of Massachusetts: Pressbooks. Retrieved from <https://openbooks.library.umass.edu/introwgss/>
- Kelleher, P. (2021). *Erasure of bisexual men is common, even among gay and lesbian people, according to science*. Retrieved from PinkNews: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/09/03/bisexual-erasure-study-psychology/>
- Kose, M. (2021). *Rainbow Capitalism: The Commodification of Pride and its Impact on LGBTQ+ Mental Health*. Retrieved from Inspire the Mind: <https://www.inspirethemind.org/blog/rainbow-capitalism-the-commodification-of-pride-and-its-impact-on-lgbtq-mental-health>
- Langer, A. (2021). *'Rainbow capitalism' is pandering, pure and simple, but it can still help drive social change*. Retrieved from CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/opinion-rainbow-capitalism-pride-month-1.6042417>
- Levinson, J. (2020). *Why Diversity in Children's Media is So Important*. Retrieved from psychology in action: <https://www.psychologyinaction.a/psychology-in-action-1/2020/3/5/why-diversity-in-childrens-media-is-so-important>
- Longmore, M. (1998). Symbolic Interactionism and the Study of Sexuality. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 35(1), 44-57. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3813164>
- Lorbel, J., & Farrell, S. A. (1991). *The social construction of gender*. SAGE Publications.
- Mahdawi, A. (2016). *'Who's the man?' Why the gender divide in same-sex relationships is a farce*. Retrieved from The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/aug/23/same-sex-relationship-gender-roles-chores>

- Mattsson, E. (2013). The Narrative Identities of Queer People of Color: Interviews with Queer People of Color in Long Beach, CA.
- Maudlin, R. K. (2002). The Role of Humor in the Social Construction of Gendered and Ethnic Stereotypes. *Race, Gender & Class*, 9(3), 76-95. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41675032>
- McDermott, M. (2020). The (broken) promise of queerbaiting: Happiness and futurity in politics of queer representation. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. doi:10.1177/1367877920984170
- Méndez, M. (2013). Autoethnography as a research method: Advantages, limitations and criticisms. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 15(2), 287-297. Retrieved from [http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0123-46412013000200010](http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0123-46412013000200010)
- Miller, K. (2019). *Friends is 25 years old. It's still extremely popular — and polarizing*. Retrieved from Vox: <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/9/20/20875107/friends-25th-anniversary-polarizing-legacy-homophobia>
- Mitchell, B. (2018). *Queerbaiting: What is it and why is it a problem?* Retrieved from Pink News: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/02/26/what-is-queerbaiting-everything-you-need-to-know/>
- Moore, M. (2018). *Star of Gentleman Jack says the show has helped people in coming out*. Retrieved from GayTimes: <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/star-of-gentleman-jack-says-the-show-has-helped-people-in-coming-out/>
- Mueller, H. (2018). Book Review: Queer TV in the 21st Century: Essays on Broadcasting from Taboo to Acceptance. Ed. Kylo-Patrick R. Hart. McFarland, 2016. 232 pp. \$35.00 paperback. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 51(2), 550-553.
- Murphy, C. (2021). *What Is Queerbaiting? Here's What the Manipulative Marketing Tactic Looks Like—and Why It's Harmful*. Retrieved from Health.
- Namaste, K. (1994). The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), 220-231. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/201866>
- Nascimento, L. d., & Steinbruch, F. K. (2019). “The interviews were transcribed”, but how? Reflections on management research. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 54(4), 413-429. doi:10.1108/RAUSP-05-2019-0092
- Nattrass, W. (2021). *Elections 2021: Where do Czech political parties stand on same-sex marriage?* Retrieved from Expats CZ: <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/elections-2021-where-do-the-czech-political-parties-stand-on-same-sex-marriage>

- Needham, J. K. (2018). Queering Player Agency and Paratexts: An Analysis and Expansion of Queerbaiting in Video Games. *Cultural Analysis and Social Theory Major Research Papers*, 6. Retrieved from [https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=cast\\_mrp](https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=cast_mrp)
- Nikel, D. (2019). *LGBT Travel: Sweden Named Most Friendly Country, U.S. Lags Behind*. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidnikel/2019/11/23/lgbt-travel-sweden-named-most-friendly-country-us-lags-behind/?sh=629645eeb89d>
- Oliver, D., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: Towards reflection in qualitative research. *Social Forces*, 84, 1273-1289. doi:10.1353/sof.2006.0023
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., & et al. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Adm Policy Ment Health*, 42(5), 533-544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-yf
- Paner, I. (2018). The Marginalization and Stereotyping of Asians in American Film. *Honors Theses*, 36. doi:10.33015/dominican.edu/2018.HONORS.ST.08
- Patricolo, C. (2018). *Czech Republic parliament delays same-sex marriage debate*. Retrieved from Emerging Europe: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/czech-republic-parliament-delays-same-sex-marriage-debate/>
- Paus-Hasebrink, I., Kulterer, J., & Sinner, P. (2019). The Role of Media Within Young People's Socialisation: A Theoretical Approach. *Social Inequality, Childhood and the Media*, 45-75. Retrieved from [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-02653-0\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-02653-0_3)
- Pilcher, J., & Whelehan, I. (2013). Gender Order. In *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (pp. 62-64). SAGE Publications. doi:10.4135/9781446278901.n19
- Pirodsky, J. (2018). *Czech MPs hold historic debate on same sex marriage*. Retrieved from Expats CZ: <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/czech-mps-hold-historic-debate-on-same-sex-marriage>
- Power, M. (2011). *Social Construction of Gender*. Retrieved from Applied Social Psychology: [http://www.personal.psu.edu/bfr3/blogs/applied\\_social\\_psychology/2011/10/the-social-construction-of-gender.html](http://www.personal.psu.edu/bfr3/blogs/applied_social_psychology/2011/10/the-social-construction-of-gender.html)
- Renold, E. (2006). 'They Won't Let Us Play... Unless You're Going out with One of Them': Girls, Boys and Butler's 'Heterosexual Matrix' in the Primary Years. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 489-509. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30036158>
- RFSL. (2022). *Marriage in Sweden*. Retrieved from RFSL.
- Riedel, S. (2018). *Why Everyone's Favorite 90's Show Is Hugely Transphobic*. Retrieved from them.: <https://www.them.us/story/friends-is-transphobic>

- Robnsson, S. (2019). Stereotypical gender roles alive and well in the Netflix production *The Kissing Booth*. *Linneus University*. Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1301854/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Roderick, L. (2017). *More than half of LGBT+ community feels 'invisible' in advertising*. Retrieved from Marketing Week: <https://www.marketingweek.com/lgbt-community-advertising/>
- Rogers, O. (2021). *Why Representation Matters in Kids' Media*. Retrieved from Common Sense: <https://www.common SenseMedia.org/kids-action/articles/why-representation-matters-in-kids-media>
- Rolin, K. (2009). Standpoint Theory as a Methodology for the Study of Power Relations. *Hypatia*, 218-226. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20618192>
- Romesburg, D. (2020). *An enduring history of racism in San Francisco's queer community*. Retrieved from San Francisco AIDS Foundation: <https://www.sfaf.org/collections/status/a-conversation-on-white-supremacy-and-racism-in-the-queer-community/>
- Ross, T. (2019). Media and Stereotypes. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity* (pp. 1-17). Retrieved from [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-13-0242-8\\_26-1](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-13-0242-8_26-1)
- Sarner, L. (2016). *QUEER AND DIVERSE, 'BLACK SAILS' IS QUIETLY TV'S MOST REVOLUTIONARY SHOW*. Retrieved from Inverse: <https://www.inverse.com/article/10922-queer-and-diverse-black-sails-is-quietly-tv-s-most-revolutionary-show>
- Schacht, K. (2019). *What Hollywood movies do to perpetuate racial stereotypes*. Retrieved from DW: <https://www.dw.com/en/hollywood-movies-stereotypes-prejudice-data-analysis/a-47561660>
- Schmader, T., Block, K., & Lickel, B. (2015). Social Identity Threat in Response to Stereotypic Film Portrayals: Effects on Self-Conscious Emotion and Implicit Ingroup Attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 54-72. doi:10.1111/josi.12096
- Schweinitz, J. (2010). Stereotypes and the narratological analysis of film characters. In J. Eder, F. Jannidis, & R. Schneider, *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (pp. 276-289). Berlin: De Gruyter. doi:10.1515/9783110232424.3.276
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2013). Queer and Now. In D. E. Hall, A. Jagose, & e. al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (pp. 3-16). New York: Routledge.
- Seidman, S. (1996). *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.
- Somerville, S. (2007). Queer. In B. Burgett, & G. Hendler (Eds.), *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (pp. 187-191). New York: NYU Press.
- Snider, A. R. (2020). Heteronormativity and the Ideal Family. *UMSL Graduate Works*. Retrieved from <https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis/220>

- Stanger, T. (2019). *The B Word: The Erasure of Bisexuality in Cinema*. Retrieved from Filmdaze: <https://filmdaze.net/the-b-word-the-erasure-of-bisexuality-in-cinema/>
- Stein, A., & Plummer, K. (1994). "I Can't Even Think Straight" "Queer" Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), 178-87. doi:10.2307/201863
- Stonewall. (2015). *Racism rife in LGBT community Stonewall research reveals*. Retrieved from Stonewall: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/cy/node/79551>
- Stonewall. (2017). *List of LGBTQ+ terms*. Retrieved from Stonewall.org.uk: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms>
- Thomson, K. (2021). An Analysis of LGBTQ+Representation in Television and Film. *Bridges: An Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Connections*, 5(1). Retrieved from [https://scholars.wlu.ca/bridges\\_contemporary\\_connections/vol5/iss1/7](https://scholars.wlu.ca/bridges_contemporary_connections/vol5/iss1/7)
- Tredway, K. (2014). Judith Butler Redux – the Heterosexual Matrix and the Out Lesbian Athlete: Amélie Mauresmo, Gender Performance, and Women’s Professional Tennis. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 41(2), 163-176. doi:10.1080/00948705.2013.785420
- Vance, Carole S. (2005) Anthropology Rediscovered Sexuality: A Theoretical Comment. In *Same-Sex Cultures and Sexualities: An Anthropological Reader*. Jennifer Roberston, ed.15-32. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Veissiere, S. P. (2018). "Toxic Masculinity" in the age of #MeToo: ritual, morality and gender archetypes across cultures. *Society and Business Review*, 13(1).
- Warner, M. (1999). Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet. *Duke University Press*, 29, 3-17. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/466295>
- Wille, E., Gaspard, H., Trautwein, U., & Oschatz, K. e. (2018). Gender Stereotypes in a Children's Television Program: Effects on Girls' and Boys' Stereotype Endorsement, Math Performance, Motivational Dispositions, and Attitudes. *Frontiers in Psychology*. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02435
- Yuen, N. W. (2019). *How Racial Stereotypes in Popular Media Affect People*. Retrieved from Scholars: Strategy Network: <https://scholars.org/contribution/how-racial-stereotypes-popular-media-affect-people-and-what-hollywood-can-do-become>
- Zainal, Z. (2007). Case study as a research method . *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*
- Zhang, L., & Haller, B. (2013). Consuming Image: How Mass Media Impact the Identity of People with Disabilities. *Communication Quarterly*(3). doi:10.1080/01463373.2013.776988

## Appendix

### Appendix 1.1 – Participant recruitment flyer (English version)

#### **Participants Needed for Master’s Thesis Research in Sociology! Are you Swedish (or did you grow up in Sweden), aged 18-25, a university student, and identify as queer?**

I’m about to start research for my master’s thesis and am looking for interview participants. My research focuses on **heteronormative gender norms and stereotypical perceptions of queer people in society**, and **queer representation in popular media**. I am interested in **how queer people perceive queer representations in popular media (film and TV) in the last 10 or so years, and how this affects their self-perception and identity formation**.

I will be conducting semi-structured or narrative interviews. They will each take about an hour, and the questions will focus on:

- your opinions on popular film and TV featuring queer characters
- your perception of how heteronormative society views queer people
- the relation between the two, and how this affects your identity

One session should be enough, but I might need to conduct a follow-up interview. All data and your information will be confidential, and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. The interviews will be conducted in English. (P.S.: I’m a queer person myself).

If you are interested in participating or want further information, please email me at (redacted) or (redacted).



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

**Hledají se účastníci pro výzkum magisterského studia v sociologii!  
Jste Čech, je Vám 18-25, jste univerzitní student, a jste LGBT+?  
Bydlíte v okolí Plzně či Prahy?**

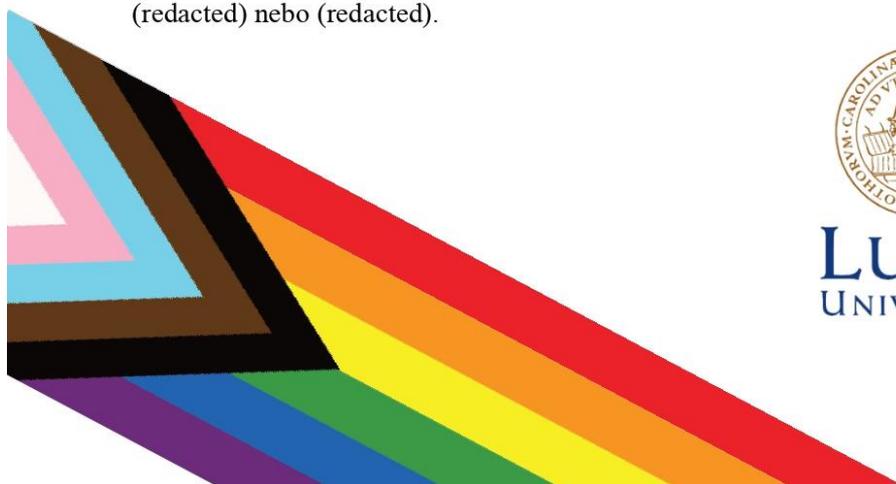
Právě začínám výzkum pro mou magisterskou diplomovou práci na univerzitě v Lundu, a hledám účastníky na rozhovory. Můj výzkum se soustředí **na heteronormativní pohlavní normy a role a stereotypní názory na LGBT+ lidi v heteronormativní společnosti, a LGBT+ reprezentaci v populárních médiích**. Zajímám se konkrétně o to, jak **LGBT+ lidé vnímají LGBT+ reprezentaci v populárních médiích (filmu a televizi), a jak tohle ovlivňuje jejich sebe-vnímání a identitu**.

Budu provádět polostrukturované nebo narativní rozhovory. Každý bude trvat cca. hodinu a otázky se budou soustředit na:

- Vaše názory na populární filmy a seriály s LGBT+ postavami
- Vaše vnímání toho, jak heteronormativní společnost pohlíží na LGBT+ lidi
- Vztah mezi těmito dvěma, a jak tohle ovlivňuje Vaší identitu

Jedna schůze by měla stačit, ale možná budeme muset provést další navazující rozhovor. Všechna data a Vaše informace budou důvěrné, a budete mít právo kdykoliv od rozhovoru odstoupit. Rozhovory budou provedené v češtině, ale můžou být i v angličtině (jakýkoliv jazyk je pro Vás pohodlnější pro vyjadřování). Budu v Čechách od 13. prosince do 8. ledna 2021, takže tohle časové rozmezí je ideální; můžeme ale provést rozhovor i mimo tuhle dobu přes Zoom. (P.S. jsem LGBT+).

Jestli máte zájem o účast nebo chcete podrobnější informace, prosím kontaktujte mě na (redacted) nebo (redacted).



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

## **Appendix 2** – *Interview guide (English version)*

1. In regards to your gender and sexual orientation, what do you identify as?
2. When did you first realise you were queer?
  - a. What was the journey you took from then to now?
3. Are you out to your family/to others?
  - 3a. If not, do you still feel safe in your family?
4. How present were heteronormative values and gender norms in your household during your childhood?
  - 4a. How did this influence your queer identity and self-expression?
  - 4b. How aware of gender norms and heteronormative values were you in the context of Sweden, and when did you become aware?
  - c. Have you broken away from them? If so, how did this affect your self- and gender expression?
5. How do you think heteronormative values and gender norms affect queer people?
  - 5a. Where do you think they are most noticeable and oppressing?
6. What's your relationship with film and TV?
  - 6a. What do you like to watch?
  - 6b. What language do you watch films in most?
7. In general, what do you think about queer representation in media?
  - 7a. Do you think it's mostly realistic, or is it stereotypical?
  - 7b. Have you noticed a difference in portrayal of queer people in different types of film, like Hollywood and indie?
8. Do you prefer films and TV with actual/explicit queer representation, or more subtle queer-coded characters?
9. Can you give me examples of queer representations in media you liked and didn't like?
10. What are some common tropes or patterns that you've noticed in film and TV with queer characters?

11. To what extent do you think societal views of queer people is reflected in film and TV?
12. Especially in media that does not have explicitly queer characters, what character attributes do you most perceive as queer-coded?
13. What do you think about film and TV that are marketed through queer-baiting?
  - 13a. Are there any examples of queer-baiting you can think of?
  - 13b. What do you think queer-baiting implies about society's views on queer people?  
How do you think it affects queer people?
14. What do you think needs to be changed for more accurate queer representation?
15. What films and TV that you've watched when you were younger influenced/affected your queer identity or self-realisation?
17. How has film and TV impacted or changed your identity, self-perception or self-expression since your first realisation that you were queer?
18. How important is film and TV that includes queer characters for you?
19. How much do you identify with or relate to queer characters?

### **Appendix 3 – List of codes**

- Perception of heteronormativity and gender roles
  - *In household*
  - *In context of country*
  - *Affecting queer people (experiences/general perceptions)*
  - *How heteronormative stereotypes of queerness in media affect queer people*
- Media perceptions
  - *General opinions on queer representations in media*
  - *One-dimensional queer characters; diversity and intersectionality*
  - *Stereotypes and tropes*
  - *Queer people in media production*
  - *Target audience; production as profit-driven; fetishisation*
  - *Queer-baiting*
  - *Queer-coding*
  - *Hollywood v. independent productions*
  - *Cultural/language factors*

- Identity
  - *Exposure to queer representations in media important for identity formation*
  - *Personal importance of queer representations; identifying with queer characters*

#### **Appendix 4 - Participant profiles**

**Lana** is a 25-year-old lesbian trans woman from Czechia. She is a recent graduate of Univerzita Karlova and is working in Prague now. She settled in her queer identity quite late, not realising in her childhood that her fantasies were connected to her trans identity. She is not a fan of Czech cinematography and does not seek out queer representation in media in general, but does appreciate representation that is done well, which, for her, is the character Jules in *Euphoria*. She attributed the ease of her coming out to her parents to the character Dáša from the Czech series *Most*, and felt that her identity was particularly influenced by seeing the cross-dressing character of Klinger in the series *M\*A\*S\*H* at a young age.

**Ambrose** is a 23-year-old queer transmasculine person from Czechia. They are currently studying at Západočeská Univerzita in Pilsen. They have also had a later realisation of their queer identity, and are only partially out to their family, as they find their gender identity is difficult to express in Czech. While they have watched a lot of queer film and TV, they feel that there is a severe lack of nonbinary or transgender characters, particularly those they could identify with more. Mae Martin from *Feel Good* has however been a relatable model in the struggle with gender dysphoria. They have not felt that their identity was particularly affected by queer presence in the media, but it was an informative and later validating source for them when they realised they felt alienated from heterosexual media.

**Jakub** is a 25-year-old gay man from Czechia. He is a recent graduate of Univerzita Karlova, and is working in Prague now. He has identified as gay since early teens, and thinks he did not experience pressures regarding heteronormativity from his family as he is the middle child, so he had the opportunity to explore his identity freely. He feels that the portrayal of gay men is mostly stereotypical - even more so in Czech dubbed or original productions – and oversexualised, which sets harmful and unrealistic relationship examples for young queer men to follow. He hasn't had a role model in queer media during childhood or currently, and while he enjoys queer representation in media, it's not so important for him.

**Jirka** is a 22-year-old gay man from Czechia. He is currently studying at Univerzita Karlova in Prague. He first realised he is gay during early teens, but didn't come to terms with it until

he was 17, when he was on a study exchange abroad. He's not fond of Czech productions, where he feels queer representation is lacking as opposed to foreign media, and where queer characters have stereotypical roles. He particularly liked the relatable nature of Norwegian series *Skam*, its high school setting and the way it handled a queer relationship, but does not specifically seek out queer media, as he perceives most of it negatively, which he connects to the way the Czech public and press receives queer representation.

**Lim** is a 24-year-old agender bisexual person from Czechia. They are a recent graduate of Západočeská Univerzita, and are working in Pilsen. They realised they're queer during late teens, and have had a hard time finding the identity label that fits best. They are now openly out to their family and at work. They have watched a lot of queer media, and find the biggest issue in not being able to relate to American productions, which take up most of the queer media available. They feel that genderqueer and bisexual representation in media are lacking, and every rare example is therefore validating for them, such as Bo in *Lost Girl* or Cal in *Sex Education*.

**Dylan** is a 23-year-old queer non-binary person from Sweden. They are currently studying at Lund University. They realised they're queer during early teens, and fully embraced it during late teens. They have watched almost all queer media there is, and feel that only a couple productions like *Euphoria*, *Genera+ion*, *Sex Education* or *Pride* have been inclusive in their queer representation and portrayal of community, which is important for Dylan. Their identity was not particularly influenced by media, but exposure to queer portrayals like *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* or *Kiss Myg* at an earlier age made them more comfortable with themselves. They were very excited about the rare and well written depiction of the nonbinary identity in *Sex Education*.

**Maya** is a 23-year-old-lesbian trans woman from Sweden. She is currently studying at Lund University. During her teens, she has struggled with finding the right identity and way to express herself, and came out a couple years ago. She prefers watching cartoons and older science-fiction and fantasy films, and hasn't seen a lot of queer cinema as she's afraid she won't like the way queer people are depicted, which might make her question herself again. Maya prefers queer representation in cartoons and particularly enjoys the series *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, which has had a huge impact on her and helped her settle in her identity. She also found an idol in a lesbian model on *Top Model*, which helped her create a mental image of herself as a woman.

**Anna** is a 25-year-old queer trans woman living in Sweden. She is currently studying at Lund University. She realised she was queer in her early twenties, and struggles with not conforming to the societal expectation for trans women, particularly feminine gender expression, which she does not want to subscribe to. She feels there is space for a lot of improvement regarding the media representation of trans women, and the existing representation had a mostly negative effect on her, as they are mostly tragic, and show no good prospects for the future. Seeing trans representation on TV for the first time during her teens helped her realise the existence of such ways of identifying, and *The L Word* showed her the ability to identify as a queer woman.

**Kaj** is a 20-year-old trans gay man from Sweden. He is currently studying at Lund University. He grew up in the Netherlands, but has lived in Sweden for 10 years. He realised he's trans very early on, and his identity as a gay man came much later. He feels queer media representation is primarily focused on cis queer men, and this is mostly stereotypical and behind its time. His first contact with queer media was *Brokeback Mountain*, which has also influenced his identity. Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings* was a version of masculinity that Kaj found appealing, and this was influential in his trans identity formation as well. Kaj prefers queer representation in novels, such as *Maurice* or Isherwood's works.

**Ylva** is a 22-year-old queer woman from Sweden. She is currently studying at Lund University. She knew she was queer from early teens, and is comfortably out despite her long-lasting denial. She likes watching queer media, but prefers cartoon representation of queer women, such as in *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, as she feels that live action media is lacking in such portrayals. There wasn't much queer media she had access to during her childhood; this exposure came during her teens with cartoons like *Steven Universe* or young adult books like *Cirkeln*. It's important for her to see a multiplicity of queer narratives and stories in media, and this she feels is currently lacking, as most queer media is stereotypical.